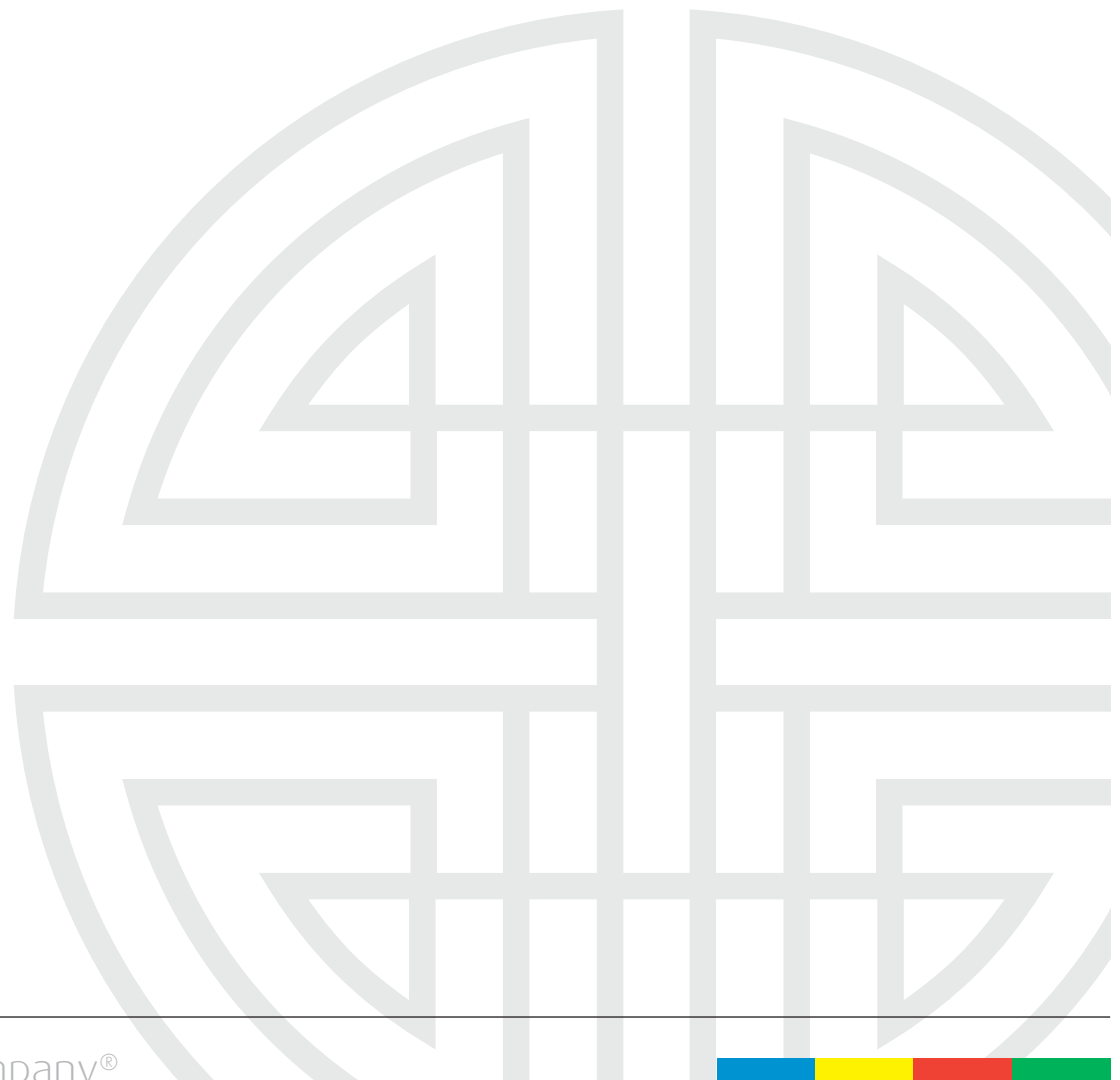


Case Study

Telecom New Zealand

Whole Brain® Thinking turns contact centres into customer loyalty generators



How Telecom New Zealand used Whole Brain® Thinking to turn contact centres into customer loyalty generators

The engine room

If an army marches on its stomach, a business delivers through its contact centres. That's often the engine room, particularly if that business is a telecommunications company. Like other telcos the world over, Telecom New Zealand Limited relies on contact centres to support customers, introduce them to new offerings and generate leads. And like those other telcos, it has often struggled to find new and better ways to improve contact centre operating efficiency and deliver better customer service.

