

# CEO DIVERSITY LEADERSHIP

2009



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Eight Companies Share a Deep Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

**CEO Forum**  
A Candid Look into the Lives, Passions, and Goals of Our Award Winners

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Expert Insights on Religious, Generational, Global, Gender, and Team Diversity in the Workplace



# Diverse By Design Teams

## Generating Specific Business Outcomes Through Diversity and Inclusion

Few CEOs today seriously dispute the value of diversity and inclusion. But what's the best way to use diversity and inclusion to improve our organizations?

In the past, the diversity conversation had been almost exclusively focused on the protected classes of race, gender, sexual orientation, age and disability. In this context, motivation for seeking diversity has centered on legal compliance and ethical mandates. Diversity efforts have also been remedial-to "fix" people who have difficulty



**Fred Keeton**  
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"including and valuing" their colleagues.

Companies have stated in nebulous terms that diversity enhances business outcomes. They've primarily used cultural enhancement and equality arguments to make the business case. Even highly touted multicultural marketing efforts are solely focused toward reaching underserved protected class market segments. Neither of these arguments, though important, presents a compelling, defined-value proposition for the application of diversity and inclusion principles across all business objectives.

A paradigm shift is required. Harrah's Chairman and CEO Gary Loveman's diversity and inclusion charge sets the stage for the kind of thinking that guides our efforts. As Gary has explained, "A high-performing organization is the product of a diverse group of talented employees, working in an inclusive environment where various backgrounds and experiences are

respected and valued, and where each individual has the opportunity to do his or her best work. I want Harrah's to be known as a place where our colleagues legitimately feel that they have made themselves in some way personally better through their very association with the company. We must recognize that inclusion is not a part of our culture. It becomes our culture."

What does Harrah's deem as key to directly applying diversity and inclusion to business outcomes? We all have cognitive abilities and predispositions based on our individual backgrounds, experiences, and genetic wiring. We must identify, mine, and channel these diverse, untapped cognitive resources toward specific business outcomes. Only then can we transform perceptions of, and our approach to, diversity and inclusion. A focus on cognition is central to answering the "universal question." Answering it is critical in getting strong individual or organization support to shift paradigms and take bold new directions. That universal question is simply, "What's in it for me?"

A focus on cognitive diversity creates a common foundation linking each dimension of the larger ideology. Why? Because we all have been included or excluded at various times based upon perceptions of how we think or cognitively engage. Moreover, the benefits of understanding and harnessing cognitive diversity are well documented. Thinkers as diverse as James Surowiecki, Frans Johansson, and Daniel Pink have demonstrated that diverse teams make better decisions, that diversity is critical to innovation, and that, in order to remain relevant globally, diversity and inclusion are key. Finally, Scott Page, PhD, demonstrates with empirical statistical evidence that more diverse teams, under the right circumstances and faced with a hard problem, generate the best outcomes. According to Dr. Page, all of us possess individual "cognitive toolboxes" shaped by who we are and our experiences.

How do we make diversity and inclusion relevant? First, we understand that all dimensions of diversity in our lives, including protected class dimensions, contribute to creating our diverse cognitive toolboxes. The number and relevance of diverse tools

available to focus on a problem determines functional potential in individuals and teams.

Second, we take on hard problems. Any group, diverse or not, can solve easy problems. Diverse groups have advantages in solving difficult problems simply by increasing the number of approaches or tools available to solve the problem.

Third, our culture allows insights and ideas to be shared freely and without fear of repercussion.

Fourth, we accept good ideas from wherever they originate, be it CEO or line staff.

Fifth, our structure both harnesses our cognitive diversity and focuses it toward specific identified business outcomes.

Our structural approach at Harrah's is to identify a specific and defined business goal. What are we trying to accomplish? What is our immediate issue? Is there a hard problem or complex issue to address? Next we create a "Diverse by Design" work team, a smart, cognitively diverse team that also brings other relevant dimensions of diversity to the issue. We use the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI) as our method of determining cognitive predispositions. Next we focus this team on the hard problem or issue and ensure that the fundamental goal is fully understood. The team works toward a solution with a defined time line for completion and delivery of its work product. Importantly, while there is a singular defined goal, how the team applies its diverse cognitive tools to solve the problem is left to the team. The value of Diverse by Design teams is ultimately manifested in their outcomes. This approach can be applied across all functions to achieve better outcomes.

Our message is simple – diversity and inclusion efforts will remain in the realm of the theoretical unless they are used to tackle real problems businesses face. The very best approach is to focus Diverse by Design teams toward solving specific difficult issues impeding our achieving the most effective and efficient business operations and taking advantage of opportunities to innovate.