

THE INTEGRATIVE LEADER

How Leaders Use Both Sides Of Their
Brain To Build Resilient Companies



SONIA JEANTET

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CHAPTER I

Why You Need To Use Both Sides Of Your Brain

“When faced with a storm, a tree that doesn’t bend becomes wood.”

—**African proverb**

We are living in transformative times for the entire world. There are overt and covert changes taking place to government structures, financial paradigms, social norms, industry composition, and geopolitical relationships. This is the perfect storm for breakdowns of long-established systems.

No one alive or in leadership has simultaneously experienced what has occurred in the first half of 2020. Events like a global pandemic, worldwide economic shutdown, demonstrations and riots lasting months across most of the cities in America and the world, and new protocols for resuming business are creating a new playbook for leading through a crisis.

Psychologists would inform us that any one of these circumstances would challenge our ability to cope because we are in deep survival mode. At the base of our head is a special location, the amygdala, from which chemical reactions emanate to deal with these circumstances. When we have an amygdala hijack, we revert to examining our world and actions, and the instinctual question of “How can I be safe?” dominates our decision-making and behavior.

Fight, flight, and freeze strategies are at the top of the list in the midst of uncertainty and form the first phase of our response. The quicker we move through this phase, the greater our chances for assessing potential options to create a highly functioning future. The number and depth of the neural connections in the frontal portion of the brain, where you do your best thinking, evaluating, and understanding, will determine your ability to thrive in the unfolding new world.

This book shows how leaders, when faced with complex business challenges, applied cognitive diversity that delivered optimal financial and organization results. Six of the chapters will highlight a factual story of a leader applying a left-, right-, or whole-brain solution to resolve their circumstances. Chapters three through nine will also refer to a thought leadership source that validates the results achieved by the leader.

This information will be relevant to two groups of readers: the owners and leadership of an organization, and the emerging leaders who want to avail themselves

of all possible tools that will help them thrive regardless of the circumstances they face.

A surprising statistic from a study conducted by Accenture Strategy: 89 percent of C-Suite executives have degrees in left-brain directed fields such as engineering, finance, and accounting.

Importantly, there is a difference between left-brain thinking and right-brain thinking. In 1990, Herrmann Global, an Inc. 500 firm, pioneered *The Whole Brain Thinking Model*.¹ The model has four quadrants to define thinking preferences, two for each side of the brain. According to this model, the left brain is analytical, logical, and focused on facts and form, while the right brain is the creative, innovative, emotional, visual-spatial half focused on futures and feelings. The relative level of activity in each quadrant is believed to determine an individual's cognitive style and personality.

Individual and team assessments reveal which quadrants an individual may favor. The firm's data indicates that leaders who have dominance in all four quadrants are least represented in the population. Yet, CEOs and presidents of organizations and divisions are more successful when they maintain a balance in their leadership priorities that take into consideration issues and opportunities in all four thinking styles.

In general, an executive's career experience tends to align with their dominant thinking preferences since

¹ Herrmann Global LLC, "Cognitive Diversity for Better Management," Herrmann, accessed May 2, 2020, <http://www.thinkherrmann.com/>.

they will play to, and be rewarded for, their strengths. This pattern is often correlated to the organization's industry. Industries where engineering and financial acumen are critical value left-brain preferences. Industries where innovation, interpersonal savvy, and curiosity are important complement right-brain thinking. There are connections between the upper mode of left and right, which emphasizes strategic thinking and innovation management. Clinicians and process implementers tend to have brain connections between the lower mode of both right and left brain. However, the knowledge and instincts that favor one side or mode over another do not have the same value today, because of the complexity in the workplace and the pace needed to affect change. An ambidextrous brain provides a significant advantage for leadership success.

