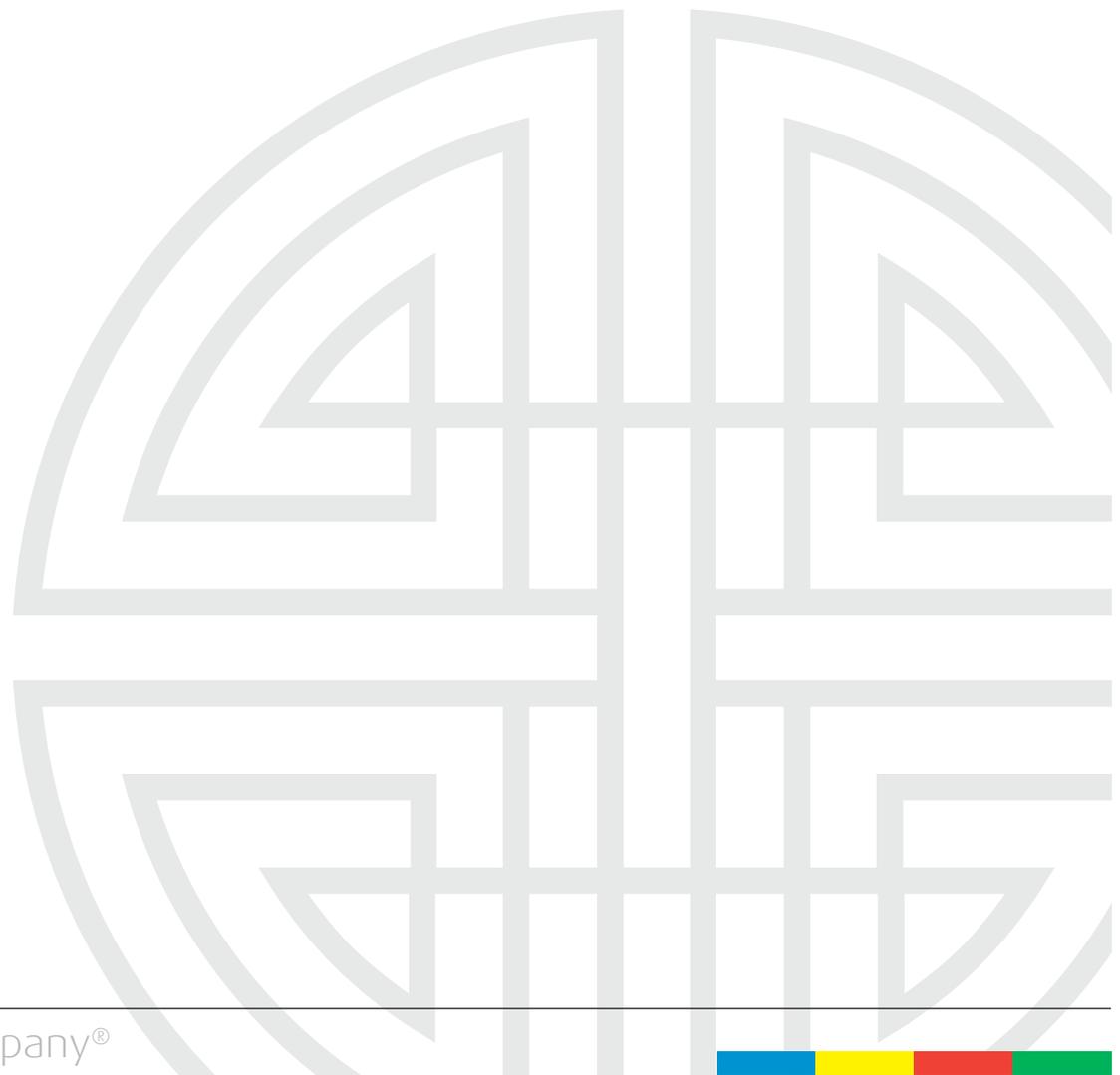


Case Study

Slagelse Municipality

from conflict to common ground: Whole Brain® project management



“Even though the course included a brand new project management model, the participants said they thought the Whole Brain® Model was the most valuable thing they learned.”

Slagelse Municipality is a large municipality of 77,000 people in Denmark’s Region Zealand.

Purpose

Create a unified project management organisation to support a greater development focus.

Process

Use the Whole Brain® system to provide a consistent framework for addressing the underlying challenges in project management, communication problems and conflict.

People

Project managers as well as all project stakeholders across departments.

Possibilities

A common understanding and approach to project management, meetings, communication and problem solving that has formed the foundation for a development-focused, mutually respectful culture.

When Slagelse Kommune, a large municipality of 77,000 people in Denmark, instituted a goal of becoming more development focused in 2008, its newly inducted Board of Directors immediately saw that one of the primary obstacles to efficiency and effectiveness within the municipality was the lack of a system for managing projects.

From department to department and even from project to project, there was no consistency across the organisation in the way projects were handled. Different people and departments used different tools, and some had even created their own, using terms and methods that were completely foreign to the other groups and individuals they interacted with. There was no one way to tackle a project, and as a result, teams were often mired in miscommunication and conflict.

As Head Consultant of Strategic and Organisational Development, Tina Larsen was charged with addressing the issue by creating a project management organisation.

According to Tina, the challenges of inconsistencies and communication breakdowns are somewhat inherent in a municipality due to the breadth, variety and complexity of its responsibilities. From departments dealing with abused children

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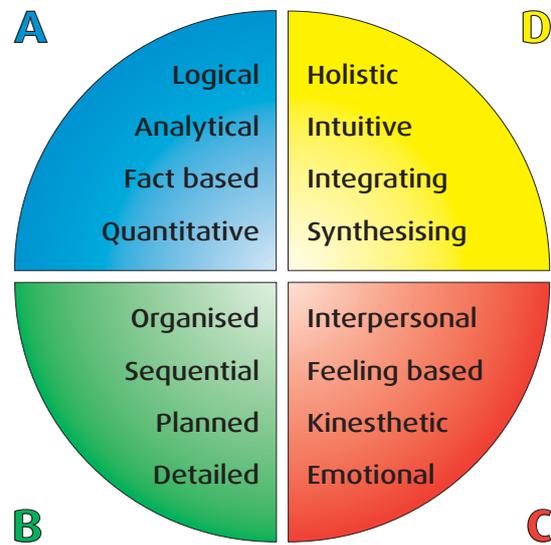
to those working on organisational development or engineering, there are many, extremely different professions working together. And most companies, she notes, face a similar problem, with distinct functions ranging from finance to production to human resources to sales.

“These different professions each have their own rooted discourse and this can cause communication problems, if you’re only rooted in what you do every day.”

Tina’s goal was to develop a program that ensured all stakeholders understood the terminology, processes and best methods for tackling a project. It would include not just project managers but anyone who had a responsibility for participating in and contributing to projects.

In the process of developing the program, Tina was introduced to the Herrmann Whole Brain® