

Unlocking the Power of Problem-Solving Styles: The VIEW Model and Cognitive Diversity

Luc De Schryver

o2c2 Consulting



Contents

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Introduction..... | 2 |
| 2. Theoretical Framework of the VIEW Model..... | 2 |
| 3. Dimensions of the VIEW Model..... | 2 |
| 3.1 Orientation to Change (OC)..... | 2 |
| 3.2 Manner of Processing (MP)..... | 3 |
| 3.3 Ways of Deciding (WD)..... | 3 |
| 4. Psychometric Properties and Validation..... | 3 |
| 5. Cognitive Diversity: Definition, Impact, and Organizational Relevance..... | 3 |
| 6. Organizational Climate and Tools Supporting Cognitive Diversity..... | 4 |
| 6.1 The Situational Outlook Questionnaire (SOQ)..... | 4 |
| 6.2 Other Leading Tools..... | 5 |
| 7. Case Studies and Practical Applications of the VIEW Model..... | 5 |
| 7.1 General Electric's Leadership, Innovation, and Growth (LIG) Program..... | 5 |
| 7.2 Credit Unions: Process Innovation and Cognitive Diversity..... | 5 |
| 7.3 IBM and the System of Credit Unions of Brazil (Sicoob)..... | 5 |
| 7.4 IBM and Prairie Credit Unions: Payments Modernization..... | 6 |
| 7.5 Norwegian Air: User-Centered Design and the VIEW Model..... | 6 |
| 8. Challenges in Managing Cognitive Diversity..... | 6 |
| 8.1 Interpersonal Tensions and Miscommunication..... | 6 |
| 8.2 Social Categorization and In-Group/Out-Group Dynamics..... | 6 |
| 8.3 Resistance to Change and Conformity Pressures..... | 6 |
| 8.4 Challenges in Team Composition and Process Design..... | 6 |
| 8.5 Leadership and Organizational Climate..... | 7 |
| 8.6 Measurement and Evaluation..... | 7 |
| 9. Strategies and Best Practices for Managing Cognitive Diversity..... | 7 |
| 9.1 Make Cognitive Diversity Visible and Valued..... | 7 |
| 9.2 Build Diverse Teams Intentionally..... | 7 |
| 9.3 Foster Psychological Safety and Inclusive Communication..... | 7 |
| 9.4 Structure Team Processes to Balance Styles..... | 7 |
| 9.5 Invest in Leadership Development and Inclusive Practices..... | 8 |
| 9.6 Use Assessment Tools to Monitor and Improve Climate..... | 8 |
| 9.7 Address and Manage Conflict Constructively..... | 8 |
| 9.8 Align Organizational Systems and Policies..... | 8 |
| 9.9 Leverage Technology and Digital Tools..... | 8 |
| 9.10 Commit to Continuous Learning and Adaptation..... | 8 |

1. Introduction

In an era marked by rapid technological advancement, global competition, and constant change, organizations are increasingly challenged to solve complex problems and adapt swiftly to new realities. While technical expertise and operational efficiency remain essential, a growing body of research highlights the transformative impact of cognitive diversity—the differences in how individuals think, process information, and approach challenges—on organizational innovation, adaptability, and resilience. The VIEW model of problem-solving styles offers a robust, research-based framework for understanding, measuring, and leveraging these differences within teams and organizations. This white paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical underpinnings and practical dimensions of the VIEW model, explores the organizational benefits and challenges of cognitive diversity, and offers actionable strategies and best practices for leaders, HR, and Organization Development (OD) professionals seeking to harness the full potential of their teams.

2. Theoretical Framework of the VIEW Model

The VIEW model (a measure of problem-solving style) is grounded in decades of research at the intersection of psychology, creativity, and organizational behavior. It conceptualizes problem-solving styles as consistent, measurable preferences that shape how individuals approach, process, and resolve challenges. Unlike models that focus solely on skills or abilities, VIEW emphasizes *style*—the natural, preferred manner in which a person engages with problems and change. This distinction is crucial: while skills can be developed and abilities may fluctuate, style represents a relatively stable aspect of personality and cognition that influences behavior across contexts.

The theoretical foundation of VIEW integrates three major constructs: learning style, cognitive style, and psychological type. This integration allows the model to capture a broad spectrum of individual differences relevant to creative problem-solving and change management. The model is intentionally agnostic regarding specific creative problem-solving processes, ensuring that it measures style independently of process or ability.

3. Dimensions of the VIEW Model

The VIEW model identifies three independent, empirically validated dimensions of problem-solving style: Orientation to Change, Manner of Processing, and Ways of Deciding. Each dimension represents a continuum of preferences, and together they provide a nuanced map of cognitive diversity within individuals and teams.

