Get to the core of your thinking.

Diversity of Thought
A Results-Based Approach to Inclusion
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Executive Summary Walkaround Model

A. Discover how the field of Diversity & Inclusion has evolved over the years and why companies have struggled to connect D&I initiatives to tangible business benefits.

B. Develop a plan for incorporating thinking into your D&I efforts, based on research and real-world examples of the business value of a Whole Brain® approach to inclusion.

C. Learn how Diversity of Thought provides organizations with a pathway to inclusion that produces bottom line results.

D. Explore four ways you can incorporate Diversity of Thought into your D&I efforts, depending on where you are in the D&I journey.

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With excitement building around the launch of the new Kinect sensor for Xbox 360—a gaming platform that promised to appeal to everyone, not just the typical gamer—Microsoft’s Good Science Studio team was feeling the heat. The set of games that shipped with Kinect would have to showcase the “something-for-everyone” mandate, and it was up to the design team to develop the games, make them broadly appealing and do it all in an extremely aggressive timeframe.

Studio Head Shannon Loftis realized that not only did her team need to appeal to a diverse audience, it also needed to capitalize on its own diverse strengths to be able to push the boundaries of creative game design and get the product out the door on time. It was a diversity challenge on an amplified scale, and one that’s representative of a new perspective on the role of Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) in business.

Although it’s been around for a number of decades, the D&I field is still relatively young, and it continues to evolve. With internal priorities and external realities shifting over time, the emphasis, focus and attention placed on D&I has changed throughout the years. Yet it has continued its struggle to provide the direct business results that some organizations seek—and that all too many, unfortunately, don’t expect.

Over the past 20 to 30 years, D&I programs have continued to pick up steam across most industries and sectors, including Fortune 500s, government agencies and non-profits. Some of these initiatives have remained closer to diversity’s compliance-oriented roots, concentrating on aspects like equal opportunity and affirmative action, while others have focused on specific elements of diversity, like race, ethnicity, age, disability, religion, access to development or upward mobility (i.e., glass ceilings). Others have targeted external company positioning, focusing primarily on diversity impacts from a community reinvestment perspective. That includes the support of diverse community organizations, such as supplier diversity, job readiness and other community-related efforts.

If you’ve been in the trenches leading and working on D&I initiatives—or even if you’ve just been involved as an ally or champion—then you’ve probably also seen the ups and downs and unique challenges this field has experienced. From where it “lives” in the organization to the roles and titles of leaders to the expectations and metrics for measurement, it’s an area that is frequently in the midst of transformation, battling to demonstrate impact and relevance.
In some ways, this can be attributed to D&I’s origins in business and the evolving research on the value of these initiatives. While D&I efforts initially emerged in response to the EEOC guidelines of the 1960s, many organizations began putting together D&I programs because it was “the right thing to do.”

But without much business rationale behind that statement—or measurements in place to prove business value—the programs were often vulnerable, viewed as “nice to haves” rather than “must haves,” especially under tight budget conditions.

More recently, companies began recognizing and responding to the growing evidence that it was “the smart thing to do”—that a strong D&I culture would give them a competitive advantage. A variety of studies have bolstered that position, including research conducted in 2013 by the Center for Talent Innovation, which found that there was an 80% improvement in business performance among companies with high diversity levels and that employees in publicly traded companies with higher diversity are 70% more likely to see their organization capture a new market. Various other studies have found such tangible business benefits as increased sales revenues, higher than average stock performance and financial returns above national industry medians.

For all the touting of the “business case for diversity,” however, the reality is that many D&I programs have been more about counting the numbers (hiring, promotions, improved race or gender data, and external positioning) and less about connecting to or driving effective business practices that lead to strong bottom-line results. That doesn’t mean that these efforts didn’t create great results. These elements of D&I initiatives have been critically important, and many have benefited from the systems and processes that have been implemented. But there have been missed opportunities. The ultimate goal for every organization should be to link the D&I work to business objectives through the creation of a more inclusive environment that better serves both employees and customers.