I have been an executive coach for the past twenty years, consulting with such varied Fortune 500 organizations as Raytheon, Disney, and Warner Bros. I am engaged to work with high-potential executives. They are the individuals who have consistently proven themselves over the course of their career; they solve difficult problems and are instrumental in developing and launching new ideas, products, systems, and businesses. Their career path is in an upward trajectory. They are moving into larger leadership roles: running a new line of business, redefining how a product or service is provided, entering new markets, identifying and delivering against new return on investment models, and always growing the scope of the teams they lead.

Early in my coaching career, it became clear that a high-potential executive who began to practice and take on whole-brain thinking habits had a greater chance to be successful regardless of what their next role would be. That executive was being an integrative leader, leveraging the full potential of their thinking abilities. An integrative leader is in the optimal performance zone. Neuroscientists define this as a state of neural harmony where the disparate areas of the brain are in sync, working together. It is also defined as a state of maximum “cognitive efficiency” or being “in the flow,” which lets you use whatever talent you have at peak levels. In this book, these concepts are illustrated with stories of high-potential executives with whom I have had the pleasure and honor to work.

To succeed in the twenty-first century, you and the executives on your team will have to operate as whole-brain thinkers. AI and robotics are tools that elevate the efficiency of what traditionally have been left-brain competencies, and in some cases, are replacing jobs that build that knowledge and experience. In addition, for right-brain competencies, there have been many initiatives for growing emotional intelligence to manage a diverse workforce generationally and across other distinctions. When I took the first emotional intelligence assessment, distinguishing among different visual cues for others’ feelings was part of the test. It can be argued that the facial recognition feature in surveillance cameras and our phones is capturing that information to better understand and market to us. This is one example of how technology leverages a strong right-

brain skill set. The advantage of being a fully functional human being is achieving and maintaining the whole-brain optimal performance zone.

Human beings are frequency generators and resonate with what is in our field. Our thinking is influenced by our environment. The more we interact and connect with machines, the more we are comfortable with structured thinking, which is a left-brain strength. The more we spend time interacting with others in conversations that explore imagination and build interpersonal connections, the more we are resonating with strategizing and personalized thinking, our right-brain strength. In the midst of complex situations that require breakthrough solutions, integration and balanced thinking across both brain hemispheres provide access to the field where the whole universe of options exists.

The change in neural pathways allows integrative leaders to embrace new behavior habits, which strengthens their ability to lead. The process for launching new neural pathways begins with the questions we ask ourselves. In his book, *Quiet Leadership*, David Rock shares, “The questions you ask of your brain significantly affect the quality of the connections it makes, and profoundly alter the patterns and timings of the connections the brain generates in each fraction of a second.”²

² David Rock, *Quiet Leadership: Help People Think Better -- Don't Tell Them What to Do: Six Steps to Transforming Performance at Work* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2006).

It is what happens when we have an “aha” experience. The insights gained allow these leaders to recognize the situations they are facing and deftly shift to the optimum return for the organization, be it return on ideas, investments, interpersonal interactions, process, situational awareness, or cognitive agility. Some examples of the leadership skills modeled include the ability to synthesize diverse thinking and viewpoints; being vigilant to the external environment; making tough decisions effectively; and the ability to influence, coach, and empower others.

Understanding Return For Integrative Leadership And Research Validates

The twenty-first-century business environment is a brave new world. We will need a larger percentage of leaders who are practiced at cognitive diversity or whole-brain thinking. In *The Integrative Leadership Model*, they are integrative leadership practitioners.

Research conducted from February through April 2019 by Accenture Strategy³ with 200 C-Suite executives, 5,700 consumers, and 5,700 employees in France, Germany, Italy, China, the UK, and the US defined the circumstances leaders will face. They will be challenged to solve complex business problems in new ways, with different constituents, at a new pace and scale, and with bigger consequences than ever before for getting it wrong.

³ Peter Lacy, Katherine LaVelle, Alberto Zamora, “Striking Balance with Whole Brain Leadership – The New Rules of Engagement,” Accenture Strategy research study, 2019.

