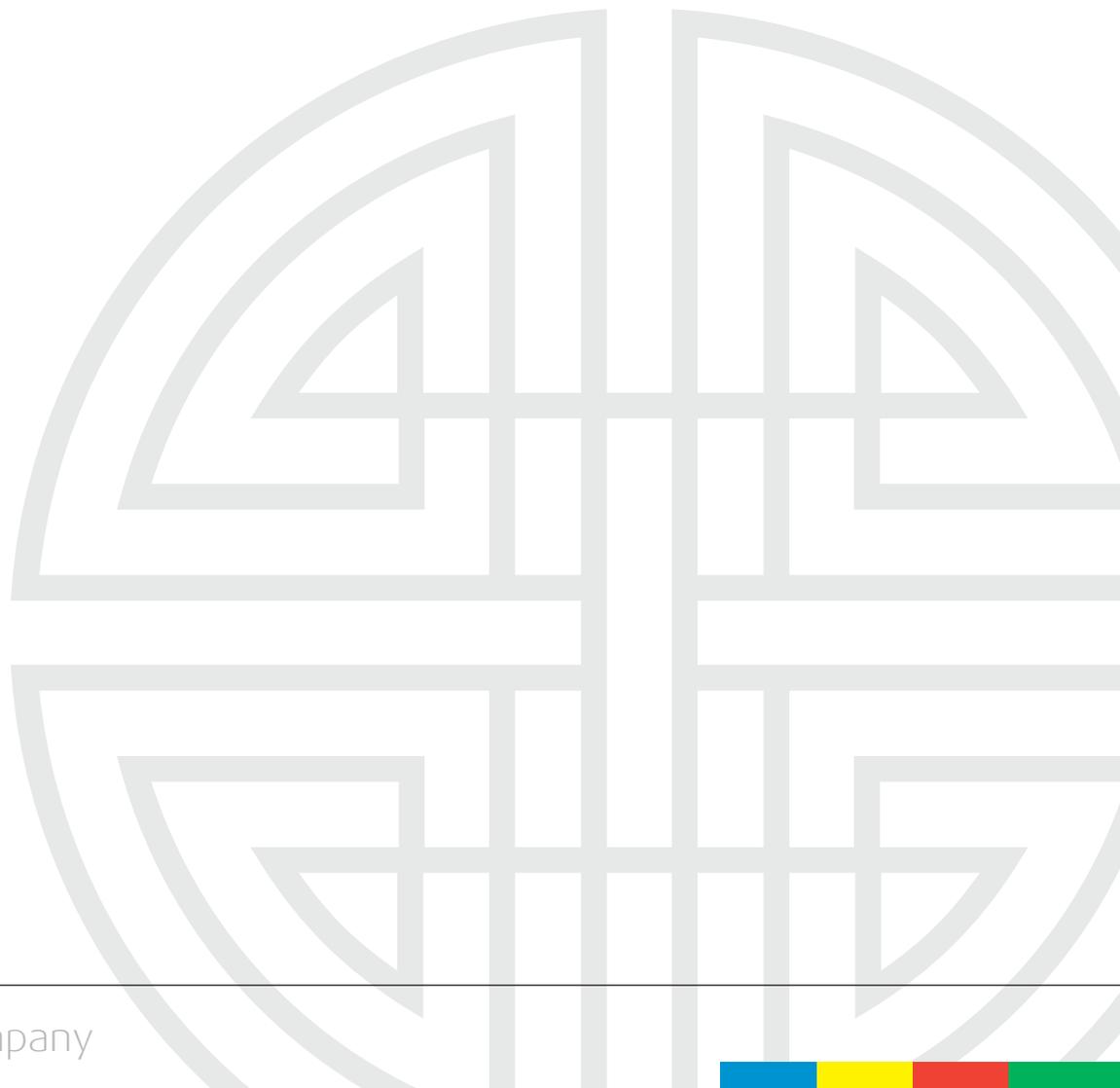


# Case Study

## Cirque du Soleil

Fast track leadership development with Whole Brain® Thinking



Learning one's HBDI Profile results frequently elicits an "aha" that ripples from the professional to personal parts of an individual's life. It can help the person learn how to make inroads where only roadblocks appeared before.

## The scene

Cirque du Soleil is known for its breath-taking shows that combine mind-boggling physicality with signature artistry. They are beautiful, mystifying and awe-inspiring to behold.



Producing such complex and imaginative shows with ever-expanding teams of people is a true feat of creativity, technical prowess, determination and flow.

