

Dialoguing from the Four HBDI® Quadrants

(Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument)

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Growing up as a kid, I always enjoyed watching the Peanuts animated specials on television...“It’s the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown” “A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving” and “A Charlie Brown Christmas.” I must confess that I still enjoy watching these shows as an adult. Something that always cracked me up was when the adults on the cartoons would speak...it would always be unintelligible...“Woh Woh Woh, Woh, Woh...Woh...” I know that Charles Schulz was trying to tell us something about the way adults sound to children sometimes.

When I see people’s eyes glazed over in a dialogue session, I often think that may be what some are hearing in their heads.

We find it fascinating the many different responses we receive to dialogue.

In our extended Leadership Development series, we devote half of each session to learning dialogue skills and practicing them on organizational issues chosen by the group. It is always humbling to read our feedback evaluations after the sessions. One participant will

write, “I liked everything you did today except for the dialogue session...it was like talking in circles, no decisions came out of it, and it lacked focus.” Yet another participant will write, “The most valuable part of the session for me



today was the dialogue time. We desperately needed this time to hear everyone's perspective. I learned several things I didn't know before having this time to dialogue." So, there you have it.

Some love it, some hate it. But why? We believe it has everything to do with brain dominance.

Much has been written on the virtues of dialogue. It draws on the wisdom of many traditions from history...the Socratic questioning, Native American Indian councils, Quaker's listening and silence, Eastern spiritual practices, and noted western psychology theories of Carl Rogers and Gestalt. In recent years, the physicist David Bohm's ideas about dialogue were studied, practiced, and popularized by the work of Peter Senge and the MIT Organizational Learning Center. There are many sub-skill sets to dialogue. After having participated in many day-long heated community dialogues and multiple ½ day team dialogues with Clients, one concept seems to differentiate dialogue for me and define it.



Dialogue is the ability to listen to someone you disagree with and may not even like or value as though you are listening to someone you consider wise and hear their truth or meaning.

And, make no mistake that is a very tall order. To learn more about the mechanics and philosophy of dialogue, check out some of the great resources aforementioned. But the focus of this article is to look at how different people see and value different elements of dialogue in very different ways. Not always, but most of the time, you can guess a person's brain dominance by observing how she or he contributes to a dialogue session. More importantly, we can improve the quality of dialogue by applying the elements of the four HBDI® (Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument) brain quadrants.* To see how the differences emerge, let's take a familiar, concrete example. Most organizations, at one time or another, have surveys that are targeted to assess Employee satisfaction or morale. Usually what follows is lots of analysis with many people contributing different viewpoints and perceiving the results differently.

*for complete information on the HBDI®, go to hbdi.com.

A-Quadrant Dialoguers

People with an A-Quadrant dominance are going to find meaning in dialogue by asking and getting answers to objective, fact-based questions. Even if the topic of dialogue is a subjective, opinion, feeling-related subject, they will contribute and find meaning by hearing specifics and not sweeping generalities. "I understand that this survey says Employee morale is down...I get it, but what were the factors surrounding this survey? On what day was it given out? How many people responded? Could this question have been misinterpreted? How do our scores correlate with other organizations? A-Quadrant dominant thinkers likely will be frustrated with opinions that are "hunches" or feelings not based on fact.

To find meaning and value, there must be objective data points in the conversation from which to converse, respond.

B-Quadrant Dialoguers

People with a B-Quadrant dominance will likely find meaning in dialogue by asking and getting answers to process related questions. They will be concerned with policy, fairness, rule-following, and having a proper order and organization to the

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discussion/dialogue of the topic. In our Employee Satisfaction Survey example, they will contribute by knowing policy and procedures surrounding issues that surfaced in the survey data. They will be concerned with fair and equal application of rules/regulations and adhering to them, even if Employees are unhappy or frustrated.

They will want practical solutions to issues and implementation plans that are clear, with a 1, 2, 3...approach.

They will have historical knowledge and remind others about incidents and things that have been tried in the past. If new suggestions/solutions are made that require changes in policy or difficulty in administration, there will be frustration and push back. B-Quadrant dialoguers will find meaning if these “B” type issues come to resolution.

C-Quadrant Dialoguers

C-Quadrant dominant individuals love dialogue. Talking and connecting with others through warm conversation is one of their greatest strengths. C-Quadrant thinkers will find value when they and others tell how they feel about the topic and how people are affected. In the example of the Employee Satisfaction Survey, they will be able to bring a sense of what

the cultural climate is. They will be highly tuned in to Employee feelings—frustration, appreciation, cynicism, optimism, etc. and will contribute by conveying these feelings. They will need to hear how those dialoguing are feeling about the issue being dialogued, too.