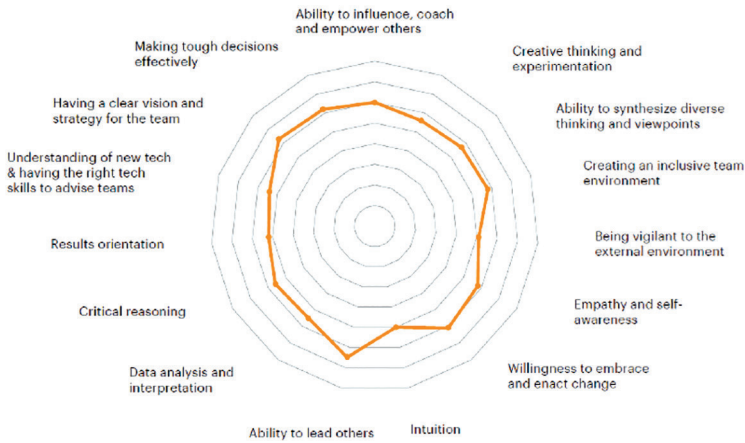
Here is the view from the C-Suite:

- 85 percent say disruptive impact of new technologies has increased
- 74 percent say disruptive impact of constantly shifting customer demands has increased
- 72 percent say disruptive impact of new market entrants has increased
- 62 percent say investors are among their most disruptive stakeholders
- 49 percent say employees are among their most disruptive stakeholders

A banking board member in the UK shared: “Aside from the generally accepted skill sets that we feel are required for the kind of senior positions that we have, the next thing that is high on the list is cognitive diversity. All the evidence says if you can get a better level of cognitive diversity, you get a better outcome. You get better profitability. You get a better perspective on each problem that you are trying to solve.”

From the *New Rules of Engagement for the C-Suite* 2019 research study, here are the whole-brain skills and behaviors C-Suite leaders demonstrate:

Figure 1



The study revealed that only 8 percent of the C-Suite leaders use a whole-brain approach today.

The financial results of those who practice cognitive diversity report stronger average growth and profitability; +22 percent average three-year revenue growth and +34 percent average three-year profit (EBITDA) growth. As a result of the study, 82 percent intend to use a whole-brain approach in the next three years.

The choice for the boards and organizations that plan to thrive in these times is to address the skill gaps. *The Integrative Leader Model* I am sharing with you in this book can be used to re-skill C-Suite members and to build bench strength with talent recruited from the outside.

There is a silver lining for integrative leaders. This style of leadership attracts natural change agents who seek

to be empowered. They are naturally predisposed to ponder and respond to disruption. This creates opportunities for leading in new dimensions and guiding them on building a vibrant, coherent, and resilient state for the organization. The organization's brand will have a new currency and relevancy.

At the end of chapter one and chapters three through nine, you will find tips for applying the information to grow integrative leadership skills. *The Integrative Leader Model* is a framework designed to enhance a leader's ability to build and sustain a resilient team, business, and organization. The recommendations provide a range of options that may require partnering with organization development or a skilled cognitive diversity consultant to implement. Applying the recommendations in the Becoming An Integrative Leader boxes will reveal whether that step in the model is a well-developed competency in your organization or a blind spot. For example, to use return on imaginative intelligence: the leader may not explore why the company is in the business often enough to recognize a breakthrough opportunity or replace the ineffective practices and habits that have built up over time.

I look forward to partnering with the organizations eager to embrace *The Integrative Leadership Model*.

BECOMING AN INTEGRATIVE LEADER

Administer a “thinking preferences” assessment to the leaders in areas where your business will be experiencing the greatest challenge, change, or complexity.

Partner with HR and/or a cognitive diversity consultant to create a library of critical skills for effective change and/or managing complexity leadership.

Categorize the library into cognitive preferences (align with left/right brain) using the *Integrative Leadership Model*.

Build a cognitive diversity proficiency level grid for the critical leadership skills.

Build career paths that move emerging leaders through the proficiency grid.

Create a skill gap development plan with an experienced executive coach to raise the cognitive diversity performance for the leaders.