

Stop Hiring Yourself



*By Dan Gregory and Kieran Flanagan,
Behavioral Researchers & Strategists*

One of the most interesting parts of our professional lives is that we get to work intimately, not with one or two industries, but with virtually every commercial and even government category there is over the course of the year.

This allows us a unique opportunity to observe the trends that occur across a range of different organizations. One of the most common is the C-Suite team who is trying to rebuild their business in their own image. In other words, they hire multiple copies of themselves.

Sure, they talk a good [diversity](#) game and how they don't like silos or cultural disharmony, but when you dig a little deeper, the kind of diversity you uncover is little beyond surface. Of course, a diversity of genders and ethnicities is to be encouraged and even expected, but this is not the only diversity we should be endorsing. Cognitive diversity, a capacity to think in new and challenging ways is also critical.

It is not uncommon to find a management team with an Indian version of the CEO, a Chinese version, a Hispanic, Female, Male, Mormon, etc... etc... However, despite their cultural differences, they often share a bias in their mode of thought.

And this is perfectly understandable. Consider how the scenario might play out in a social situation. You meet someone who looks and sounds quite different to you, but then

discover you agree on virtually every important thing you discuss. Even the most humble among us would find it hard not to consider such a person “amazing”!

But it is precisely this desire to maintain harmony, and to pay scant attention to the physically obvious metrics of diversity that can get us in to trouble.

One of the reasons diversity is so critical to business success, and why it should be considered as far more than a [Corporate Social Responsibility](#) box to be checked is that it helps us avoid contextual blindness.

Often, those of us who are highly experienced and even expert at our area of endeavor know so much about the way things should be done that we lack the ability to see how they might be done. Our expertise leaves us blind to possibility.

This fixed-perspective becomes even more of an issue when we are surrounded by talented people whose thinking style aligns too closely with our own.

So how might this cognitive diversity play out in the real world?

Consider the case of the [Great Ormond Street Hospital](#) in London. When faced with a critical error rate in transferring patients from the operating theatre to the recovery ward, rather than relying on eyes that had observed this problem for their entire professional lives, they called in an expert at fast and accurate transitions rather than another medical professional.

Now, to many outside observers, the pit crew boss from Ferrari's Formula 1 Racing Team may not immediately seem like the kind of outside consult you'd expect a surgeon to ask for, but the results were undeniable. Error rates dropped significantly without any impact on efficiency.

A lack of expectations combined with a true diversity of thinking when it came to problem solving proved to be key to the hospital's strategy.

Key points to remember when seeking cognitive diversity:

1. **Don't sacrifice efficacy for harmony** – We all want to work in a culture and with a team that clicks, but don't let this come at the expense of happy delusion. Someone has to be able to say, "The emperor is naked."
2. **Hire people that irritate you (just a little)** – No one wants to work with a complete pain in the neck, but those who can see your weaknesses and those who see the world through a different lens or from different angles are true assets when your world view proves insufficient to win.
3. **Add Cognitive Style to your diversity metrics** – For many years, the business world resisted diversity in the workplace, for all kinds of historic biases and prejudices. Today, we're doing better, but there is still room for improvement. Particularly when we realize, this isn't something we *have* to do, it's something we should *strive* to do.

About the Authors: Dan Gregory & Kieran Flanagan are behavioral researchers and strategists, specializing in behaviors and belief systems—what drives, motivates and influences us. They have won business awards around the world for Innovation, Creativity and ROI working with such organizations as Coca-Cola, Unilever, News Corp and the United Nations in Singapore. They are passionate advocates for the commercial power of creativity and a return to more human engagement, cultures and leadership. Published by WILEY, Kieran and Dan's new book Selfish, Scared & Stupid is available in paperback RRP \$22.95 from www.selfishscaredandstupid.com.