Far too many of these initiatives haven’t been conceptualized or developed in such a way as to achieve that goal, further perpetuating the perception that D&I is nothing more than a nice to have.
Historically, D&I programs have focused on the elements or dimensions of diversity as captured in the Gardenswartz & Rowe model (see figure 1). The trend in recent years has been to focus more on inclusion—sometimes based on those same dimensions. In this context, the ultimate question needs to be: “How can we build a work culture, a product or a service delivery system that will appeal to the broadest range of people and drive business results?”

Smart organizations are beginning to discover the answer: **Harness the power of Diversity of Thought.**

Microsoft’s Good Science Studio is one of those organizations.

Shannon Loftis realized her team not only needed diverse thinking and perspectives in order to achieve its goals, it needed to have the tools and foundation to be able to take advantage of that diversity. While the company had been conscious of including different perspectives on project teams, that didn’t always guarantee that the diversity would be leveraged. Her goal with the Kinect project was, as she puts it, to make sure “all the thinkers on the team had a voice.”

Since each of us differs from one another in a variety of ways, diversity itself is very broad in scope. The Gardenswartz & Rowe model (below) is widely used as a tool for understanding many of the areas of focus that have traditionally been used as touchstones for D&I programs.

© Lee Gardenswartz and Anita Rowe. Internal and External Dimensions are adapted from Marilyn Loden and Judy Rosener. *Workforce America!* (Business One Irwin, 1991)
So, with the right training and tools, the developers learned to listen to and value their more process-oriented teammates’ perspectives, while the project managers learned how to interact more effectively with the creative, free-wheeling developers. Together, they came up with better ideas and made faster decisions as they balanced “wild creativity” with discipline, structure and science.

As a relatively new element of inclusion, Diversity of Thought has only recently begun capturing the attention of the broader D&I and business community—and now it seems like it’s popping up everywhere. The experience of a leading senior consultant in the D&I field who has worked with hundreds of CEOs and C-level executives over the past few years is representative of this trend. He shared with us that whenever the topic of diversity has come up, the leader’s response has consistently been: “What really matters to me is diversity of thought. That is something we really need. How do we get that?”

Ironically, the concept has a 30-year history grounded in research and data at Herrmann International, where we have been studying the impact of people’s thinking preferences on how they behave, problem solve, tackle projects, make decisions, communicate, work in teams and, most of all, how they drive business results.

By Any Other Name…
For many organizations, “Diversity of Thought” is a very new concept in terms of driving inclusion. It’s so new, in fact, that the field hasn’t landed on a consistent name for describing this dimension of diversity. You may hear it referred to as thought diversity, cognitive diversity or thinking diversity. We believe Diversity of Thought captures the meaning most accurately.

The good news is that our ongoing research and the work we’ve done with global organizations like Microsoft, as well as our database of more than 2 million thinkers, has consistently shown that Diversity of Thought is present in every organization. In addition, when linked to business drivers, it can be a cornerstone for huge success and competitive advantage. In Microsoft’s case, the team dramatically reduced overall development time (by 40% compared to typical game design projects), and it created a set of games that appeals to a broad consumer audience. The game that’s proven to be most popular? No surprise to us—it’s the one that’s the most “whole-brained,” having elements appealing to the full diversity of thinking preferences.
The Whole Brain® Model

“The brain is involved in all aspects of the learning process. It is the single bodily organ that is the central processor of all learning activities.”
– Ned Herrmann

The Whole Brain® Model, which serves as an organizing principle for how the brain works, depicts the four different thinking preferences:

A – logical, analytical
B – detailed, structured
C – people-oriented, participatory
D – conceptual, risk-taking

Using the skill of Whole Brain® Thinking, people and teams are able to fully leverage their preferences, stretch to other styles when necessary, and adapt to and take advantage of the full Diversity of Thought within themselves and in those around them to be faster, more responsive, more collaborative, and more productive.
“With so many different, multifaceted professions, Whole Brain® Thinking gives project team members a way to bridge the professions...It has significantly minimized conflict—within the project management groups, with the work they do with people outside the groups, and with the stakeholders outside of the organization.” – Tina Larsen, Head Consultant of Strategic and Organizational Development, Slagelse Municipality, Denmark

The four-quadrant Whole Brain® Model (figure 2), which Ned Herrmann originally developed as part of his initial research on learner diversity while head of management education at GE, is a metaphor for the brain and an organizing principle of our thinking preferences. And it equals the playing field: Unlike many elements of traditional diversity, everyone has thinking preferences. Just as important, everyone has the ability to adapt their thinking as the situation requires by applying the skill of Whole Brain® Thinking. Our research has shown that the more people understand how they and others think and how thinking affects work, interactions and outcomes, the more adaptive, agile and successful they can be.

