

# Diverse Thinking Is A Good Thing - A Really Good Thing!



Bill Taylor, Founder Downing Goliath LLC  
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## Article Summary

Diversity and Inclusion start with an attempt to listen to and understand other points of view to ours. We all have very different understandings about an argument depending on our *contextual experience* with a specific situation. It is our responsibility to attempt to explain our contextual experience surrounding our argument, as well as attempt to understand the contextual reference points of our colleagues or adversaries.

This article discusses how understanding another's point of view begins with understanding the contextual references we hold as individuals. We discuss why diverse thinking will help you grow both as an individual and as a company, as well as how to embed this value throughout your organization.

## Diversity Requires Overcoming Your Contextual Biases

As we all (at least in the USA) have become frustrated and perhaps angered by the continual rock-throwing and blame-mongering by our country's leadership, I couldn't stop thinking about how having different opinions, and how having a willingness to strike realistic, rational compromises actually makes us stronger, and creates better solutions to the problems we face.

What if we genuinely and openly explored all our options, tapping into the incredible diversity for problem solving we can muster as human beings, imagine how much more

we can accomplish, as opposed to digging in around a single idea being the only correct one?

*Obviously, easier said than done . . .*

All my personal and professional life, I've had the benefit of living, working, learning, and interacting with people from all around the world. From these experiences, I have learned that regardless of your strengths and expertise, if you are not willing to consider another person's or group's point-of-view it will not only adversely affect your interactions and working relationships, it ultimately will determine how successful the outcome of your project will be.

Diversity is the term most often used to describe the differences between human beings and their cultures. While an important aspect, I believe that getting comfortable understanding, and developing a willingness to embrace the uniqueness of another individual or culture goes well beyond the notion of recognizing the differences between you and your fellow human beings.

We all have very different understandings of, or points of view about an argument depending on our *contextual experience* with a specific situation - even though we may speak the same language, our interpretation of the words is very dependent on our previous experiences with similar sets of circumstances [assuming you've had them]. It is our responsibility to attempt to explain our contextual experience surrounding our argument [assuming you've had them], as well as attempt to consider the contextual reference points of our colleagues (or adversaries) in the conversation.

Understanding this notion of contextual experience is especially important if you are serious about implementing a diverse and inclusive workforce strategy into your organization design. Realizing the benefits that a highly diverse workforce brings against a competitor that *doesn't* work or think this way is an incredibly powerful competitive advantage, and one that is not easily duplicated once up and running.

Interestingly, the origin of the word *diversity* is derived from the Latin word *diversitas*, which means to *turn aside*. So, when you think about diversity, try not to think about the differences that create gaps in our agreements. This may be why most HR professionals are now talking about *Inclusion* as opposed to *Diversity*.

However, you choose to think about it, for me it's about having a willingness to understand these contextually derived points-of-view from those around you - having a willingness to *turn aside*, if you will, your own context to consider another's. It is only when our ability to really listen to and attempt to consider someone else's frame of reference, that the positive benefits of a diversified workforce strategy can be fulfilled.

*"We cannot expect to solve the problems we face, with the same ways of thinking that created them." Albert Einstein*

I made the classic rookie mistake of misinterpreting this contextual experience framework while participating in an executive development course, in Japan a number of years ago. I could not understand why I was having such a difficult time conveying my (brilliant) ideas to my teammates. They understood the words I was saying, or at least I thought they understood since nobody was pushing back. My project teammates did not have a good command of the English language, and my ability to speak Japanese was - well - not so good either, so we brought in a professional translator to help us bridge the communication gaps. It was only then that we all realized that the concepts we were trying to convey meant something completely different to each other when we applied our respective contextual experiences to the challenge - in the framework of my teammates' personal experiences, my ideas were not so brilliant after all.

For a better understanding of why diversity and diverse thinking is so important to an organization's longevity I recommend you read or re-read the [Wisdom of Crowds](#) by James Surowiecki.

This is a wonderful discourse on how the collective wisdom of a diversified group - irrespective of each member's educational achievements - has important lessons for how we solve complex problems, interact with each other, conduct our business, satisfy our customers, select our leaders, improve the communities in which we live and work, and ultimately how we thrive as individuals.

To realize the full benefits of your diversity strategies, listen carefully to your customers, members of your team, and your stakeholders. Try to understand not just *what* they're saying, but the context - the frame of reference - for *why* they're saying what they are saying.

Without pausing to consider what's important to someone else, or what they are trying to accomplish, it becomes impossible to bridge agreement gaps that stem from an unwillingness to understand another individual's or culture's ideas.

You will never have "a failure to communicate," no matter where you are from, your age, your gender, your political point of view, or your cultural background if you have authentic, open, and honest communications with each other. This is not to say that you will always reach a mutually agreeable solution to an argument, but more often than not, you will realize a better way to accomplish a task, or overcome a challenge than if you attempt to solve the problems only with like-minded individuals, or self-centered thinking.

Make a serious attempt to engage with people from differing points-of-view, be open to new ways of working, and don't hesitate to explain your own context - you'll be astonished at how much your organization and your customers will benefit from the discourse. The bonus is how much each of you will personally gain from the experience as well.

[Contact Us](#) today to learn how we can help you implement these principles throughout your organization; getting everyone in your organization thinking differently about their responsibilities to embed diverse thinking in their personal and professional lives.

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### About Downing Goliath

Downing Goliath is a *marketing and sales process strategy* consulting practice formed to help enterprises *[small and large]* think beyond traditional ways of engaging with your customers.

We consider every customer touch point and help you understand how effectively your company intersects with your customers' purchase decision-making journey ...

*... and how to make those encounters mutually beneficial.*