



CASE STUDY

How Whole Brain® Thinking Helps Organizations Succeed With DEIB



Executive Summary

“Cognitive diversity is how we each process information differently and look at the world through our own set of eyes. This is developed throughout our lives in our brains and through our thinking and experience,” says Ann Herrmann-Nehdi, chair of the board and chief thought leader at Herrmann.

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) can be a complex subject to broach in corporate settings. One way to break the ice is to discuss people’s different thinking styles, or cognitive diversity.

People often feel more comfortable acknowledging cognitive diversity because they see it all around them — at work, home, and in their communities. By normalizing thinking style differences, people become more comfortable with the idea of unconscious bias, opening the door to deeper conversations — and results — related to DEIB.

Two longtime management consultants and DEIB experts who incorporate cognitive diversity in their work are Janet B. Reid, Ph.D., founder, CEO, and managing partner of BRBS World LLC, and Vince Brown, president and CEO of V. Randolph Brown Consulting (VRBC).

“We’ve always incorporated that,” Reid says. “And it’s a very powerful way to begin the DEIB dialogue with people because everyone can identify with it.”



Reid and Brown also incorporate Herrmann’s Whole Brain® Thinking

model. This science-based framework helps individuals better understand how they can bring their best selves to work every day by using their whole brains.

When teams apply Whole Brain® Thinking as part of their day-to-day work, they understand themselves and have a much better context for how their teammates think similarly or differently than they do. They can then embrace differences to help the team become more than the sum of its parts.

The Whole Brain® Thinking model groups people’s thinking preferences into four quadrants: Analytical (A or Blue), Structural (B or Green), Relational (C or Red), and Experimental (D or Yellow). All people prefer a combination of preferences, and no one set of preferences is ideal or better than another.

Whole Brain® Thinking “provides a common language for people to understand unconscious biases. And that common language enables us to hear each other through those biases,” Brown says. “That, to me, has been really the profound effect.”

CONTACT US    

thinkherrmann.com
info@thinkherrmann.com
800-432-4234



Objectives

Whole Brain® Thinking helps to “understand the preferences that people have, how they prefer to communicate, how they prefer to hear answers, how they prefer to think through strategy,” Brown says. “It just unlocked the potential for us to gain greater insights regarding the work that we were doing in diversity, equity, inclusion, and now belonging.”

Reid and Brown have long worked with large organizations on DEIB issues. But for them to do their jobs effectively inside client organizations, they need to understand the existing culture and mindsets. And they need a way to do this that their clients feel comfortable with. That’s why they turn to Whole Brain® Thinking.

Reid and Brown also use this approach to help their clients better understand their thinking.

Reid notes that many clients struggle with business outcomes because they don’t understand how they think and thus don’t know their unconscious biases. These companies rely on their gut, Reid says, instead of brain science.

“If you don’t understand your own internal biases, your own unconscious biases, then your first impressions are usually wrong,” she says.



Challenges

“If you’re human, you’re biased. So that’s just a fact,” Brown says. “And, quite frankly, bias in itself is not a negative. The one bias we’re talking about is implicit, or unconscious, bias towards people.”

Bias can be a complex subject to broach at work, as people can feel uncomfortable with the topic and worry about being judged. There’s also confusion about the different types of biases — and whether they are necessarily wrong.

Unconscious biases can get in our way and prevent us from being our best selves. But, as Brown notes, we can gain control over our unconscious biases when we can understand them. “And that’s when we make quantum shifts in behaviors. And we can do it in a respectful way that people can come to understand,” he says.

Unconscious bias is distinct from prejudice, Reid notes. “An unconscious bias, or implicit bias, is a natural way that our brain functions not to have to calculate every single thing forever before

making a conclusion,” she says. That’s very different from prejudice, which is someone choosing deliberate thinking or actions against a group of people they don’t like.

Another challenge previously encountered by Brown and Reid in their work was scaling Whole Brain® Thinking quickly enough to create a common language, accelerating the process of applying it in the flow of work. Thankfully, technology has made this easier, and the digital tools and processes Herrmann provides allow people to learn and apply Whole Brain® Thinking faster than ever before.

