

The Power of Whole Brain Thinking

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How We Think Matters

The image of the Titanic sinking, immortalized in a movie is a defining visual of how the unimaginable can become possible and how 'rock solid' assumptions are mistaken for facts. Those closest to the Titanic were the ones most convinced of her invincibility.

"We believe that the boat is unsinkable." Philip Franklin, Vice-President of White Star Line, 8-00 a.m., April 15, 1912.

"I cannot imagine any condition which would cause the ship to founder. I cannot conceive of any vital disaster happening to this vessel. Modern shipbuilding has gone beyond that." ? Captain Edward Smith.

We all, at some point of time, fall a victim to the Titanic mindset, "Since I am so sure, I can't be wrong," and some of us most of the times. This is because the way we think influences the way we behave and we all 'see' the world through the prism of our own attitudes shaped by the forces of nature and nurture. The first step to make a shift in our mindset is to understand how we think and our dominant preferences.

Whole Brain Thinking Background

In the 16th century, when Rene Descartes declared "I think, therefore I am" he put a spotlight on the importance of thinking. Four hundred years later, Ned Herrmann took this question further when he experienced an epiphany after reading an article by Henry Mintzberg in the HBR. The article asked a powerful question that haunted him ? "How come managers can be so smart and yet dull at the same time?"

Ned Herrmann was a polymath, a singer (he sang at Carnegie Hall), a sculptor, a physicist by training from Carnegie Mellon, and he was also the head of Management Development at GE, at that time. This question intrigued him in the sense it was a question vital to help him understand himself better. GE supported Ned's experiments and applications and the pursuit of the 'aha' of the Mintzberg Moment during the late '70s, and it was these activities that led to the development of the whole brain concept and the Herrmann Brain Dominant Instrument HBDI®.

The Whole Brain Thinking Concept

Ned Herrmann combined Sperry's work and MacLean's research (both renowned Nobel Prize winning scientists) to create his Whole Brain Model, which emphasizes the fact that there are really four parts of the brain where dominances exist: Cerebral left, Limbic Left, Limbic Right, and Cerebral Right. These four styles or 'mindsets' are known as quadrants A, B, C, and

This is of course a metaphorical mode that describes how each of us has a preferred way and mode of thinking that affects the way we receive and process information. The awareness of one's own thinking style and that of others, combined with the ability to act outside of one's preferred thinking style is known as Whole Brain Thinking*

Tuning in

For a good metaphor to understand how the Whole Brain Thinking model works, consider for a moment that our brain is a radio and that we have our favorite stations that we are 'tuned to ' and listen to more

often. These favorite stations are our dominant thinking preferences ? we all have at least one dominant preference.

The model helps us understand which 'stations' we have a preference for and which we 'avoid', and there is nothing right or wrong if some of us prefer tuning into different stations. It also tells us that each of us has an access to each station. If we don't listen to a station often, it may require some work for us to tune in. The faster we are able to tune into the right station given the situation, the more effective we will be. We don't need to stay tuned in to stations we do not prefer but tune in only when required.* (for more please read 'The Creative Brain' by Ned Herrmann.)

Whole Brain Thinking and the HBDI®

The Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI®) is the instrument that accurately identifies one's thinking preferences. This instrument is very easy to administer given that it is online ,takes only 20 minutes to fill in and provides an accurate, visual , validated profile of how one thinks and more importantly, how one thinks under pressure.

Over 2 million people world-wide have been administered the profile and in India, we have administered the profile to over 1,200 managers from 32 companies.

Examples of HBDI profiles reflecting the dominance of each quadrant. The white lines indicate how the individual thinks under stress conditions.

The inner concentric circle indicates avoidance in that quadrant, the circle next to that indicates secondary thinking preferences and the last two concentric circles indicate primary thinking preferences in that quadrant.

People Behind Profiles – the 'Adamant' CEO

The funny part of our consulting work is helping managers understand the implications of their profiles. Every profile is a 'story' and in interpreting the story, people gain insights that help them make significant changes in the way they approach issues and change their behavior toward the team, colleagues, clients, and at home.

Please refer to the profiles above.

The CEO of a large manufacturing company was a 'high blue' ? a very analytical, fact based, and precise person. He was impatient with people who took too long to get to the point. He was also very sure of his approach, had a high focus on task and numbers, and saw no need to change. After all, he was very successful having steered the company to new heights, the quintessential 'Captain of the Titanic". Under pressure, he became even more analytical and as his people would say privately he was the 'iceman' apparently bereft of emotion. Not completely true of course, he was emotional, but he prided himself on his ability to keep his feelings under check.

He 'saw' the world very differently from his deputy – the Vice President of Service who was more people focused, believed in relationships, and who was very approachable. He respected the abilities of his deputy, however, but was worried that he was too soft on people. On their one-on-one's, he repeatedly suggested to his deputy that he should be tougher and develop the ability to take 'hard' decisions.

Their weekly meetings were becoming increasingly strained and unproductive and when both of them completed their HBDI profiles, it was as if the lights went on ? a 'aha' moment.

They both saw how differently they 'viewed' the world and this acceptance of differences made the CEO open to change. The CEO requested his deputy to address the monthly staff meetings, which earlier, the CEO used to do. The outcome of this 'small' change was that while it was very difficult for the CEO in the

initial meetings to control his impatience,? his deputy took 15 minutes to 'warm up' ? he found that when he spoke later, the team was much more receptive to his messages. For the deputy, he began to understand the importance of being succinct and precise.

Harnessing Potential

The power of the Whole Brain Thinking model is the ability to help people and teams change their mindsets. The HBDI is a cognitive tool, it is visual, it does not pigeonhole you in a box nor label you as a certain type, and there lies its almost universal acceptance.

A greater realization for people is that there are four equally valid and relevant ways of thinking and the goal is really to stretch oneself into quadrants where one has an avoidance and become 'situationally whole' when required.

We believe that the larger goal for individuals, teams, and organizations is to move three levels to harness the full potential of their people and teams: From the first level of just 'tolerating' differences to the next level of 'accepting' differences to third level of 'honouring' differences.

This journey can be extremely rewarding in terms of personal growth as well as for organizations in terms of unleashing the power of true collaborative working.