Gardenswartz and Rowe, world-renowned leaders in the D&I arena, felt so strongly about Diversity of Thought being central to inclusion that they authorized us to insert our Whole Brain® Model icon into the center of their model (see figure 3, next page), replacing personality. Diversity of Thought is an overarching approach to inclusion that everyone identifies with and can relate to.

Our research shows that not only does Diversity of Thought exist in every person and in every organization or group, the data consistently show that when the size of the group is large enough, there will be a well-balanced distribution of individual thinking preferences across the four quadrants of the Whole Brain® Model. In other words, nearly every group—your employees, your customers, your vendors, the world—represents the full breadth of thinking; all thinking preferences are represented.

The implications? No matter who you hire and who you serve, and no matter what kinds of products or services you provide, it’s imperative that all thinking preferences are considered. If you want to fully engage your employees and truly meet the wants and needs of your current and future customers, you have to not only be inclusive but also take a Whole Brain® approach to your inclusion efforts.
“Whole Brain® Thinking has helped us improve communication because now we understand how each other needs to receive information. This knowledge helps us to rearrange how we communicate to be more effective.” — Director, Respiratory Care, Christiana Health Care

Every organization is facing complexity and change at a scale and pace unlike anything we’ve ever seen before. The Diversity of Thought within our organizations is one of the best resources available for thriving in this new reality. This has been proven through our work with thousands of organizations around the globe facing critical business challenges. A six-year study at the U.S. Forest Service added valuable insights: Teams that are balanced in terms of thinking preferences are more effective; they consider more options and make better decisions. The study also found that when faced with a complex challenge, whole-brained teams were 66% more efficient than homogeneous teams. We continue to spearhead research in this area, most recently in a study we conducted in partnership with INSEAD on the impact thinking preferences and Diversity of Thought have on management team performance.

**Teams with Homogenous Thinking**
- Often achieve consensus very quickly
- Will respond in ways that are predictably consistent with their thinking preference
- Have an advantage when speed and focused expertise are needed and innovation is not important

**Teams with Heterogeneous Thinking**
- Often take more time and have difficulty achieving consensus
- Can be synergistic and therefore ideal for creative and complex assignments
- Can be extremely creative and successful, but can “crash” if they do not take the steps and time to find synergy
But there’s more to it than just having Diversity of Thought. After all, we know it exists in every organization and, indeed, in every individual. If you want to reap the benefits of Diversity of Thought, there are specific best practices to follow.

First, a validated instrument like the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument® (HBDI®) assessment is critical for understanding individual thinking preferences as well as the thinking preferences of teams or groups. It also provides hard data that you can use to more strategically align thinking resources with business objectives and challenges. Figure 4 shows a comparison of HBDI® Team Profiles, representing a team comprised of members with similar thinking preferences versus a team with more balanced Diversity of Thought. Both have specific advantages, but when innovation, creativity and complex problem solving are priorities, a diverse team with appropriate tools and management will outperform the homogenous team.

Next, the most successful organizations build a culture that goes beyond tolerating thinking differences to embracing and leveraging them. This means that everyone needs to recognize how and why Diversity of Thought contributes to overall objectives, and team members have to be able to communicate effectively across differences, regardless of their preferences.
In addition, individuals and teams can dramatically improve the quality of their problem solving and decision making when all the thinking assets available are effectively applied. This requires an upfront investment to get the teams prepared, but it’s worth it.

Finally, leaders and managers play a pivotal role in making sure the organization gets the benefits of differences rather than ending up with conflict, which can frequently happen. Diverse teams without the benefit of proper management tools like the HBDI® and well-developed skills to manage its application can quickly devolve into chaos. The more diverse a team, function or division is, the more important it is to have a skilled leader who can manage, facilitate and incorporate Whole Brain® Thinking practices within the team and organization, while at the same time driving strategy toward specific business goals.

