

How Teams Make Better Decisions

One of the considerations employers make when deciding to employ a leader or manager is whether they like the candidate and think he or she will fit right in. Liking a candidate is certainly an important consideration. However, deciding if we like someone is usually influenced by a belief of whether or not someone thinks like we do.

Here are some examples of situations where a person might think differently from us and we ascribe a negative connotation to their thinking style that often mistakenly translates into whether we like them or not:

- “John is always finding reasons why we can't do something differently. He over-analyzes everything and the result is analysis-paralysis.”
- “Sally is often stuck in wanting to understand how we plan to do something. We just need to get started. We'll figure out the details later.”
- “Rob is more concerned about putting people's feelings before the business. We need to accomplish corporate objectives first and our people need to get on board.”
- “Cheryl is always jumping from one idea to another. It's tough trying to keep her on topic. No wonder we never finish our meetings on time.”

While we often think of these situations as descriptions of personality characteristics, they are examples of different ways of thinking that show up in how we communicate and how others, as a result, see us and think about us.

Based on my experience as a career strategist and coach working with executives, I often hear that a key reason they took a position at a company was based on their perspective of the company. When executives tell me why they decided to leave a company, however, the most frequent reason is their belief that their boss or others were not open or receptive to considering ideas that were not consistent with their way of thinking.

The second most frequent reason usually relates to personality characteristics, which may be influenced by a different thinking style. In retrospect, they recognized that before they accepted the job they should have focused more on assessing the people they would be working with and to whom they would report.

Using our personal lives as an analogy, most of us usually have a circle of close friends and a wider circle of friends we do not consider our close friends. Your close friends are those you like (personality characteristics) and with whom you probably share similar views on philosophical, social or political issues (thinking preferences). Your wider circle of friends, however, probably includes those you like (personality characteristics) but with whom you do not share similar philosophical, social or political views (thinking preferences).

Whether our thinking style is in our DNA or is learned is still a subject of debate. Companies and academics have conducted research to understand why great teams who like each other keep making the same mistakes, why silos in organizations often form, and how to get teams to work together when everyone in a group does not think alike.

Ned Herrmann conducted early research at GE and the company he formed, Herrmann International, is a leader in what is today called “Whole Brain Thinking”. The premise is that organizations make better decisions when participants bring different thinking preferences to the conversation and are able to communicate more effectively when they can recognize and keep an open mind to the different thinking preferences in others.

Based on his research, he created the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI®). The HBDI measures individual thinking styles in four distinctly different preferences referred to as Rational, Safekeeping, Feeling, and Experimental. The HBDI has been validated through academic research and has been used by many large corporations internationally for years to help their employees understand their own thinking preferences and to recognize the preferred thinking styles in others. The terms may be described differently by others but these are the general concepts of the four thinking styles:

- Rational – Analytical, critical thinking, logical, bottom-line focused, needs to understand how things work. (John above)
- Safekeeping – Organized, establishes procedures, likes planning, practical, gets things done. (Sally above)
- Feeling – Sensitive to others, strong interpersonal skills, expressive, emotional, supportive, and intuitive. (Rob above)
- Experimental – Imaginative, creative, speculates, willing to take risks, sees possibilities. (Cheryl above)

A visual representation of these different preferences is shown below:



While these four different thinking preferences might suggest that we have only one thinking preference, our thinking actually includes all of the four quadrants. What is unique to each of us, however, is that our thinking preference in each quadrant varies to some degree from the other quadrants. We usually have stronger and weaker preferences in one or more areas that show up in how we communicate with others and in how we view others (as demonstrated in the four examples on the previous page).

The following examples demonstrate how these different thinking preferences might show up in a management team:

- If the team has strong preferences for Rational and Safekeeping thinking (often referred to as left-brain thinking), the team may focus more on analyzing the details and creating structure and processes and less on exploring new opportunities or considering the impact their policies and procedures might have on employees.
- If the team has strong preferences for Feeling and Experimental thinking (often referred to as right-brain thinking), the team may focus more on exploring many different options, along with their potential impact on employee morale, and less on whether a project makes business sense and can be achieved within a specified time and budget.
- If the team has strong diagonally opposite preferences, such as Rational and Feeling thinking or Safekeeping and Experimental thinking, just getting those teams to work together productively can be the biggest challenge.

Our unique thinking style impacts everything about our life. It affects how we make decisions about what is important to us and what we have no or minimal interest in. It impacts how we communicate with others and they, in turn, react to us. It affects how we think about others and how they think about us.

The challenge for management teams is to understand how each other's thinking preferences might create blind spots or be the cause of constant frustration when they try to work together. These issues become even more challenging when recruiting new talent. The question you need to answer beforehand: "Is there a dominant thinking preference within the organization that could benefit from a new person bringing a different thinking style and perspective?"

The following quote by Soichiro Honda is one that we often don't think about when interviewing candidates:

"If you hire only those people you understand, the company will never get people better than you are. Always remember that you often find outstanding people among those you don't particularly like."

Choosing only those candidates you like and those you think will easily fit in with your existing management team may be a safe choice but you may be missing an opportunity to make the best choice by adding a different perspective that your business needs.

If you would like more information about Herrmann International and the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI®), go to <http://www.herrmannsolutions.com>.

If you would like to learn how your organization can benefit from understanding the thinking preferences of your management team using the HBDI®, contact Carl, a certified HBDI Practitioner.

Carl Wellenstein works with small and middle-market companies when they want to take charge of the recruiting and interviewing process for executives and managers. He helps them create and implement a comprehensive system that improves their and their recruiter's success at getting the right people the company needs. If you would like to know how Carl can help you, contact him at carl@execglobalnet.com.