

CASE STUDY



CASE STUDY: Integrating Significantly Different Cultures into a Cohesive Whole with a Common Purpose

How the U.S. Navy bridged two cultures and improved performance, problem solving and morale in a newly merged command.



OBJECTIVE:

To fully merge two separate commands into a single unit functioning with a common purpose.

The flagship campus of the University of Maine system, UMaine is one of New As part of a downsizing effort, the U.S. Congress had mandated the merging together of the U.S. Navy's Aviation Supply Division in Philadelphia and its Ship and Submarine Parts Operation in Mechanicsburg, PA, into one physical entity.

Over the short term, the goal was to establish a common culture that would facilitate more effective employee communication and improved working relationships of individuals and teams both within and between the two commands. The long-term objective was to fully merge 2,000 airplane parts people with 2,000 ship and submarine people so that the entire operation would function as a single unit with a common purpose—a cohesive whole that would “move as smartly as a battle cruiser or F-16.”



CHALLENGES:

To achieve both a physical and cultural integration among two naval commands operating under significantly different leadership approaches and team cultures.

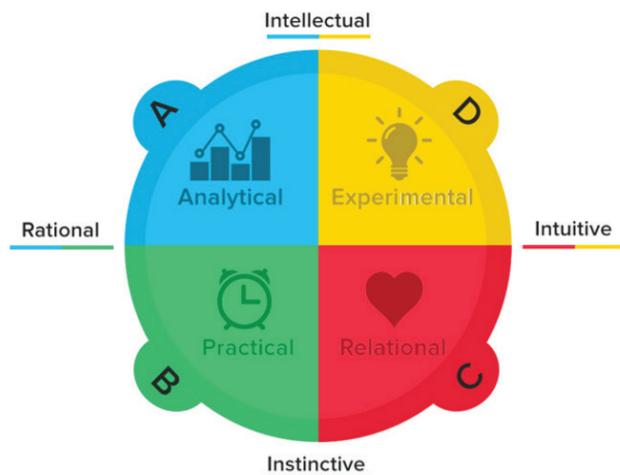
The two components were not only physically dislocated but also entirely different in terms of leadership cultures and the culture of employee communication and interaction. The bottom line was that these two organizations could not talk to each other..



SOLUTIONS:

Understanding and leveraging the diversity of thought among the commands as a foundation for moving forward with a common language and culture.

HBDI® Certified Practitioner Lynne Krause of BBTD Services, who was working with the Navy's Training Department, recommended using the Whole Brain® approach as a foundation for the common culture going forward. This would allow the groups to understand not just individual preferences but also the composite preferences of the two different organizations and quickly see how differences in thinking were contributing to their communication breakdowns and culture clashes. At the same time, once they discovered the role different thinking preferences play in achieving outcomes, they would be able to recognize the value in their diversity of thought and harness it towards common goals.



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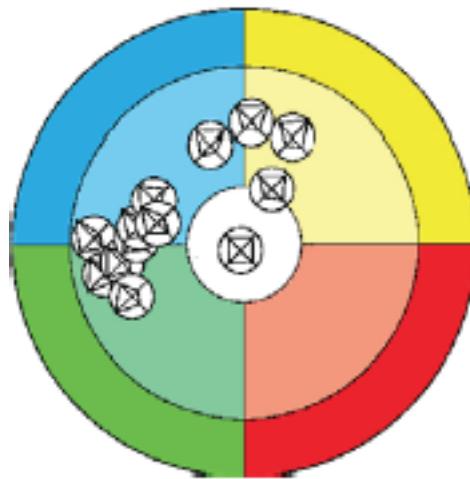
Figure 1: The Herrmann Whole Brain Model

Krause first administered the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument® (HBDI®) assessment, which defines and describes preferences for thinking across the four quadrants of the Whole Brain® Model, with the top Navy Command. She then created composite profiles of the preferences at the command level and facilitated data-sharing among team members, reviewing the implications and consequences of their individual and combined profiles.