The two are closely intertwined. Research suggests that customers whose needs have been well met by contact centre operatives are better satisfied with their experience of the company and, ultimately, cost the company less. This applies even if the call takes longer: while average call times matter, it's not time on the call that counts; it's finding the best way of closing out the customer's question while they are on that initial call. And it is this focus on assessing contact centre performance from the customer's perspective, rather than simply measuring call times, that Telecom believes puts it ahead of the competition and will keep it there.

The cost of customer call backs

Customer call backs, or 'subsequent calls', occur when a customer who has dealt with one person and had their problem resolved, then calls back to talk further with another person. The initial contact centre operative thought that the customer's

needs had been met: not so the customer. Multiplied across the organisation, this has a major impact on contact centre costs and is a clear indication that something is not working correctly.

Telecom's contact centre managers were baffled. "Our people were doing all we expected from them," says Helen Stockdale, a project manager for the contact centre team. "They were meeting their performance goals. They were following scripts prepared for them. They were reading through the checklists and achieving their KPIs. But the feedback from customers was not what we expected."

And that had an impact on morale. "These were people who wanted to do well and tried really hard," adds Jenny McGregor, another contact centre project manager, "but they just weren't making the connection with some people."

Often it was not a technical issue that prompted the subsequent call. From its own research Telecom New Zealand knew that 24 percent of subsequent calls (representing many hundreds of thousands of calls each year) are made because customers somehow did not feel that their emotional needs were being met.

The problem is not unique to Telecom. First Contact Resolution (FCR) is a measure that is in growing use by contact centres worldwide. Also called one-and-done and first touch resolution, it is increasingly used to drive focus on areas where systems or process improvements can gain efficiency or customer benefits.

Telecom was looking to go a step further. Yes, it was looking for a way to reduce the volume of subsequent calls. (In fact it targeted a reduction of around 25 percent in the first year, with more savings in subsequent years, which, taken altogether, would represent significant savings.) But management also knew that if they could achieve this goal, the initiative would likely raise customer loyalty by about 28 percent as well. And they believed that, if their plan succeeded in both those areas, they would then have a new tool to help drive meaningful transformation throughout their entire business.