It will be difficult for C-Quadrant individuals to trust, be open and vulnerable if others don't share their honest FEELINGS.

They will probably share stories to make a point and may be seen as going off on a tangent. But for them it is all related. Because empathy is high in the C-Quadrant, they are likely to ask many clarifying questions, notice who has not spoken, invite them in, support those who seem to be in the minority, and find value in sharing different perspectives simply to better understand the root of differences. The individuals with the C-Quadrant dominance will deem the dialogue valuable and worthy of their time if relationships are better, trust is higher, and there is a good “feeling” at the conclusion of the dialogue.

D-Quadrant Dialoguers

D-Quadrant dominant thinkers also love dialogue. Most of the time,

this is their primary thinking style...they like to talk out loud as they process their thoughts spontaneously.

They make large leaps easily and often, delighting in what *might* be rather than *what is*.

For most, they do not organize or edit their thoughts before sentences come out of their mouths. As a result, it can appear to be wandering, random information. As they hear it, they begin to make sense of it, create new connections, and then expand upon their own and others' ideas. This is how new thoughts, new ideas, and new solutions come about...not in a linear, but holistic and heuristic way. This person may also lose themselves in the moment and be unaware of how long they have talked. Time will be less of an issue with a D-Quadrant...the most important success indicator for them will be whether or not the group has broken into new territory and has discovered innovative ideas in the conversation.



Dialogue Disconnects

Keeping the desires of each dominant quadrant in mind, it is easy to see how a dialogue circle can be great for C and D thinkers and frustrating and at odds with A and B-Quadrant thinkers. In our Employee Satisfaction example, a D-Quadrant thinker might add to the dialogue by telling about a new book or webinar they experienced then giving a potential solution on a specific low-scoring question then sharing new ideas about future developments while suggesting some new approaches that fly in the face of current policy and procedures. While the links to all of these thoughts may not be apparent to a B-Quadrant thinker, they will make perfect sense to a D-Quadrant.

This can confirm the worst fears of A and B-Quadrant thinkers about dialogue... that it is unorganized, random, time consuming, and pointless.

The same thing can happen if A and B-Quadrant thinkers dominate with their preferred style of dialogue: focusing on efficiency, objectivity, analysis, and rushing to an answer that is easy to implement. C and D-Quadrant thinkers can feel “sold out” and that real, meaningful, empathetic, innovative conversation never happened.

Now can you easily see why dialogue will get different marks on

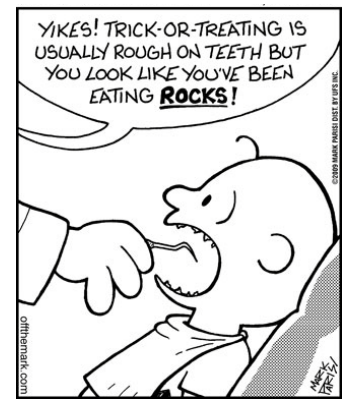
evaluations? Depending on the direction dialogue goes, there are four possible paths—(1) the objective, data-focused, proofs approach; (2) the process oriented, step-by-step, well-defined, organized approach; (3) the feeling centered, emotions sharing, building-relationships-and-inclusion approach; and (4) the random, stream of consciousness, going-to-the-edges approach. And, depending on your brain dominance, you could either be delighted or disappointed with the conversation.

A skilled dialogue facilitator will make room and solicit each of these conversation styles. And if one approach is dominating, the facilitator can ask for balancing perspectives.

A whole-brained approach is desirable but can be tricky to achieve, especially if there is intensity around the issue at hand. Sometimes a facilitator will use a process that starts with dialogue and then moves to discussion—moving from gathering collective ideas and insights to making a clear, crisp decision with action items.

In the television show, “It’s the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown,” all of the Peanuts gang go trick or treating. While everyone else gets assorted candy, apples, gum, cookies, money, and popcorn balls,

poor Charlie Brown gets the same thing at every house: a rock.



Charles Schulz later revealed that after the show’s airing, boxes and bags of candy came in from all over the world “just for Charlie Brown.” Oddly enough, when I was reflecting on the dilemma of either getting something or nothing from dialogue, this story came to mind.

Whether we get a rock or sweet treats from dialogue, may have more to do with first being open to other quadrant perspectives,

and then being bold enough to ask for what we need (our own dominance) from the dialogue session. To have a rich and meaningful dialogue...it takes all four quadrants of the brain working together to get the most goodies. And when that happens, maybe we won’t just be hearing, “Woh Woh Woh, Woh, Woh, Woh Woh.”

Seminars and additional resources are available from Ann McGee-Cooper and Associates, Inc. 214 357-8550 or visit us at AMCA.com

*Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument®
<www.HerrmannInternational.com>