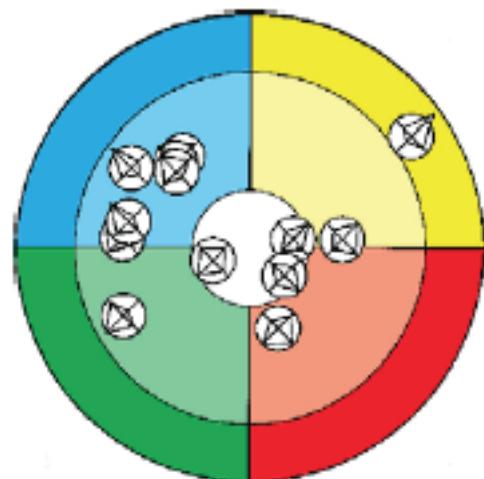
Next, the command teams, from the top down, learned how to play their roles more effectively and how to work more effectively with each other, based on an understanding of their thinking preferences. As more and more of the different levels of leadership groups completed and received their HBDI® profiles, the nature and extent of the cultural differences became clear.

Because individual's approach to innovation and problem solving will reflect their HBDI® Profile results to some extent, for the purpose of teaching the habits of innovation, Hall has sorted tools and methods into sets that bear relationships to the four quadrants of the Whole Brain® Model; this structure is fundamental to a systematic approach to innovation.

For instance, tools and methods associated with the A quadrant emphasize facts, research, critical analysis and a technical perspective. An A-dominant individual might find these activities reassuring, natural and even easy; however, a more powerful application might be for a person with a different dominance (D, for instance, which tends to emphasize holistic, big-picture solutions) to mine for research and technology, and equip her- or himself with facts as a basis for innovation.



*HBDI® Team Preference Map NAVICP
Corporate Board Upper Level Civilian
Management Group, Mechanicsburg*



*HBDI® Team Preference Map
NAVICP Corporate Board
Upper Level Civilian
Management Group,
Philadelphia*

As part of the merger, new teams were formed on the basis of HBDI® data, which in many cases resulted in shifting people to jobs that better suited their mental preferences. As the merger process proceeded, partnership councils were formed at both sites to help integrate the divergent cultures. The HBDI® assessment and a Whole Brain® approach were used extensively in helping people understand their own thinking preferences and in organizing and resolving problem issues. In particular, union concerns and civilian management issues needed to be understood and resolved. Communication and relationship issues affecting intact work teams and ad hoc groups also needed to be properly diagnosed and resolved. Whole Brain® concepts and tools became the accepted way of dealing with these complex issues.

The “missing” quadrant in both cultures was the “C” quadrant. This was why communication and interpersonal relationships became key training priorities. An important additional element of this merger process was the application of a parallel mentoring program, which matched individuals with compatible mentors who would not only facilitate individual development, but also help bring everybody on board to a common culture. Matching thinking styles using the HBDI® was so effective that out of 300 mentor/mentee matches, only two pairs had to be re-matched. This was a clear demonstration that matching mentor and mentee based on thinking preferences was an effective, accurate and high quality approach to developing pairs.

RESULTS:

Successful cultural integration, realignment of work, improved interactions and improved work effort and morale.

The Navy commanders reported that they loved the concept, and implementation proceeded at top speed as a result. This comprehensive Whole Brain® approach to the merger and integration established a common language that bridged the gap between the two cultures and also between different levels and types of command, making Navy and civilian interaction with the union much smoother.

The HBDI® has been rolled out from the top down in both cultures, and HBDI® profiles were used extensively as a development tool to realign employees to more appropriate work. All teams were formed on the basis of HBDI® data, and improved work effort and morale resulted. Additionally, military commanders became highly supportive of the Whole Brain® approach and recommended it to their next level of command.

In Whole Brain® terms, the initiative has been a clear success, resulting in:

- Improved performance
- Realignment of work
- Bridging of two cultures
- Clarifying the future to make integration possible

As relations have improved, a potential breakthrough with the union is an added bonus to the original purpose of the initiative. The relative balance of the Union Management Partnership Counselor will help ensure continued progress in union-management relationships.

UNLEASH THINKING POTENTIAL

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