“The biggest challenge before and the greatest opportunity today is scaling this so that people have access to it at their fingertips,” Brown says.



Solutions

“I think sometimes [Whole Brain® Thinking] can get pigeonholed as just one or two uses. But I would say it’s the steel thread that actually runs through every successful organization,” he says.

Whole Brain® Thinking can be applied to many organizational activities that contribute to DEIB outcomes, which has been the primary focus of Reid and Brown’s work. It also applies to growing revenue, building culture, and building engagement and inclusivity by embracing cognitive diversity.

From there, the salesperson can “discern the other person’s thinking style preferences, building a significant emotional relationship by deeply listening and hearing the other person’s perspective,” Reid adds.

For example, a sales team struggling to understand its prospects can have sales representatives start by knowing their own thinking style preferences. Embrace the power of the pause when interacting

with clients so you can hear what they really need, Reid says: “Think about how you think, and then listen deeply to the client to hear clues about how they think.”

Brown works with a client who applies Whole Brain® Thinking whenever conducting a merger or acquisition. As Brown describes it, this leader comes to him and says, “The first thing we’re going to do is we’re going to focus on Whole Brain® Thinking because what I need to do is, one, build a common language. Number two, I need folks to see each other’s strengths and other areas that they have. And three, I need for them to see how we can communicate more effectively.”

Strong communication is imperative to better business, and that’s an underlying application of Whole Brain® Thinking, Brown says.





Results

Organizations of all sizes, industries, and geographies can come together through Whole Brain® Thinking. “It is a highly understandable model, it’s a very usable model, and it’s something that everyone can say yes to because it’s the truth,” Reid says. “It’s how the brain operates.”

Whole Brain® Thinking also provides a common language for understanding and discussing cognitive diversity. By improving organizational communication, people better understand each other’s strengths and can stretch themselves in quadrants that are less their preference.

For example, Reid mentioned a client whose team profile was heavily Blue/analytical and Green/practical. They were struggling to innovate, but that didn’t mean they were incapable — just unaware.

“And the big ‘aha’ was, ‘Well, we don’t have as much creative thinking, nor do we have a sense of what our market desires or even what our people internally desire,’” Reid says. “A Whole Brain® is necessary to keep good business results sustained over a long period of time.”

Another example Reid shared was a Fortune 50 company where innovation had been siloed. Whole Brain® Thinking was crucial in helping employees across job roles and departments come together to ideate and iterate. “We were able to create an inclusive culture ... such that they respected each other, [and] they understood each other’s part in making a successful whole,” Reid says. The result was nearly \$1 billion in new revenue from products created through this collaboration.

Brown says Whole Brain® Thinking also contributes to the success of employee resource groups and other DEIB efforts. “It’s integral in innovation and generating revenue and bottom line,” he says.

“It’s also essential in building cultures, developing people, [and] creating allyships on diversity councils.”

Not only that, but Whole Brain® Thinking also helps Brown and Reid make breakthroughs with the organizations they work with. “It provides a framework for forward-thinking about [Whole Brain® Thinking] in terms of preference and dominance,” Brown says. “And the moment that you understand that, it really is helpful in terms of thinking through, ‘What biases do I have, and how do they show up?’”

Additionally, Whole Brain® Thinking complements Reid and Brown’s work on “intrinsic inclusion,” including the book by that name. Intrinsic inclusion sits at the intersection of diversity, neuroscience, biases, and biology. This approach prompts important discussions about disrupting implicit unconscious biases and mitigating their effects in business — unlocking greater collaboration, innovation, and inclusivity. Whole Brain® Thinking helps accelerate each of the four key behaviors that enable inclusion: Connected understanding, shared trust, respectful empathy, and significant emotional events/relationships.

The personal effect of using Whole Brain® Thinking can affect your entire life. “For anyone who is interested in being successful, anyone who is interested in living a more peaceful and fruitful and productive life, get to know yourself and get to know others. Become more intrinsically inclusive. Create more of a sense of belonging with others,” Reid says.