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### WHOLE BRAIN THINKING FOR A PRODUCTIVE WORKFORCE

*Prasad Deshpande literally has his thinking cap on while consulting with his clients and dealing with potential customers. Understandably so, as a leadership development and executive coach specializing in Whole Brain Thinking, Deshpande remains occupied for the most part of his workday in understanding people's preferred thinking style.*

*Deshpande, who is currently Director, Empowered Learning Systems-a Pune-based HR consulting and organizational development company was formerly with the Indian School of Business, where he was responsible for setting up the highly successful Open Enrollment Programmes Division at the Centre for Executive Education.*

*A member of American Society of Training and Development (ASTD) and International Coach Federation (ICF), Deshpande is a certified practitioner of the Hermann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI) - one of the most widely used and researched diagnostic tools that measures our preferences in thinking styles and communication.*

*In an interview with SHRM India Editor Rajeshwari Sharma, Prasad talks about HBDI, and how he helps organizations apply the principles of Whole Brain Thinking in areas such as aligning strategy to implementation, decision making, coaching, team building and collaborative working.*

#### Excerpts:

#### How does the whole brain thinking concept work?

Research on the brain has led to an understanding that 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 the thinking style of others, combined with the ability to act outside of one's preferred thinking style is known as the Whole Brain Thinking.

A good metaphor to understand how the Whole Brain Thinking model works is 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.

What are the advantages and limitations of Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument, which is based on whole brain thinking?

The HBDI tool has a number of advantages. It is very easy to administer given that it is online and takes only 20 minutes to fill in. It is visual and this greatly adds to its appeal as it is easy to understand at all levels in the organization.

It provides individuals with a significantly increased level of personal understanding. People do open up and talk about relationships at home and how this has helped them understand their significant 'others' better. To illustrate my point, let me cite you an instance of this person - let's say his name is Ajay- in one of the organizations that I work with. Ajay is a technical whiz and very good at his job but extremely different from the rest to the extent of being perceived as weird. What exasperated his boss and teammates was his habit of coming in very late; rapid fire ideas, which he never really implemented well; his extremely untidy desk; his penchant for communicating in doodles and sketches. Most often his down to earth engineering colleagues found it difficult to understand him. After the HBDI sessions, every one realized that he was a very right brained and very strong in the yellow quadrant (conceptual, providing innovative solutions). When I had a chat with his boss a year later, he spoke to me about Ajay and how, while he had not changed much, everyone else was far more comfortable with his 'differences' and this acceptance in turn, had made Ajay more productive. I wonder how many Ajays are there in organizations, who sadly do not fit in and whose potential is not realized.

HBDI cannot be used as a tool for selection as it measures only preference and not competence. A better way to use this tool would be to select the individual on the parameters defined by the organisation and then use the HBDI to identify the best 'fit' in terms of the profile and the mental demands of the job. For example, if the individual is a high blue (extremely analytical) and if the job demands a lot of customer service -then this might not be a right fit. Again a trap to watch out for is assuming that you know how people think. We are all complex creatures and it is important to validate by asking questions and checking for understanding.

How does it compare against other types of instruments such as MBTI, PI, Thomas Profiling, and Big Five.

As I mentioned earlier the HBDI is a cognitive tool. The HBDI does not pigeonhole you in a box nor label you as a certain type. The other tools that you have mentioned are personality assessment instruments.

HBDI provides a cognitive perspective and in that sense adds another layer of understanding and can be used augment one or the other of these tools.

The common view about these tools is that they do work well but depending completely on these instruments could have limited usefulness. What are your thoughts on this?

I agree completely. These tools or diagnostic instruments cannot be used as predictors of performance or taken too literally. In fact, I always strongly urge those who have been profiled to avoid putting people in to color quadrants. These tools again do not measure other qualities that are critical for success such as courage, empathy, integrity, perseverance et al.

In which areas can Whole Brain Thinking be integrated in organizational development? Please explain.

Any situation which requires thinking that goes beyond a given quadrant's specialized mode can benefit from Whole Brain Thinking. The areas where Whole Brain Thinking is frequently applied are decision making, problem solving, improving team interactions, performance and communication. In my experience, WBT works really well in helping aligning development to achieving strategic goals. In most organizations, the challenge really is to ensure that its people are capable of effectively implementing defined strategic goals. By creating a common language and identifying gaps in thinking earlier on, WBT helps identify specific areas of development which if addressed, help in implementation. For example, one of my clients had a strategic objective, which was to increase reach through building the dealer network. Using WBT, the team realized that the problem was they were not really focused on building personal relationships with key dealers (a red quadrant gap). They also realized that they all had a different perspective on what it meant to manage dealers as they all came from different channel management backgrounds (a red quadrant gap again). (by this I mean, the focus on people, relationships and collaborative working- the skills of working harmoniously with different stake holders)

What kind of organizations is this instrument most suited and why?

The WBT concept has a widespread application and hence the instrument is used extensively - more than two million people have been administered the HBDI worldwide. The areas where WBT is used is diverse: Safety- DuPont, Shell; Education- universities; Customer Service- all banks, in retail, for example, chains such as Target. Wherever there are teams or there is a need for collaborative working which is true in most organizations irrespective of size and industry- this concept works and is very useful. Even in industries or occupations which are expertise/knowledge-based such as consulting, law and medicine where individuals mostly work on their own, this concept is useful as it would help them increase their self-awareness and deal with the outside world better. In research and development where innovation, product development is critical- this concept is especially useful as innovation is not only about generating ideas but also about teaming and implementing ideas in a practical and cost effective way.