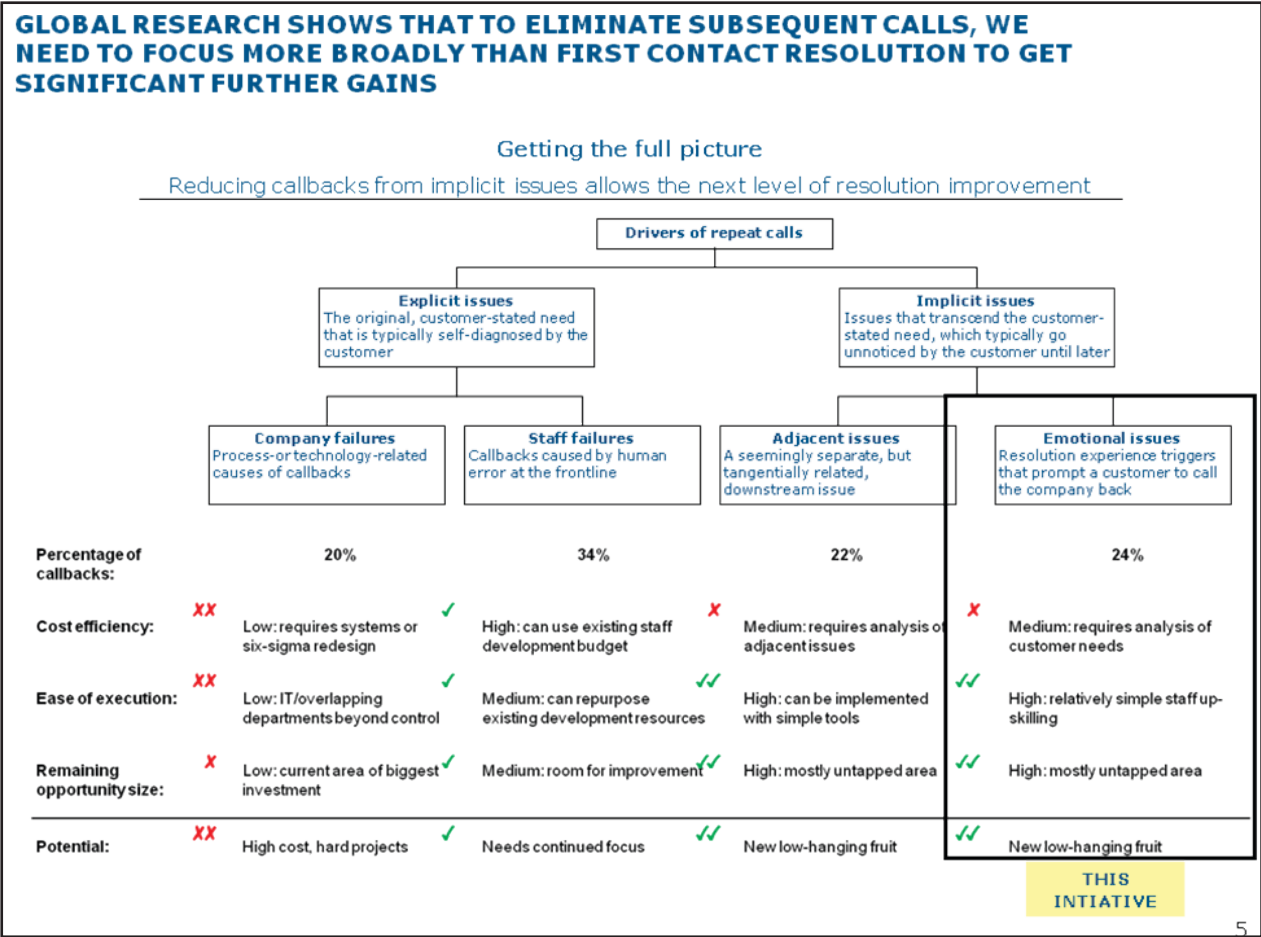
Following a model used by the international industry body, the Contact Centre Council, and based on global contact centre research data¹, Telecom's management team analysed possible options, from technology solutions to

process re-engineering. They rapidly reached the conclusion that resolving the customer's emotional issues was a clear winner in terms of cost implications, ease of execution, opportunity size and overall potential.

This decision was reinforced by the findings of a study by UK insurer, Bradford and Bingley, which found that by up-skilling agents to understand different personality profiles, repeat calls were reduced and customer loyalty increased without impacting call handling times.

Commenting on the initiative Brian Wilkinson, Director of Operations for Bradford and Bingley, noted: "In the past all customers received the same amount of time from us, leaving some feeling rushed while others [felt] short changed. Now we provide the 'right' amount of time for each caller."

1 Source: Breaking the Issue Resolution Barrier: *Shifting from First Contact Resolution to Next Issue Avoidance*. Contact Centre Council, October 2007



“Our approach to using the Whole Brain Model™ has been, from the outset, much broader than merely finding a tool for improving contact centre operator performance”

Telecom’s transformation plan

Their understanding and expectations buoyed, Telecom’s executive signed off on the goals and the plan to use Herrmann International’s Whole Brain Model™ to better identify and meet customer’s emotional (and rational) needs.

While the initial driver was to reduce call back rates, Telecom had three high level goals in view.

The first was to lift the capabilities of contact centre operatives by giving them a new tool set to help them to better understand customers’ emotional and rational needs and to engage them in a different type of conversation.

The second, to introduce a new language and a new way of thinking to enable people within the centres to work more effectively together—paving the way for a different type of internal conversation.

And the third, the high-level strategic goal of developing a new organisational lens for driving transformational change throughout the entire business.

To achieve all these goals meant delivering tangible results early on, so Telecom focussed initially on reducing the call back rate and reducing the overall time spent on calls. Learning to give each customer the right amount of time was particularly important.

Telecom calculated that, by applying Bradford and Bingley’s first year’s results they could expect to see a 21 percent call reduction in 2008-09 and a 28 percent improvement in customer loyalty. The management team knew that achieving those objectives would establish a compelling platform from which to pursue the higher level strategic goals.

With those aims in mind Telecom settled on Herrmann International’s Whole Brain Model as the primary means for achieving this result, using it to up-skill agents so that they could tailor their conversations to better meet customers’ needs.