Four Ways to Incorporate Thinking into Your D&I Efforts

No matter where you are in your Diversity & Inclusion journey, a Whole Brain® approach to inclusion will provide the knowledge, skills, tools and measurements to lead you forward and drive the business results you need to deliver.

Here are four ways thinking preferences and Whole Brain® Thinking can play a role in your D&I efforts.

**Starting a D&I initiative**

“Unlike some other tools, Whole Brain® Thinking is something you can apply to any situation—a project, project teams, a problem or issue—and it gives you a neutral baseline and common ground to start with. It’s such an easy process for people to take on board and connect with.” – David Barker, Strategic HR Business Partner for Coca-Cola’s London 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games project teams

Especially if you’re just getting your feet wet in this area, a focus on thinking preferences provides an excellent research-based foundation for the initiative. For one, because it’s scientifically based, “safe” and non-judgmental, it’s probably the least threatening way to begin talking about diversity. Frequently, people will even discover that they had been judging their thinking preferences or other elements of diversity and actually interfering with their own success. As one leader told us, “The HBDI® shed light on how I think and process information, and it answered a lot of questions about myself and why I work the way I work. I realized: **This is just how I think**.” This insight allowed him to focus on where he needed to stretch as a leader to meet the needs of his function and his team members.
Beyond providing a clear foundation for a D&I program, the Whole Brain® approach to inclusion is also very powerful in helping people recognize the value of different perspectives in the context of business, and encouraging new ways of thinking and approaches to work, which can yield great results—like it did for the Microsoft team. There are other advantages:

• Easy-to-apply thinking-based tools can be used to start the conversation about diversity and improve communication.
• This doesn’t substitute or in any way diminish the other dimensions of diversity. In fact, it often clarifies what is actually a thinking preference issue rather than a more volatile traditional diversity issue.
• The program has a viewpoint or foundational perspective to start from and build off of.
• You can easily start with the decision makers, building a clear business case, and then add the preferences of others to ensure a Whole Brain® approach to inclusion.
• The science behind it appeals to those who seek a business basis and research-based approach.

Jumpstarting or Restarting a D&I Effort

“Whole Brain® Thinking is more applicable in the workplace because it’s about the way you think and solve problems. It facilitates a good work discussion.”
– Crystal Snoddy, Head of Delivery Excellence, InterContinental Hotels Group

The Whole Brain® approach isn’t just a starting point. For an initiative that has stalled or isn’t getting traction, or for one that needs a more strategic focus, thinking preferences are like “jumper cables” to reignite your efforts. Because everyone has thinking preferences—they cut across all dimensions of diversity—a Whole Brain® approach provides common ground for engaging in conversation around inclusion.

D&I initiatives stall out for any number of reasons: lack of executive support and buy-in, difficulty in measuring or demonstrating outcomes, participant distrust or disengagement, and unclear connections to the business, among others. The Whole Brain® approach to inclusion can be the ideal accelerator for a number of reasons:

• The HBDI® assessment result data equips you with a scientific approach and real data that will increase buy-in and commitment, particularly at the executive level.
• For most people, this will be a new way to look at inclusion, and you can maximize the impact of inclusion by measuring the value of each preference’s contributions.
• This methodology provides a grounded means to have dialogue, which can address many other areas of exclusion but in a way that is less “loaded,” resulting in greater understanding, action and results.
• Because it was originally developed for business use, the Whole Brain® approach is designed to be applied to achieve a variety of specific business outcomes that can be tracked and measured.

“One of the things we look for in talent is: Can they think like a customer, and can they think like customers will think today and in the future?”
– John Donahoe, President and CEO, eBay Inc.
Building and Sustaining a High-Performance Culture

“Diversity and inclusion are most potent when channeled toward a company’s hardest problems, or most complex opportunities. If managed appropriately, they can drive profoundly enhanced outcomes.”
– Fred Keeton, Keeton Iconoclast Consulting, former vice president of external affairs and chief diversity officer, Caesars Entertainment

The ability to profile employees’ thinking preferences using the HBDI® assessment provides an opportunity to assemble teams that can perform at quantum levels higher than the norm. As a tool of inclusion, the profile data can provide the basis for building a heterogeneous team of thinkers that has a greater potential for problem solving and innovation. Microsoft’s Good Science Studios and the US Forest Service are just two of the countless examples showing how powerful and effective teams can become once they have the insights and tools to successfully harness their Diversity of Thought.