Orientation to Change (OC). This dimension reflects how individuals prefer to engage with change and novelty. It distinguishes between two primary styles:

- **Explorer:** Energized by novelty, ambiguity, and the pursuit of new possibilities. Explorers are often the first to challenge established norms, seek uncharted territory, and generate original ideas. They thrive in environments that value experimentation and are comfortable with uncertainty.
- **Developer:** Excel at refining, improving, and implementing existing ideas. Developers prefer structure, discipline, and incremental improvement. They are adept at bringing order to chaos, optimizing processes, and ensuring that innovations are practical and sustainable.

The Orientation to Change dimension is further subdivided into three subscales:

- **Preference for Novelty (NV):** The degree to which an individual seeks out new experiences and ideas.
- **Structure and Authority (SA):** The extent to which a person values established procedures and hierarchical guidance.
- **Search Strategy (SS):** The approach taken to explore or exploit information and solutions.

Manner of Processing (MP). This dimension captures how individuals prefer to process information and interact with others during problem-solving:

- **External Processors:** Draw energy from interaction, sharing ideas early and often with others. They benefit from brainstorming, group discussions, and collaborative environments.
- **Internal Processors:** Prefer quiet reflection and solitary analysis before sharing ideas. They are more comfortable working independently and may need time to develop their thoughts before contributing to group discussions.

- **Ways of Deciding (WD).** This dimension describes the primary emphasis individuals place on people or tasks when making decisions: **Person-Oriented Deciders:** inter- personal harmony, relationships, and the emotional impact of decisions. They are at- tuned to group dynamics and strive to maintain a positive, inclusive atmosphere.
- **Task-Oriented Deciders:** Emphasize logic, objectivity, and the achievement of out- comes. They focus on the rational, practical aspects of decision- making and may prioritize results over relationships.

Psychometric properties and validation

The VIEW model is operationalized through a 34-item assessment instrument, “VIEW: An Assessment of Problem-Solving Style,” which measures the three dimensions and their subscales. Extensive research over more than 20 years has demonstrated the reliability and validity of the instrument. Internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha) for the three main dimensions is high (around .86), and the subscales of Orientation to Change also show strong internal consistency (~.87). Factor analyses support the three-dimensional structure of the model, and test-retest studies indicate

that VIEW scores are stable over time, with correlations ranging from .60 to .93 over intervals from one month to twelve months. Importantly, VIEW assesses style preferences rather than creative ability or intelligence. Studies have shown no significant correlations between VIEW scores and measures of creative productivity or intelligence, underscoring the model’s focus on how people solve problems, not how well they do so.-
Prioritize.

Cognitive diversity: definition, impact, and organizational relevance

Cognitive diversity refers to the differences in perspectives, thought processes, and problem-solving strategies that individuals bring to a group. It encompasses variations in how people think, interpret information, and approach challenges, going beyond surface- level diversity such as race, gender, or age.

Cognitive diversity is a critical driver of innovation, creativity, and adaptability in organizations. Research consistently shows that teams with high cognitive diversity generate more ideas, consider a wider range of alternatives, and are better equipped to navigate complex, ambiguous problems.

However, cognitive diversity also presents challenges. Differences in thinking styles can lead to misunderstandings, interpersonal tensions, and conflict if not managed effectively. The potential for miscommunication is heightened when team members have divergent approaches to problem-solving, information processing, or decision-making. Organizations must therefore create climates that support psychological safety, trust, and open communication to fully realize the benefits of cognitive diversity.

Organizational Climate and Tools Supporting Cognitive Diversity

A supportive organizational climate is the essential context in which cognitive diversity can flourish and drive innovation. Decades of research, including meta-analyses and large-scale field studies, have identified several key climate factors:

- **Trust and Openness:** Trust is foundational for psychological safety, enabling individuals to share unconventional ideas without fear of ridicule or reprisal. Openness in communication ensures that diverse perspectives are heard and valued, reducing the risk of groupthink and fostering a culture of constructive debate.
- **Idea-Time and Idea-Support:** Providing time and resources for employees to explore, elaborate, and test new ideas is critical. Idea-support refers to the encouragement and practical backing given to new initiatives, signaling that innovation is not only permitted but expected.
- **Participative Leadership and Autonomy:** Leaders who involve team members in decision-making, encourage autonomy, and model inclusive behaviors create climates where cognitive diversity is leveraged for creative problem-solving.
- **Debate and Constructive Conflict:** A climate that welcomes debate and constructive disagreement allows teams to consider multiple angles, challenge assumptions, and arrive at more robust solutions. This is particularly important in cognitively diverse teams, where differences can otherwise lead to unproductive conflict if not managed well.
- **Risk-Taking and Tolerance for Failure:** Innovation inherently involves uncertainty and the possibility of failure. Organizations that tolerate risk and view failure as a learning opportunity create space for experimentation and breakthrough thinking.

