

Diversity of Thought—A Mind-Expanding Competency for Greater Creativity, Innovation, and Performance

By Dr. William A. Guillory



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Diversity of Thought is the ability to explore an unlimited array of creative, innovative, and inclusive responses to problems, challenges, and strategic possibilities.

The skills associated with this competency include:

Openness to experiences, suggestions, or ideas outside of one's present reality—the willingness to suspend judgment.

Knowledge of a diverse base of cultures, people, and experiences—the willingness to learn by exploring differences.

Mastery of one's unique creative and innovative process—the mastery of creativity and innovation.

Receptivity to resolving personal barriers to new (different) ways of thinking—the willingness to engage personal transformation.

Actively seeking out and engaging differences—the willingness to proactively engage differences.

Suspending Judgment

If we were to “turn up” the volume of our mind's processing of practically everything we experience, we would discover that we have an opinion about practically everything it processes. In other words, judging, evaluating, and deciding are an ongoing process of the mind—mostly unconsciously. Brain researchers suggest that we only have 5% to 20% conscious awareness of why we react to our moment-to-moment experiences. Therefore, the essential step in suspending judgment involves an inner reflection of our own opinions in comparison to others.

The behaviors involved in suspending judgment include:

First, becoming consciously aware of our own opinion of an idea, a person, or process, particularly when dealing with differences;

Second, reflecting inwardly on why we believe our own opinion of the situation is right as compared to others;

Third, learning to listen to the opinion of others in comparison to our own and honestly reflecting on the pros and cons and validity of each;

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Fourth, becoming a proponent of integrating, improving, or accepting the ideas and opinions of others.

Exploring Differences

Our “normal,” not “natural,” tendency is to associate with people, cultures (even when visiting different ones), and experiences similar to our own. The source of this behavior is probably due to the fact that we feel safe and secure within our own system of beliefs. Yet, it is natural to explore differences because such experiences have the potential to expand our base of knowledge as well as expand our view of reality.

The behaviors involved in exploring differences include:

Experiencing different cultures by immersion rather than observing and stating opinions;

Associating in both formal (mentoring/coaching/colleaguizing) and informal (lunching, chatting, and entertaining) ways with co-workers, friends, and acquaintances;

Using professional (and personal) travel to engage others in informal conversations (90% questions and 10% clarifications) about their culture, cuisine, and lifestyle (work to live or live to work). In general, exploring differences is a willingness to learn by experiencing (even radically) different ways of working, celebrating, and living.

Mastering Creativity and Innovation

One of the most obvious manifestations of diversity of thought is the ability to create diverse solutions, ideas, and insights. From an individual perspective, this process involves discovering and mastering your own unique creative process and expressing that insight some innovative way.

The behaviors involved with mastering your unique creative ability include:

Continually expanding your base of knowledge through the processes discussed in exploring differences;

Programming your “creative consciousness” during the day, for the creative insight you are seeking, using a one-line request for the solution you desire;

Making a note of when you commonly experience “creative downloads”—late at night, morning, or during sleep time; and the events (triggers) associated with them—showering, shaving, running, swimming, mediating, quiet time; etc.;

Programming the download to coincide with your natural creative trigger and its corresponding event;

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Practicing this sequence until you naturally master it!

Creativity and innovation are natural birthrights of us all. We are only limited by our unwillingness to explore our creative consciousness and express the insights we receive by the breadth and depth of our diverse base of knowledge (innovation).

Engaging Personal Transformation

It is inevitable that we eventually encounter an idea, solution, or possibility that exceeds our “finite” view of reality. This is an indication that we have “bumped against” one of the (infinite) walls of our reality—typically expressed as “I don’t believe _____!” What’s important to understand is that because we don’t believe something, does not mean it does not exist! And if it does exist, then whatever it is, is unavailable to us. Personal transformation is discovering and invalidating such self-limiting belief(s). The result is the immediate expansion of our reality of possibilities. Such self-limitations involve beliefs about individuals, groups, processes, cultures, scientific and technical ideas, and ways of performing.

Engaging Differences

Engaging differences involves the proactive process of seeking out differences with the active intent of becoming more inclusive in our thinking. We begin to invalidate the polarities we have about “wrong and right” ways of viewing people, processes, and performance. Most of all, we begin, mostly unconsciously, to release judgments about ourselves. One of the most powerful processes for engaging differences is the comprehensive implementation of diverse, multicultural teaming—both formal and informal.

The best way to design this teaming process is by: establishing the extent to which certain diversity skills, abilities, and experiences are required for a given project; designing a diversity matrix profile of critical competencies (shown on page 9); and selecting the best team members for the project from the established diversity matrix (people vs. diverse perspectives).

For example, diverse perspectives include:

- Race/Ethnicity
- Responsibility/Accountability Scale
- Sex/Gender
- Right/Left Brain
- Background Experience
- Culture
- High/Low Context

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- Polychronic/Monochronic Orientation
- Cultural Competence
- Eurocentric/Non-Eurocentric
- Emotional Quotient (EQ)
- Myers Briggs

Engaging differences is adopting a mind-set that differences are an inherent part of the human experience that provides the basis for human understanding and compatibility—in whatever activity one might engage. Whereas, exploring differences is focused on accumulating a diverse—depth and breadth—base of knowledge. The two are related but not identical.

The behaviors associated with engaging differences include:

Proactively associating with a wide variety of people from divergently different cultures; Culturally immersing oneself in different countries, cuisines, and life styles; Learning one or two different (not foreign) languages from your native language; Actively participating on and designing diverse, multicultural teams; Reflecting on how your worldview continually changes (or expands) by mastering diversity of thought.

Summary

Diversity of Thought is one of the most powerful creative, innovative, and transforming areas of diversity, inclusion, and high performance. Mastering the five integrated skills discussed in this paper ensures an individual's ability to be successful in a diverse, multicultural world. These five skill sets comprise speaking, seminar, and workshop offerings by Innovations International, Inc. based in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA.