



## IS YOUR WORKPLACE COGNITIVELY DIVERSE?

Workplace diversity has been a common topic of discussion since many years, but ever since the transformation of the global business & economic landscape due to disruptive technology, the idea of diversity has also evolved. Diversity in the modern workplace involves aspects like how people absorb and process information, make decisions and solve problems.

*Diversity: The art of  
thinking independently  
together*

*Malcolm Forbes*

So multiculturalism is not like the old multiculturalism, i.e. it is not ethnicity or nationality or demography based. The old concept of cultural diversity doesn't find much traction. The focus of diversity has evolved from cultural aspects to a wider classification which acknowledges the whole extent of individual differences among people.

The ongoing Covid-19 plight is continuously bringing unprecedented changes in the workplace.

According to the World Economic Forum, cognitive diversity will aid businesses in managing the crisis as it offers a wide range of thinking and ideas that can help resolve complex business problems.

A recent study on over 50 organizations by Deloitte highlighted that there is a horizon beyond cultural diversity, which means diversity of thinking is the way forward. Their study also revealed that top performing teams are usually both culturally and cognitively diverse.





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### How is the future of work impacted by cognitive diversity?

The World Economic Forum suggests that by 2020, the top skills required by the workforce to thrive in Industry 4.0 will include creativity, complex problem solving, decision making, and emotional intelligence, among others.

Many studies show that all these skills develop in a cognitively diverse workplace.

- An HBR report highlights that cognitively diverse teams solve complex problems faster. It mentions a tool developed by psychiatrist Peter Robertson, the 'AEM Cube' to analyze the diversity of thinking in times of uncertainty. After conducting this study over a hundred times, he revealed that there was significantly a high correlation between cognitive diversity and performance.
- Another research by Hong & Page show that a group of diverse problem solvers are far more effective than a group of high ability problem solvers indicating that cognitive diversity is perhaps more important when it comes to STEM jobs.
  - STEM jobs are projected to grow more than 9 million between 2012 & 2022 according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).
- A study conducted across several industries in Australia & Ireland revealed that there is a big influence of cognitive diversity in knowledge creation & decision making. This is evident in cross functional teams where effective decision-making skills are vital.





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**Mercer** has partnered with a tech startup to create neuroscience gaming platforms which can be used for their recruitment process. These platforms aim to accurately assess behaviours, as well as remove cognitive biases.

Technology giant **TCS** wants to tap the potential of the future generation and inspire them to take up STEM careers and so created an ITfuture program in the UK which lets one create new technological innovations. Thus again highlighting the use of new age technology to boost diversity.

**Google** employees are reportedly encouraged to spend 20% of their time tracking & monitoring creative ideas which they are passionate about. This '20% policy' has resulted in several landmark products like Gmail & AdSense among others.

Although the statement stirred up some controversy, the ex VP of Diversity & Inclusion at **Apple** in 2017 was one of the first executives to advocate the need for cognitive diversity. She said "There can be 12 white, blue-eyed, blond men in a room, and they're going to be diverse, too, because they're going to bring a different life experience and life perspective to the conversation."





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According to Bruce Robertson, **Gartner** Distinguished VP, Advisory- high performing teams which promote diversity and inclusive behaviour facilitate the growth of digital initiatives.

The concept of cognitive diversity also incorporates people with autism. Some of the best known IT companies hire talents with autism. For instance, **Microsoft** in 2015 launched its Autism Hiring Program and German based **SAP** has a Autism at Work program, thus broadening the scope of diversity.

According to Black Enterprise, the top executives at leading organizations like **Accenture, Dell, AT&T** clearly identified with the modern notion of diversity where unique differences in people are acknowledged and leveraged and stressed on the fact that the modern workforce is aware of how their identities are shaped by the different experiences they live by and come across on a daily basis.