- **Psychological safety:** Teams with high psychological safety are more likely to benefit from cognitive diversity, as members feel safe to express dissenting views, admit mistakes, and ask for help.
- **Collaborative climate:** Collaboration at multiple levels—organizational, supervisory, and peer—moderates the relationship between cognitive diversity and creativity, enabling knowledge sharing and reducing the negative effects of conflict.
- **Learning orientation and continuous improvement:** A climate that values learning, reflection, and continuous improvement supports the integration of diverse perspectives and ongoing innovation.
- **Recognition and Reward Systems:** Aligning incentives and recognition with innovative behaviors and the use of diverse thinking styles reinforces the value placed on cognitive diversity.

21 The Situational Outlook

Questionnaire (SOQ)

The SOQ is one of the most widely validated and applied tools for assessing the organizational climate for creativity, innovation, and change. Developed over more than five decades and rooted in the pioneering work of Göran Ekvall, the SOQ measures nine dimensions of organizational climate that research has shown to be critical for fostering innovation and supporting cognitive diversity.

The SOQ uses both quantitative and qualitative data, providing organizations with a nuanced understanding of their climate and actionable insights for improvement. Its psychometric properties are robust, with high reliability (average Cronbach's alpha of .86) and demonstrated validity across diverse organizational contexts.

22 Other Leading Tools

Other tools supporting cognitive diversity and innovation include the Team Climate Inventory (TCI), Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) and Basadur Profile. Each tool offers unique insights and is best selected based on organizational needs, context, and the specific dimensions of cognitive diversity and climate most relevant to the organization's goals.

3. Case Studies and Practical Applications of the VIEW Model

The practical application of the VIEW model in organizational settings is illustrated by several case studies across diverse sectors, including manufacturing, financial services, technology, and air traffic management. These examples demonstrate how organizations have leveraged the VIEW framework to enhance innovation, strategic planning, and team performance.

3.1 General Electric's Leadership, Innovation, and Growth (LIG) program

General Electric (GE) has long been recognized for its commitment to leadership development and organizational innovation. The LIG program, launched at GE's Crotonville management development center, brought together senior management teams for intensive training focused on expanding existing businesses and creating new ones. While the program's primary emphasis was on growth and innovation, it also incorporated principles aligned with the VIEW model, such as fostering diverse thinking styles and encouraging

both exploratory and developmental approaches to problem-solving. By assembling teams with varied cognitive profiles and providing a climate of trust and openness, GE was able to drive significant organizational change and sustain its competitive edge.

3.2 Credit Unions: process innovation and cognitive diversity

Credit unions, particularly those recognized by the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, have applied the VIEW model to support process innovation and strategic planning. For example, Elevations Credit Union used IBM Blueworks Live to document and link processes, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of interdependent procedures and fostering collaboration among teams with diverse problem-solving styles. By mapping processes and encouraging participation from employees with different cognitive preferences, Elevations Credit Union was able to redesign its loan application and mortgage processes, resulting in significant reductions in cycle times and improved member satisfaction.

3.3 IBM and the System of Credit Unions of Brazil (Sicoob)

The System of Credit Unions of Brazil (Sicoob) partnered with IBM to implement Robotic Process Automation

(RPA) technology, streamlining document- and form-intensive processes such as insurance quotes, payroll loans, and customer registration. Sicoob's approach emphasized the complementary roles of humans and digital automation, with bots handling repetitive tasks and employees focusing on creative problem-solving and customer interaction. This division of labor reflects the VIEW model's recognition of diverse cognitive strengths and the importance of aligning tasks with individual problem-solving styles.

34 IBM and Prairie credit unions: payments modernization

The Prairie Payments Joint Venture (PPJV), representing over 75 credit unions in Canada, collaborated with IBM to develop a modernized payments platform hosted on IBM's public cloud. The platform's design emphasized innovation, security, and integration with third-party fintech partners, enabling credit unions to remain competitive and responsive to evolving member needs. The project exemplified the VIEW model's focus on leveraging diverse perspectives and expertise to drive digital transformation and operational excellence.