Understanding the Whole Brain Model™

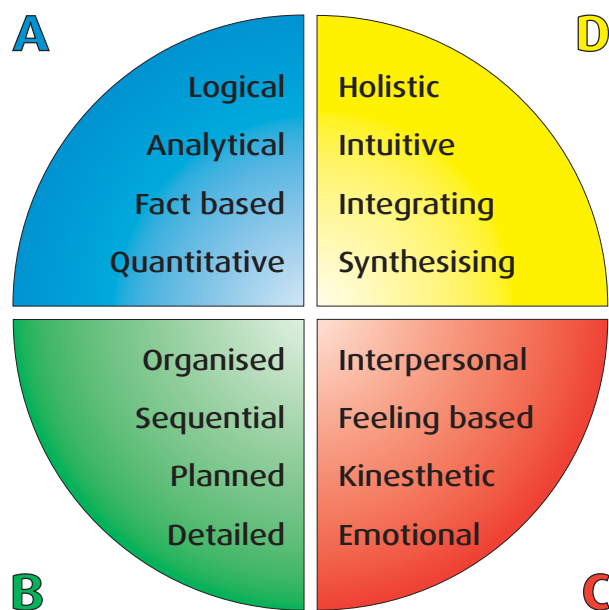
Telecom understood what the Whole Brain Model offered. “Our approach to using the Whole Brain Model and the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument® (HBDI®) has been, from the outset, much broader than merely finding a tool for improving contact centre operator performance,” says project sponsor, Sue Atkins, a certified Herrmann® Practitioner.

Sue described the Whole Brain Model to her colleagues as a learning and development tool centred on accelerating the quality of thinking and communications to improve business performance. “This aligns perfectly with the outcomes we want to drive through this initiative,” she says.

“We can embed the Whole Brain Model™ into our business—in business planning, performance measurement, training, coaching, agent materials and problem solving”

Moreover, Telecom recognised that through Herrmann International’s network it would have access to global experience, thought leadership and extensive tools and materials which would assist in shaping its ongoing management programmes and initiatives.

As a result, the adoption of the Whole Brain Model had much broader implications for Telecom. “We can embed the Whole Brain Model into our business—in business planning, performance measurement, training, coaching, agent materials and problem solving,” says Sue. “That will ensure the long-term sustainability of our investment.”



The step-change innovation—learning to read the customer’s voice

The scene was set for an innovative approach to helping contact centre operatives better understand their customers’ underlying needs, an approach that drew on Herrmann International’s global network.

Cue Lindsey Marshall, sales and marketing manager for Herrmann International Asia. New Zealand-born Lindsey is also a trained opera singer, and certain skills that he acquired in that capacity proved extremely useful in transforming Telecom’s contact centres. His role was not to get everyone singing off the same song sheet (though, as we shall see, that was achieved in spectacular style). His contribution was to apply his understanding of voice and tonality to help contact centre staff better use the one tool that they have to identify a customer’s emotional requirements: their ears.

What made the training necessary was a fundamental disconnect between those who contact a call centre and those who work there. In Whole Brain® terms, people who call contact centres often have red and yellow thinking preferences, and they don’t necessarily have great technical aptitude. The people who work there, on the other hand, are more likely to have blue and green preferences and be comfortable with technology. Lindsey’s task: to find a way of using Whole Brain Thinking to help cross that divide.

“The training we developed represented a new application of the Whole Brain Model,” says Lindsey. “It’s a combination of auditory and linguistic acuity and sensitivity, as viewed through the Whole Brain Model. Because contact centre operatives can’t see the people they are speaking with, auditory and linguistic cues take on far greater importance. And often you get but a single clue as to how the caller prefers to think and be spoken to. If you are not prepared, and not listening intently, you may miss it.”

Finding that elusive clue meant learning to suspend judgement and to listen more acutely. And that, in turn, meant taking a completely fresh look at the calling scripts that were in use. These usually came with pre-defined responses to callers’ questions, responses which were not necessarily attuned to the caller’s thinking preferences or emotional needs. It’s fair to say that, prior to the introduction of a Whole Brain approach, staff paid less attention to the caller’s language use and tonality and more to what was on the screen in front of them looking to identify an appropriate pre-determined answer.