Our research and work with organizations around the globe demonstrates that teams that have a diversity of thought and the tools to leverage it are more effective and creative, and come up with more ideas and solutions. That expanded creativity and solutions-orientation paves the way to greater productivity and greater employee and customer engagement.

Here are some key points for making sure you get the benefits of Diversity of Thought in teams:

- The more diverse the thinking preferences of a team, the more important it is to have a leader who understands thinking preferences and has the skills to balance and effectively manage that Diversity of Thought.
- The very qualities that lead to greater creativity and innovation in diverse teams also make them more prone to communication barriers and conflict. The HBDI® provides a clear set of tools to assist leaders and individual contributors to maximize their communication skills and significantly reduce miscommunications and their impact on results.
- The HBDI, Whole Brain Model and related tools all support inclusion efforts within teams because they give the team the systems and processes to work through communication barriers and leverage their diversity towards achieving business outcomes.

What’s more, the performance-boosting power of Diversity of Thought goes beyond teams to the entire culture. Many senior executives fail to realize that not only does their organization have its own culture, it also has its own thinking preferences, which can play a substantial role in the development of that culture.

Understanding the organization’s thinking preferences, and using that knowledge to identify potential aggregate Diversity of Thought blind spots, can significantly contribute to a company’s competitive advantage. Companies that know their own thinking pre-dispositions are better positioned to identify their blind spots, make
better going-forward decisions and most important, make those decisions preemptively. Their best decisions avoid disruption because the company is using its full Diversity of Thought and thinking clearly, rather than missing industry or global cues that signal significant change.

The best place to start with Diversity of Thought as a pathway to a high-performing culture? The top. HBDI® results for functional senior leadership, operations senior leadership and individual operating unit leaders, as well as an aggregate company leadership profile, will provide similar advantages as an individual or small team profile.

**Leadership Agility and Innovation**

“Leaders will see significant improvement in their ability to lead others when they invest the time and energy in understanding and speaking the ‘language’ of those they lead.” – Ned Herrmann and Ann Herrmann-Nehdi, The Whole Brain Business Book, Second Edition

With so much pressure, information overload and juggling of priorities today, it’s easy for leaders to default to their thinking “comfort zone,” even when that approach may not be best suited for the situation. Leaders often surround themselves with people who have complementary thinking preferences to “fill in the gaps” of their own preferences. However, today’s leaders also have to be agile thinkers to be effective, able to access all four quadrants—the Diversity of Thought within themselves—and adept at shifting their point of focus to more fully engage their team and colleagues as well as their current and prospective customers.

Rich DeSerio, former manager of IBM’s award-winning Leadership Development Programs’ Global Design Team, says IBM integrated Whole Brain® Thinking into its leadership competencies to build thinking agility because it views diversity of all kinds as a competitive advantage in today’s world and essential to innovative thinking: “We strongly believe and emphasize: the more perspectives and viewpoints you can get, the better.”

Successful leaders today are those who encourage everyone—including themselves—to bring their best thinking to work. Research by Edward Lumsdaine and Martin Binks (Entrepreneurship from Creativity to Innovation: Effective Thinking Skills for a Changing World) and others shows that the best solutions and most innovative ideas come from the combination of all four thinking preferences. It’s up to the leaders to set the stage for this Diversity of Thought to be leveraged and channeled toward business outcomes. As Deloitte University Press’s article, Diversity’s New Frontier, pointed out: “ Leaders that explore this new frontier of diversity [Diversity of Thought] can blend the cacophony of ideas in their workplace to spark innovation and creativity.”

“...when teams are diverse, meaningful innovation is more likely to happen.” – “The Case for Business Diversity Gets Event Better,” Harvard Business Review
Modeling the skills of an agile leader will enhance all aspects of inclusion. Here are just a few examples of how leaders, their employees, customers and the entire organization benefit when Diversity of Thought becomes part of the inclusion narrative:

- **Increased productivity:** Recently, a leader we work with who has high creativity and interpersonal skills had to flex into a bottom-line approach when dealing directly with the CFO. Tapping into a less preferred thinking preference ultimately led both executives to stop wasting time, develop newfound credibility with each other and increase their productivity.

