

**Curt Lucas**

Managing Partner & Chairman

InveniasPartners

Willis Tower | 233 S. Wacker Drive | Suite 8400

Chicago, IL 60606

COGNITIVE DIVERSITY

Why It Pays to Think Differently in Executive Recruitment

Ask most people what they understand and know about diversity and they'll usually point to 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 problems.

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 what financial, clinical or operational task they may face. Unlike demographic diversity, cognitive diversity focuses on embracing people who perceive, understand, analyze, learn, and plan in unique and special ways.

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 politically correct platitudes; it pushes past the single-mindedness that leaves many organizations isolated and out of touch.

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. By bringing together varied types of thinkers, C-Suites and boards boost creativity, drive fresh insights, and most importantly can identify people who are best bets for tackling tough problems.

Of course, cognitive diversity has its limits. Highly divergent cognitive styles can suppress communication, stymie decision making and generate unwanted conflict. According to one [study](#), cognitive diversity can impede executive decision making.

Still, organizations can make the most of cognitive diversity by mining its positive results. That means developing people who are open minded and curious enough to embrace unusual points of view and who willingly share information, insights and creative concepts.

Cognitive diversity still isn't a priority among many C-Suite or board executives, which is why organizations may want to follow this Deloitte-inspired advice:

- **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, take a fresh look at how candidates think. How do they perceive, conceptualize, learn, reason, problem solve and use language? What makes them special? And what 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've always employed from the same pool of candidates. Instead, look for people who see the world differently and who aren't afraid to reject common conceptions in the quest for a better solution.