## The drama

Acknowledging the importance of leadership as part of the Cirque production, however, has been a gradual process. In fact, just saying 'leader' had the connotation of a four-letter word in the culture of Cirque, because it implied a corporate hierarchy that represented everything Cirque is not.

Nevertheless, to sustain its ambitious expansion schedule and reputation for continuing to outdo itself, Cirque would have to embrace and cultivate the qualities leaders embody. Cirque would also need to learn how to quickly replicate its high-performing teams.

## The solution

Introducing the concept of Whole Brain® Thinking and the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument® (HBDI®) to Cirque helped the organisation understand what makes itself tick, and how to keep that 'ticking' functioning at its highest possible level.

The HBDI goes beyond 'left brain' and 'right brain' to establish an individual's preferred thinking style. With this knowledge, people can better understand how to communicate with others whose thinking styles differ from their own. Learning one's HBDI Profile results frequently elicits an "aha" that ripples from the professional to personal parts of an individual's life. It can help the person learn how to make inroads where only roadblocks appeared before.

**To date, more than 400 individuals within Cirque—directors, executives and middle managers—have embarked on the process of harnessing Whole Brain Thinking by taking the HBDI. They comprise more than 75 teams who have learned how to use these insights to bring a Whole Brain approach to their work at Cirque.**

## The outcome

Today, Cirque du Soleil's teams benefit from a unique understanding of the thinking style that each team member brings to the fore.

"The approach was very appreciated by senior managers," says France Dufresne, director for Organisational Development and Training at Cirque.

"It's very useful for this organisation to understand where our thinking preferences are in order to realign or understand our differences," she explains. "We will have different thinking preferences in production vs creative vs corporate. The Whole Brain concept is very powerful, and the trends are very important to acknowledge and accept."

As a result of using Whole Brain methodology, Cirque has achieved:

- ◆ a better understanding of interdependencies
- ◆ a greater openness about different thinking styles in the organisation
- ◆ increased team effectiveness.

For example, each show has a directorship committee, with members that change every 18 months to two years. Administering the HBDI and sharing each committee member's thinking style is the foundation of the team-building exercise for that show.

The top team at Cirque recently re-formed. When each member's HBDI Profile was completed, it turned out that—when combined—the team's thinking styles present a Whole Brain approach to leading Cirque. While that was not done by design, the creation of this particular team means the organisation's future promises to be well-represented by every type of thinking style that leadership teams need.

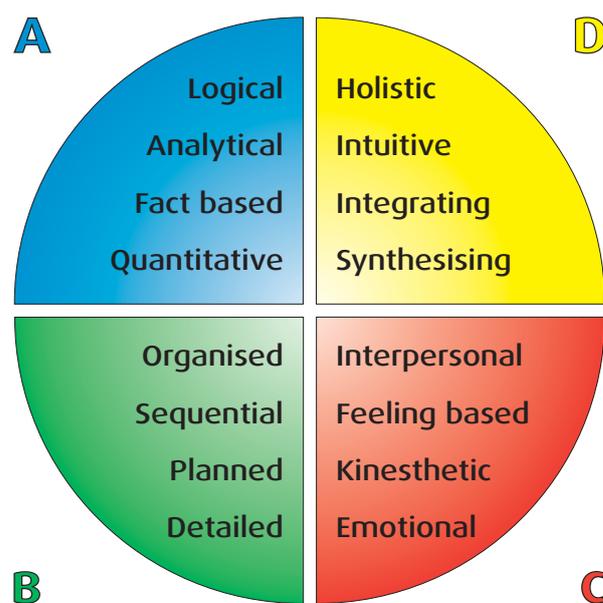
## Setting the stage

Cirque du Soleil is a 'flat' organisation, one that has eschewed the hierarchical approach to management and success. So when the idea of training leaders was introduced in 2002, it was met with some resistance.

Those who were here in the early years of Cirque felt the pain of starting an organisation. They said, "We were successful and we don't want corporate models. We have our own way of achieving success," Dufresne recalls. But after some serious discussion, the value of potentially adopting 'leadership' was accepted.

"At Cirque, we have this unique strength of coaching high calibre athletes and artists, and we wanted our leaders to become good coaches to employees, so the decision was made to teach coaching skills," she says.

After researching potential options, the Whole Brain Model™ was presented as an approach that could help build self awareness, and Robert Paris introduced Whole Brain Thinking in 2004 as the self-awareness portion of a Cirque du Soleil leadership program.



Danièle Bienvenue, a consultant who worked with Cirque, developed a highly creative way to introduce the Whole Brain Model to a highly creative audience: She hired a cartoonist to draw four characters illustrating different aspects of thinking styles.

