



Special to RBC:

Elaine Newman, CEO, Global Learning, Showcases how Diversity of Thought is the Key to Innovation

“We need diversity of thought to face new challenges.”

Sir Tim Berners Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web

Braille Street Maps...

When most people think of a map, they think of a visual representation of a geographical area. That works well for sighted people, but not for the visually impaired. Without being able to “see” a map, how could a blind person figure out how all the streets in their neighbourhood connected or what was the best route to get to their destination on a business trip in an unfamiliar city?

Because sighted people link spatial skills so strongly with visual stimuli, until recently, researchers actually doubted that blind people could interpret maps at all. It was thought that visually impaired people would not possess the same spatial cognition skills as sighted people.

That narrow-minded view has been laid to rest with the invention of Tactile and even Audio/Tactile Maps combining the spatial layout of a traditional map with raised lines, direction symbols, Braille location names, and touch-activated audio information. All it took was for someone to break out of the prevailing visual/spatial mindset and find a way.

IBM “Jam” events...

Leveraging IBM’s successful technique for hosting massive brainstorming sessions that have served as the catalyst for more than 300,000 employees worldwide launching over ten new IBM businesses, the agenda for the UN World Urban Forum was shaped by “Habitat Jam”. This three day web-based Jam session was hosted by IBM, The Government of Canada, and UN-HABITAT in which tens of thousands of participants from 168 countries shared their ideas for improving the environment, public health, safety, and quality of life in cities across the globe.

RBC Green IT Initiative ...

Inspired after attending a conference focused on the impact of technology on the environment, 24-year RBC veteran, Stephen Baird formed the Green IT Committee to generate “green technology ideas and solutions and act as advocates for their implementation.” Over the past several years, the Committee has supported a number of initiatives including energy reduction, paper reduction and electronic waste management which have resulted in significant cost impacts for RBC.

What do all of the above have in common? These are just a few examples of how diversity of thought is driving innovation within organizations, generated by people who were thinking “out of the box” – looking at problems that had existed for so long that they were considered a fact of life, but coming at it from such a different perspective that it became solvable.

Those different perspectives are the key to a corporate culture that embraces “diversity of thought” - one in which a variety of approaches, ideas, and ways of seeing things are available, so that the best and most creative might be chosen. These are the perspectives and resulting innovations that RBC exemplifies through their core value; “Diversity for Growth and Innovation”. Innovative organizations foresee “diversity of thought” as fueling their growth – driven by a culture of ideas, which in turn is grounded in a culture rich in diversity and freedom of thought.

Researchers have found that “teams of strong, but diverse individuals outperform teams of the best individuals with similar perspectives and ways of approaching a problem” (Woods, 2008, p. 2). Simply stated, throwing similar ideas and problem-solving methods at an old problem is most likely to produce the same, tired responses. On the other hand, by combining diverse ideas and ways of problem-solving, it’s more likely that a new and brilliant solution will emerge.

Diversity of thought requires creating diverse teams that include people from the spectrum of a diverse workplace. People with different backgrounds, experiences, styles, educations, expertise, abilities, as well as professional levels and functions – each has a unique perspective that, when combined with the others, can turn out to be far greater than the sum of the parts.

How Can You Create Innovation Through Diversity of Thought?

• **Consciously design diverse workgroups/teams** - If you are in a position to do so, consciously put together diverse workgroups and teams rather than choosing people who you think might work well together. Teams made up of similar personalities may collaborate more easily, but it’s the diverse teams who learn to work together who will really shine in the end.

• **Create a respectful environment** - In order to gain from the diversity of thought present in a workgroup, all members have to feel that they can share their opinions in a safe and respectful environment. That means that everyone needs to listen with an open mind when a different perspective is raised. Take a moment now to ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I truly listen when I hear a different perspective? Do I encourage others to do the same?
- Do I encourage conversations that are based on the spirit of improvement vs. whether or not the opinion is the same as mine?

• **Consider whether rules and traditions are still valid** - If a new idea challenges traditional ways of doing things, or even existing rules, consider carefully whether those rules or traditions are still valid. Often, a rule that made a lot of sense when it was first introduced is found to be outdated and counterproductive years later. Ask yourself, “Do I criticize those who share new ideas or challenge traditional ways of doing things?”

• **Allow For Mistakes** - Group members must feel safe enough to make mistakes without ridicule or punishment; rather, group members should acknowledge the courage it takes to express an alternate view. Thomas Edison made this point with his famous “lightbulb” quote. When asked how it felt to have failed so many times to create a viable electric lightbulb, he replied that he hadn’t failed at all; he had succeeded in finding 700 ways NOT to make a lightbulb. After several thousand more of those “successes,” he did find the one way that did work. It’s vital that diverse teams keep in mind that they only fail if they quit before they reach their goal. Any setbacks along the way are learning experiences and should be supported.

• **Acknowledge Personal Filters/Biases** – We all have personal biases - it’s human nature. The challenge is that these often “unconscious” biases based on past experiences and learned behaviour frequently guides our thinking and decision-making processes. Depending on these comfortable and predictable patterns can impede our innovation and creativity. The key is to be aware of the filters you use, when evaluating the actions and thought processes of others, and minimize their

influence on your behaviour. To recognize how personal bias influences you, log into <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo>. The IAT (Implicit Association Test) was originally developed as a method for exploring the unconscious roots of thinking and feeling and discovering your own biases can be the first step in changing these tendencies.

Increasing Diversity and Inclusion Awareness at RBC

We are committed to providing on-going learning and developmental opportunities to employees globally. Such offerings enable individuals to strengthen their knowledge, enhance awareness and develop the necessary capabilities to be confident and successful. RBC offers a variety of learning opportunities that focus on increasing awareness and building capabilities in several areas, including:

- Diversity and Inclusion Awareness
- Gender Diversity
- Cultural Dexterity and Communications
- Newcomer/Immigrants
- Disabilities
- Aboriginal Culture
- Generations
- MicroInequities
- Stereotypes
- Sexual Orientation
- Religion
- Group Identity
- Reverse Mentoring



Diversity and Inclusion-related learning opportunities are available to leaders and employees via a variety of guided and self-service channels.

Over 15,000 employees have participated in Diversity and Inclusion awareness activities.