Finding shared preferences

Under Lindsey’s guidance Telecom staff were trained to identify people’s thinking preferences over the phone through their choice of language and sentence structure and the tonality they use. Blue thinkers, for example, tend to sound more direct and matter of fact. They use clipped, technical terms—often hard words—and directive language. Red people tend to be more softly spoken, using a warmer tone and more inclusive language. People with green thinking preferences speak in a measured, matter-of-fact tone. If you rush them too quickly they will stop and go back to the beginning, while yellow thinkers often sound excited and enthusiastic.

Herrmann International also analysed transcripts of successful and less successful calls using the Herrmann Whole Brain Text Profiler™ which enabled them to compare the thinking preferences of the callers with that of the operator. They noted that successful calls tended to be those where the operative shared at least one thinking preference with the caller. It quickly became clear that it wasn’t necessary to achieve complete congruence between caller and operative: rather establishing common ‘linguistic’ ground through a shared preference was all that it took.

Building on this initial research Lindsey and his team developed a Whole Brain Tonal Checklist, designed specifically for use in Telecom’s contact centres, and a set of resource materials to help train contact centre staff to modulate their own voice and expressions in response to what they hear from the customer.

Rapid rollout

Once the basic tools had been created Telecom worked on a rapid rollout plan, initially in its primary outbound contact centre. Once the staff at that site had been trained and lessons had been absorbed by the implementation team, the programme was transferred across to other Telecom contact centres, including 123 (residential and mobile support), Broadband Support, New and Move, and Complex Technical Support.

Each site has its own unique requirements, so each roll-out had to be individually tailored to meet them. All followed the same Whole Brain approach and rollout process (see next page). Where necessary, work practices were changed to align with the new approach.

Stage I was to train Telecom's internal facilitators in Whole Brain methodology through Herrmann's standard four day certification programme. A customised fifth day was added to teach Telecom facilitators how to transfer the new auditory and linguistic model.

Stage II was to engage internal business leaders to champion the change. Leaders attended a workshop to learn how the Whole Brain Model applies to group dynamics and their leadership.

Stage III involved educating the team leaders about how Whole Brain Thinking can drive team performance and build morale. It included helping them to understand their individual thinking preferences, and to use the Whole Brain Model to improve communications. This also included planning sessions on how to up-skill their own teams.

Stage IV introduced front-line staff to the Whole Brain Model. The aim was to energise them by helping them learn more about themselves and discover ways of enriching their conversations with customers. This was accomplished using the Whole Brain Tonal Checklist and learning to modify their language to better match that of their customers.

And the final stage—well, there is no final stage. Stage V is all about the ongoing coaching and reinforcement of the Whole Brain programme

throughout Telecom. Stage V is about seeing the ingenuity of over a thousand thinking contact service representatives applying their learning in their work, their language and even expressing it in their office decoration, displaying posters with phrases like, "What colour was your smile today?" and "What does blue success sound like?"

Bears, bears everywhere— owning Whole Brain® Thinking

If the programme started off being driven from the top down, it was embraced from the bottom up. Staff responded to the insights they learned from Whole Brain Thinking in ways that surprised and amazed their managers. "They created their own resources, often in their own time," says Helen Stockdale.

Indeed Whole Brain Thinking infected the entire contact centre and the transformation was made visible in a wide variety of colourful ways. People created their own wall charts that referenced each of the four thinking quadrants and developed new, colour-coded call scripts. Whole Brain language infused individual discussions, team meetings and 'Heartbeat' sessions. Colourful wigs, balloons and costumes marked the ready acceptance of the model and its impact. And almost everyone adopted one of the colour coded Herrmann bears that came to symbolise Whole Brain Thinking.



better results through better thinking

Call back reduction target of 28% was exceeded—Telecom achieved reductions of up to 50% in some contact centres

Empowering people

One word—commonly used by all—sums up the experience of team leaders and front-line staff alike: empowerment. Front-line staff now have a tool and a common language they use to not only do their own job, but also to pass insights back to others in the organisation. Operatives handling inbound calls are now more closely involved with the script development. Outbound callers now offer commentary back to the marketing department on the way that benefits are presented and received. Essentially their message is the same: “That’s not working for the customers because it’s not a Whole Brain way of thinking. Why don’t you ...”