In the introductory Whole Brain session, Bienvenue conducted an exercise where attendees could choose four activities in a diversity game. Each activity happened to coincide with a preferred thinking style and related quadrant of the brain. She then revealed the Whole Brain concept by unveiling the cartoons and asked the participants to add the appropriate dialogue. This helped people make a quick connection between thinking styles and preferred activities. It also showed them that in a diverse world, a multitude of thinking styles is best.

The game and the cartoons were successful in arousing the interest of Cirque participants.

“People recognised that wherever they go in the world, this diversity of thinking styles will exist, and that their understanding will have a big role in how things turn out,” she says.

Next, participants went online to take the HBDI. Many waited impatiently for the results. Between the preparation exercise and their awareness that they would receive a highly personalised, in-depth package that would reveal their own thinking styles, the Cirque group shared an air of heightened anticipation.

“When people receive their HBDI package, it’s very exciting. The Academy Award-like envelope, marked ‘Confidential’ and sealed with a silver medallion, makes people aware that they’re about to open something very special, just for them,” Bienvenue explains.

She delivered a “Getting to Know Myself” debriefing that helped participants not only understand themselves better but also decide what kind of leader they wanted to be.

## Dramatic Impact

How do Cirque du Soleil senior managers typically react when they first receive their HBDI Profile?

“After an individual debriefing about their profile, they are usually very excited. They say things like, ‘Wow, this model is amazing. It’s helping me understand so much,’” says Dufresne. Among the typical reactions she reports hearing:

- ◆ Now I understand the differences between my boss and me, and I want to work with him.
- ◆ I see another perspective totally. I want to work with this person because they’re different from me.
- ◆ This is like a gift to us, to understand ourselves and our team better.

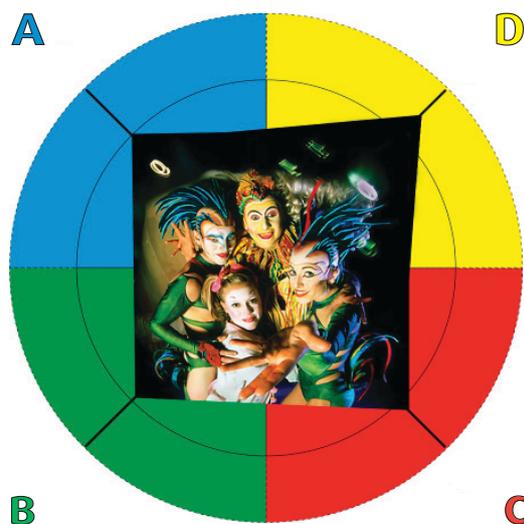
“Personally I like the fact that the people who present the profiles and the debriefings are certified. Without their interpretation, this information could easily be misunderstood, and be as volatile as dynamite,” Dufresne explains.

The human resources managers at Cirque are also briefed in the Whole Brain Model, so they understand it at the same level as the organisation’s leaders and speak the Whole Brain ‘language’.

## Team Support

As part of her coaching at Cirque, Bienvenue supports leaders as they face challenges with their teams. To address issues, she orders team profiles for each member of the team. Before presenting the results, Bienvenue asks each team member to write their team’s challenges on a 3-x-5 card, and keep it to themselves. Then she presents the results—showing a PowerPoint slide of the brain quadrant model, with each team member’s HBDI results plotted on it.

I would ask, 'What would make your team smarter? Stronger?' The answers are always in the HBDI Profile.



"Seeing it that way, it's easier to understand why they have these challenges, and makes it clear what strategies they are missing for a Whole Brain approach to address those challenges," she says. Solutions soon follow.

"I would ask, 'What would make your team smarter? Stronger?' The answers are always in the HBDI Profile. The team profile always explains why the team is going through what it is," Bienvenue explains.

"Whole Brain Thinking became a pillar, a lighthouse constantly reminding us of this knowledge about members of the team. We focused on how we can use these insights to make better decisions."

## And the shows go on

Each Cirque du Soleil new show has its own creative director and production director. These two people—drawing from opposite parts of their brain to create a phenomenal show—practically live together for the year-and-a-half the show is being developed.

Armed with an understanding of Whole Brain Thinking, "the managers realised they had put together teams that work so well by covering the Whole Brain," she says.

That's the magic of combining Whole Brain Thinking with Cirque's inimitable moving masterpieces.

better results through better thinking

## Clients

Herrmann International Asia's clients include:

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

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Herrmann International clients include:

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



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

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