Norwegian Air: user-centered design and the VIEW model. In an academic project aimed at enhancing Norwegian Air's mobile app, the VIEW

model was applied to integrate user-centered design methods and improve the in-flight service experience. The project team conducted user research, created proto-personas, and developed situational scenarios to inform the design process. Techniques such as card sorting, experience mapping, and iterative prototyping were used to balance the needs and preferences of diverse user groups. The project demonstrated the practical value of the VIEW model in guiding the systematic integration of cognitive diversity into product development, resulting in a more intuitive and satisfying user experience.

4. Challenges in Managing cognitive diversity

While cognitive diversity offers significant benefits, it also introduces challenges that organizations must proactively address. The very differences that fuel innovation can also give rise to significant obstacles:

4.1 Interpersonal tensions and miscommunication

Individuals with different problem-solving styles may interpret information, express ideas, and make decisions in ways that are unfamiliar or even frustrating to others. For example, Explorers may perceive Developers as resistant to

change, while Developers may view Explorers as impractical or unfocused. Similarly, external processors may dominate discussions, inadvertently sidelining internal processors who require more time to reflect before contributing.

42 Social categorization and in-group/out-group dynamics.

Cognitive diversity often intersects with visible forms of diversity, such as gender, ethnicity, and age, amplifying the risk of social categorization. Team members may unconsciously group themselves based on perceived similarities, leading to the emergence of in-groups and out-groups. This dynamic can foster stereo-types, exclusion, and reduced knowledge sharing, undermining the potential benefits of diversity.

43 Resistance to change and conformity pressures.

Organizations with strong, homogeneous cultures may inadvertently suppress cognitive diversity by rewarding conformity and discouraging dissent. Employees often feel pressure to “fit in,” leading them to withhold unique perspectives or adapt their thinking to align with dominant norms. This phenomenon, known as groupthink, limits the range of ideas considered and reduces the organization’s capacity for creative

problem solving.

Challenges in team composition and process design.

Effectively leveraging cognitive diversity requires intentional team composition and the design of processes that accommodate different problem-solving styles. However, organizations often lack the tools and frameworks needed to assess and balance cognitive diversity within teams. Without a structured approach, teams may become skewed toward certain styles, leading to blind spots and missed opportunities.

Leadership and organizational climate.

The role of leadership and organizational climate is critical in managing cognitive diversity. Leaders must foster an environment of trust, openness, and psychological safety, where all team members feel valued and empowered to share their perspectives. However, creating and sustaining such a climate is challenging, particularly in organizations with entrenched hierarchies or cultures of risk aversion.

Measurement and evaluation. Assessing the impact of cognitive diversity on team performance and innovation is inherently complex. Traditional metrics may not capture the nuanced ways in which diverse thinking contributes to outcomes. Organizations need robust tools, such as

the SOQ, to measure climate dimensions that support innovation, including trust, openness, and idea support.

Strategies and best practices for managing cognitive diversity.

To unlock the full potential of cognitive diversity, organizations must move beyond passive acceptance to active management. The following strategies, grounded in research and practice, offer actionable recommendations for HR and organizational development professionals

1. Make cognitive diversity visible and valued.

Raise awareness of cognitive diversity within the organization. Use frameworks like the VIEW model or tools such as the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI) to help individuals and teams identify their own and others' thinking styles. Incorporate discussions of cognitive preferences into onboarding, team formation, and leadership development programs. Publicly recognize and celebrate unique contributions, reinforcing the message that diverse perspectives are an asset, not a liability.

2. Build diverse teams intentionally.

Recruit and assemble teams with a deliberate focus on cognitive diversity. Go beyond demographic diversity to consider differences in problem-solving approaches, educational backgrounds, and lived experiences. Use structured interviews, skills assessments, and personality inventories to identify candidates who bring new ways of thinking. Avoid the trap of “culture fit” that favors homogeneity; instead, seek “culture add”—individuals who challenge the status quo and expand the team’s collective repertoire.

3. Foster psychological safety and inclusive communication.

Create an environment where all team members feel safe to express their ideas, challenge assumptions, and engage in constructive debate. Leaders play a pivotal role in modeling openness, humility, and respect for dissenting views. Establish ground rules for meetings that encourage equal participation, active listening, and the respectful airing of disagreements. Provide training in communication, conflict resolution, and civility to equip employees with the skills needed to navigate differences productively.

4. Structure team processes to balance styles.

Design team processes that leverage the strengths of different cognitive styles at appropriate stages. For example, during ideation and brainstorming, encourage divergent thinking and the free flow of ideas. In later stages, shift toward convergent thinking, seeking consensus and focusing on implementation. Use decision-making models that clarify how input will be gathered and how final decisions will be made, ensuring transparency and buy-in. Rotate roles and responsibilities to give all members opportunities to contribute in ways that align with their strengths.