Anecdotes abound about how the programme has helped staff not just to answer the customer’s questions and respond to their requests but to better understand what they really wanted and so present them with a solution that really works for them.

The overall ‘Aha!’ moment experienced by so many, is epitomised in a story about a woman who had been getting temporarily disconnected over a long period because her phone bill kept ballooning beyond what she could afford. “We had tried a toll bar with a PIN and a full toll bar, but nothing worked, because she kept taking it off,” explains Tania Abrams

from the 123 team. “She was a red person and she needed to be able to contact her family, because that’s what made her happy. Once I realised this I gave her ‘Total Home’ because this would enable her to call her family more, and she could use the web cam and she knew how much her account was going to be.”

“No one previously had found out what she really needed. We assumed she needed not to use the phone, but what she needed was to be able to contact her family. We assumed it was the money that mattered, but it wasn’t. It was being able to connect with her family and tell them that she cared.”

2009 Results

- ◆ **Call back reduction target of 28% was exceeded—Telecom achieved reductions of up to 50% in some contact centres in 2009**
- ◆ **Customer satisfaction increased by more than 20%—customer satisfaction scores of 4 out of 4 are now being achieved in some contact centres**
- ◆ **Sales targets have been exceeded in outbound contact centres without requiring additional resources**
- ◆ **Outbound Contact Centres saw a dramatic increase in dials-to-calls-completed**

The Contact Centre Council is now referencing Telecom New Zealand as the new industry benchmark

and a corresponding improvement in sales performance. The success of the programme means that resources were available to be re-routed to handle inbound calls, reducing call waiting time and improving customer satisfaction

- ◆ **The Contact Centre Council is now referencing Telecom New Zealand as the new industry benchmark.**

These early successes have not only validated Telecom's decision to introduce HBDI into contact centres, they have also paved the way for its acceptance and use as a tool for transforming the overall organisation.

Sue Atkins summed it up: "Introducing the Whole Brain Model and the HBDI started a journey of personal growth for our people and has been hugely beneficial for overall engagement with the company. Our people have voluntarily stepped up to drive this programme in different ways—with screen savers, quizzes, visual displays, conversation tools and team sessions. It has created better conversations between team leaders and agents and has provided a common language to help us challenge the way we do things. Moreover it has created greater consciousness of communication styles and, as a result, conversations between

people at all levels of the organisation are now far more meaningful and effective."

"Whole Brain Thinking equips our people to tailor their language and tonality to complement each customer's preferred way of processing information," says Sue. "It helps our people to better understand the customer's emotional state and to respond appropriately, thereby reducing the opportunity for talking at cross purposes. It helps our people identify what is critical to our customers, and it also helps our people to learn more about themselves so that they can understand their own responses in customer conversations."

The future

Now the programme is under way, the pace has picked up. Telecom has now rolled out the Whole Brain programme to all of its frontline customer service people as a foundation for creating service differentiation. Telecom is already talking with Herrmann International about moving the programme into international contact centres based offshore and into face-to-face retail channels.

better results through better thinking

Asia-Pacific clients

Air NZ	Flotech	Rutherford Group
ANZ	Frucor	St George Bank
Australian Central Credit Union	Janssen-Cilag	Southern Cross Healthcare
AXA	IBM	Telecom NZ
Bank SA	Manukau City Council	Transfield Worley
Bendigo Bank	Manukau Water Limited	The Warehouse
Coca Cola Amatil	Microsoft	Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
CPA Australia	Ministry of Education	Warehouse Stationery
Department of Community Services QLD	Nestles	Westpac
Department of Conservation NZ	PNB Paribas	Worley Parsons
Department of Primary Industries	PricewaterhouseCoopers	Zespri
E-Time		

International clients

Allstate Insurance	Home Box Office	Nortel Networks
American Express	IBM	Novartis
AT&T	Johnson & Johnson	Procter and Gamble
Bank of America	Kaiser Permanente	PR Donnelly & Sons
Barclays	Marriott Hotels	Shell Oil
Boeing	Morgan Stanley	US Navy
Coca Cola	MTV Networks	Weyerhaeuser Corporation
Disney University	National Semiconductor	Wharton School of Business
DuPont		Xerox
Frito Lay		
GE		



The Originators of Whole Brain Technology® and the Creators of the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument® (HBDI®)

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