

STRUCTURING THOUGHTS



Our activities
during 2008
in a nutshell



THE ENTHUSIASTIC RESPONSE from clients and friends to our first activity report just a year ago prompted us to repeat the experience for 2008. In these few pages, you will thus find an overview of the projects we worked on in the last 12 months and a glimpse of our pipeline for 2009.

Given two situations, some people focus on the differences between them, while others see the similarities—a question of point of view or perhaps just one of level of abstraction. Unquestionably, we have always been in the second category: we believe that the same small set of “first principles” can help one optimize virtually any instance of communication. The diversity of projects we successfully completed in 2008 and the broad spectrum of clients who entrusted them to us nicely confirmed in our eyes the universality of our approach.

A general-purpose conceptual framework—simple yet solid—is also what we aim to provide in the book we are publishing. Writing for an audience as diverse as the many individuals who come to us for advice is a challenge. Given the success of our training sessions and consulting activities, however, we trust that any “rational mind” will find in our first book helpful answers to his or her questions about communication.

Handwritten signatures in blue ink. The signature on the left is 'Geneviève' and the signature on the right is 'Jean-luc'.

Geneviève CASTERMAN
Founding partner

Jean-luc DOUMONT
Founding partner



Training



Selecting the examples we need from documents sent in advance by workshop participants makes for a relevant learning experience.

Our training activities in 2008 were more diverse than ever, in terms of format (lectures, workshops, training programs), topics (speaking, writing, graphing, formatting, teaching—or just thinking), audiences (students, engineers, scientists, economists, executives, writers, graphic artists, and more), languages (English, French, Dutch, Spanish), and locations in Europe (Austria, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Spain), North America (Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco), and South America (Santiago de Chile).

In the research or R&D sphere—and as in previous years—we addressed mostly two (broad) communities: engineering and related sciences on the one hand, and the life sciences on the other hand. Our audiences in 2008 were, for example, engineers at Ion Beam Applications (IBA) and at Laborelec, graduate students both in engineering and in bioengineering at the University of Gent, researchers at the Scripps Research Institute and at the Salk Institute, postdocs at Caltech, and, during Jean-luc's now established speaking tours in the US, mixed groups at MIT, Stanford, UC Berkeley, UCLA, Harvard, as well as (for the first time in 2008) the University of Chicago.

Somewhat unexpectedly, Jean-luc had plenty of occasions in 2008 to be in touch again with his former field of research (that is, optics), with the launch of regular training programs for the Institut de Ciències Fotòniques (ICFO) in Barcelona, workshops at major conferences of SPIE, and invited lectures for Women in Photonics—and more of it to come in 2009, too.



Throwing dice helps participants sharpen their statistical thinking.

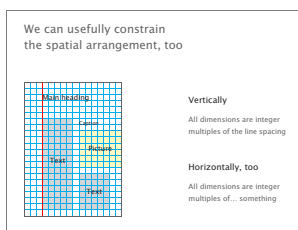
In the financial sphere, our program on statistical thinking (*Dice, cards, and insurances*) was once again much demanded, not only for underwriters and others at insurance companies (Fortis Corporate Insurance, Nassau Verzekeringen), but also for brokers (Marsh). Mixed sessions for insurers and brokers together were particularly appreciated, as they helped each of them understand better the point of view of the other one.

Besides for statistical thinking, clients in the financial world called upon us for communication skills. Much to her delight, Geneviève thus got a chance to critically analyze publications on IFRS and US GAAP (in Spanish, too) to prepare a program on scientific writing for the Universidad de Chile. Similarly, she developed a specific session for PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Consulting

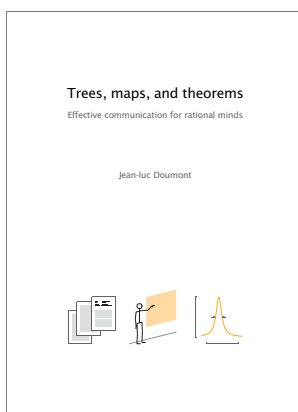
Next to training, we offer a broad range of consulting services, through which we can, as our tag line says, “structure thoughts.” In 2008 again, we identified messages and organized content for key presentations, created slides, and coached speakers, or even facilitated entire processes—conducting interviews, leading round tables, and finally offering recommendations. Geneviève’s solid business experience was a definite asset for the projects she led at Axa, Fortis, and Prince Albert Fund.

Among other topics, our sessions on visual structure discuss grids.



One of our areas of expertise that is increasingly called upon is *visual structure*, generally in the form of an expert review of existing or new designs, possibly coupled to a workshop. In 2008, we thus helped McMaster-Carr optimize their catalog of over 465 000 products, commented on the user interface of a Web-based knowledge-sharing application for Whatever, and accompanied Brussel Deze Week in the visual redesign of their weekly newspaper—three projects illustrating again the broad applicability of the “first principles” we believe in.

Publishing



We are delighted to report that Jean-luc’s long-awaited book on “effective communication for rational minds” is now out. Titled *Trees, maps, and theorems*, this 192-page A4-size book covers our three core topics in the area of communication (written documents, oral presentations, graphical displays) and is directed at our usual audiences of engineers, scientists, business people, and other professionals. From January on, it will become the written support for our training programs in communication—together with client-specific examples, as always. To look at sample pages, download extra material, or order your copy, go to www.treesmapsandtheorems.com.

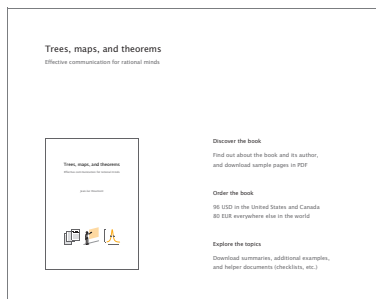
Perspectives for 2009

As always, our pipeline tends to fill relatively long in advance: our calendar is almost fully booked for the first half of 2009 and we have speaking engagements all the way to 2010 already.

The coming year promises to be hectic indeed (but we would not want it any other way ;-), with more demand than ever from researchers in the United States, Canada, and Europe (we seem to be developing quite a pole of activity in Barcelona), next to our regular programs for Belgian engineering schools, our workshops on communication and on statistical thinking for insurance companies, and our various consulting projects.

As one example of business development, we are receiving ever more invitations to deliver lectures or run workshops on scientific communication at technical conferences, both in Europe and in the US, and at various research institutions (affiliated or not with a university), then primarily in the US. Given that we do little marketing, if any, this increase must result from word of mouth within the scientific community.

Our new Web site about the book, www.treesmapsandtheorems.com, will be further enriched in 2009.



Of course, self-publishing is an adventure of its own—one that will likely keep us plenty busy as well in the new year. We must get the word out about *Trees, maps, and theorems*, ensure faultless worldwide fulfillment of the orders placed, and create additional material to further assist our readers, such as more numerous or more specific examples, answers to frequently asked questions (besides the ones in the book), and perhaps summaries, checklists, or preparation templates.



It is never too early to contact us with a project or just an idea. Our planning indeed fills up fast, and experience demonstrates that early involvement on our part leads to better deliverables. We are always happy to listen, to help you clarify your needs, and to search with you for meaningful ways to address them. Get in touch with us at +32 2 757 26 36 or info@principiae.be.

