



Insights On Cognitive Diversity

Posted by Curt Lucas

If you ask most people what they understand about diversity they will usually think of the differences in identity and demographics; factors like age, gender, marital status, race, ethnicity, income, education and occupation are common topics. However, most are less likely to acknowledge or appreciate cognitive diversity amongst individuals which are variations in how people think and approach challenges.



Cognitive diversity takes root when organizations recruit and include people with varied styles of decision making, problem solving, conflict resolution, and leadership. These individuals offer unique perspectives because they think differently-- no matter the financial, clinical or operational tasks they face.

In the current healthcare landscape, cognitive diversity is more important than ever. It guards against group think at a time when the healthcare industry is committed to change management, innovation and transformation. Cognitive diversity reaches beyond statistics and traditional; it pushes past the single-mindedness that can leave many organizations isolated.

Cognitive diversity can be identified in many forms, including the following:

- **Point of View/ Perspective:** People are different in the way they represent situations, challenges, and alternative solutions.
- **Interpretation:** People have varied approaches to discerning implications and meaning. Not everyone relies on the same categories or classifications.
- **Problem-solving:** People differ in how they surface solutions to problems. Some brainstorm every possible solution, while others dissect solutions one by one.

Cognitive diversity comes with many benefits, including creativity, fresh perspectives, enhanced decision making, and innovation. Thought diversity has also become a business booster, according to Deloitte's [Diversity's New Frontier: Diversity of Thought and the Future of the Workforce](#)

When organizations bring in people with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and personalities, the differences reshape how others think or come to certain conclusions. Some are people designers, engineers, or visionary planners, while others are

trackers, critics, or number crunchers. Collectively, these varied types of thinkers allow C-Suites and boards to boost creativity, drive fresh insights, and most importantly identify people who are best suited to solve the organization's distinct challenges.

Organizations can make the most of cognitive diversity by mining its positive results. This means developing people who are open minded and curious enough to embrace new perspectives. Leadership should encourage others to willingly share information, insights and creative concepts.

Unfortunately, cognitive diversity has not been a priority among C-Suite or board executives. Some strategies for increasing cognitive diversity across the organization include:

- **Recruit Differently:** Seek candidates who display varied world views and come to the table with diverse personal and professional experiences that might include entertainment, sports, music, technology, retail, or financial services. Be sure to infuse the interview process with questions that surface creative ideas and original thought.
- **Lead Differently:** While some organizations promote innovation and creativity in their annual reports, they demean and suffocate ideas that challenge the "the way we do business around here." C-Suite and board executives can champion an expansive learning culture that welcomes and rewards fresh ideas.
- **Promote Differently:** Organizations can advocate varied approaches to thinking and problem-solving and even integrate the "think different" gospel into career and leadership development. The best approach: Nudge and support people who think outside the box, draw outside the lines, and insist on driving on the shoulder of the road.

The best advice InveniasPartners can offer healthcare organizations is to operate with a more expansive concept of diversity and inclusion. Instead of restricting recruitment conversations to variables like race, gender, or ethnicity, leadership should also focus on how candidates think. How do they perceive, conceptualize, learn, reason, problem solve and use language? What makes them unique? And what value could they bring to the organization?

In the emerging healthcare environment, one of the worst mistakes organizations can make is to hire the same types of executives they have always employed. Instead, look for people who see the world differently and will not be afraid to reject common conceptions in the quest for a better solution.