5. Invest in leadership development and inclusive practices.

Equip leaders with the skills to recognize, value, and manage cognitive diversity. Provide training in inclusive leadership, unconscious bias, and the facilitation of diverse teams. Encourage leaders to seek out and incorporate feedback from team members with different perspectives. Hold leaders accountable for fostering climates of trust, openness, and psychological safety. Recognize and reward inclusive behaviors in performance evaluations and promotion.

6. Use assessment tools to monitor and improve climate.

Regularly assess the organizational climate using validated tools like the SOQ to identify areas that support or hinder cognitive diversity. Solicit feedback from employees on their byproduct of cognitive diversity. Rather than suppressing disagreement, channel it into productive debate focused on ideas rather than personalities. Provide training in conflict resolution and equip teams with frameworks for managing differences constructively. Encourage teams to view conflict as an opportunity for learning and innovation, not as a threat to cohesion.

7. Align organizational systems and policies.

Ensure that HR policies, performance management systems, and reward structures reinforce the value of cognitive diversity. Incorporate diversity and inclusion metrics into organizational dashboards and hold leaders accountable for progress. Provide flexible work arrangements and accommodations to support diverse working and thinking styles, experiences of inclusion, psychological safety, and the extent to which their ideas are valued. Use the results to guide targeted interventions, such as team-building activities, process redesign, or leadership

8. Leverage technology and digital tools.

Utilize digital platforms and collaboration tools to facilitate knowledge sharing, remote teamwork, and the inclusion of geographically dispersed or neurodiverse employees. Use online skills assessments and blind resume screening to reduce bias in hiring and promotion decisions.

9. Commit to continuous learning and adaptation.

Recognize that managing cognitive diversity is an ongoing process, not a one-time initiative. Foster a culture of continuous learning, experimentation, and feedback. Regularly revisit team composition, processes, and climate as organizational needs and external environments evolve.

Supplementing with recent research and best practices.

Recent research and organizational experience point to several best practices for HR and OD professionals seeking to implement cognitive diversity initiatives.

- **Assessment and measurement:** Use validated tools (VIEW, Basadur Profile) to assess cognitive styles and diversity within teams. Map team cognitive diversity to identify gaps.

- **Intentional team composition:** Balance cognitive styles and align team composition with task demands, using the law of requisite variety to ensure the team's cognitive diversity matches the complexity of the task.
- **Foster an inclusive climate:** Promote psychological safety, encourage open dialogue, and address social categorization through cross-functional projects and shared objectives.
- **Leadership development:** Develop inclusive leadership skills and modulate cognitive diversity across project phases to balance creativity and efficiency.
- **Recruitment and talent management:** Broaden recruitment channels, use skills-based hiring, and implement blind screening to reduce unconscious bias.
- **Training and development:** Offer ongoing, evidence-based training on cognitive diversity, unconscious bias, and inclusive behaviors. Establish mentorship and sponsorship program.
- **Continuous measurement and feedback:** Track progress using innovation rates, team satisfaction, and retention. Solicit employee feedback on inclusion and diversity efforts.

- **Integrate with broader DEI initiatives:** Embed cognitive diversity into organizational values, policies, and daily practices, ensuring alignment with broader Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) strategies.

Conclusion

The VIEW model represents a significant advance in our understanding of problem-solving styles and cognitive diversity. Its robust theoretical framework, validated measurement instrument, and practical applicability make it an invaluable tool for organizations seeking to unlock the creative potential of their teams. By embracing cognitive diversity and leveraging the insights provided by the VIEW model, organizations can transform diversity from a source of conflict into a well-spring of creativity, innovation, and sustained competitive advantage.

Cognitive diversity is a powerful, yet often underutilized, resource for organizations seeking to thrive in a world of constant change and complexity. By combining robust assessment tools with a deliberate focus on supportive organizational climate factors, leaders can transform cognitive diversity from a source of friction into a driver of creativity, innovation, and competitive advantage. The evidence is clear: organizations that invest in understanding and leveraging

problem-solving styles, foster climates of trust and openness, and institutionalize inclusive practices are better positioned to adapt, innovate, and succeed in the long term.

The journey to unlocking the power of cognitive diversity requires intentional assessment, inclusive leadership, supportive organizational climate, and continuous learning. HR and OD professionals play a pivotal role in designing and implementing initiatives that recognize, measure, and nurture cognitive diversity at all levels of the organization. By adopting evidence-based strategies and integrating cognitive diversity into broader DEIB efforts, organizations can build stronger, more resilient teams capable of thriving in an everchanging world.

The call to action is unequivocal: invest in understanding and applying the VIEW model and related practices to unlock the full potential of your teams and achieve sustained organizational success

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