- **Improved and streamlined communication:** Another leader was struggling with one of his direct reports because each would take a separate path in project discussions, based on their own thinking preferences. The process of solving a complex issue was often stressful and overly time consuming. Using the HBDI® data, the leader discovered a more productive process flow and path for communication, reducing stress and saving time and energy.

  “We used to spend too much time trying to get to common ground,” he says. “But now, a conversation that might have taken two hours can happen in about 45 minutes.” Not only that, others on the team now have a better understanding of where this employee is “coming from” and a better appreciation for the value he brings.

- **Greater flexibility and ability to adapt to a changing world:** A focus on Diversity of Thought as the underlying driver for agility has helped highly technical managers at CLP India, one of the largest foreign investors in the Indian power sector, improve their leadership effectiveness under dynamic but challenging business conditions.

  Using the Whole Brain framework as an organizing principle to build up their comfort with different thinking preferences, the managers have increased their flexibility in adapting their thinking to different situations and people, and made it easier to collaborate to meet the demands of a rapidly expanding, increasingly diverse customer base.

  Led by these agile thinking managers, CLP India is now blazing new trails in innovation and is one of the few power companies in India focusing on both conventional and renewable energy. The company is also recognized for the culture it has created, one that embraces different thinking and appeals to younger employees—critical for attracting the next generation of talent, particularly in a country with such a large population of young people.

- **Breakthrough Innovation for Complex Challenges:** Diversity of Thought can be a driver for innovative solutions to very tough challenges. The Diverse by Design teams created by Fred Keeton at Caesars had “focusing on breakthrough outcomes” as one of their primary objectives. Results included innovative ways to achieve new or increased revenue, cost savings, process efficiencies and improved engagement.

“We come from different backgrounds, different cultures, but I say that’s the best thing the company could have – a diversity of ideas and people challenging the heck out of others.” — Warren Staley, CEO, Cargill, “The Quiet Giant Speaks”
“If people even partially internalize the inherent value of different perspectives... they will be better equipped to listen for the ‘a-ha’ that occurs at the intersection of different planes of thought.” – Dorothy Leonard and Susaan Straus, “Putting Your Company’s Whole Brain to Work,” Harvard Business Review

As Microsoft, Caesars, CLP India and countless other stories bring to life, the exciting thing about Diversity of Thought as an inclusion pathway is how quickly people and companies connect to it and are able to transform thinking into real business results.

In the hectic world of a telecommunications call center, for example, this approach has paid significant dividends. Telecom New Zealand found Diversity of Thought to be the perfect bridge for helping call center operatives find common ground with their customers and be more efficient and productive.

“In the past, all customers received the same amount of time from us, leaving some feeling rushed while others felt short changed. Now, we provide the ‘right’ amount of time for each caller,” says Director of Operations Brian Wilkinson.

Within just a few weeks of implementing the program, customer satisfaction scores shot up, many reaching 4 out of 4. Dials-to-calls completed and sales results have improved dramatically, while repeat calls (or “call backs”) have been reduced. The impact has also been evident internally, according to Sue Atkins, the project’s sponsor.

“It’s created better conversations between team leaders and agents and has provided a common language to help us challenge the way we do things,” she says.

The net effect? According to the company’s independent auditors, for every $1 it invested in the program during the first year of the initiative, it made $12 in return. No matter what kind of initiative you’re driving, those are the kinds of hard numbers every business leader is looking for.

Ultimately, Diversity of Thought provides a pathway to inclusion that produces bottom line results. It allows you to capitalize on the diversity already present and available in your organization. Think of it as an access code that can allow you, your organization and those you serve to get better results, improve processes, clarify relationships and generate new ideas—all with a positive impact on your bottom line.
Herrmann International combines powerful psychometric tools with learning programs to prepare your workforce for a complex and volatile environment. Learn more about our assessment tools, explore our learning programs, or talk to a Whole Brain® Specialist today.

- Request a quote
- Learn more about the HBDI®

Herrmann International is the originator and creator of the ground breaking Whole Brain® Thinking System and HBDI®. Since 1985, Herrmann has helped 97% of the Fortune 100 and 2 million Thinkers improve their lives at work.
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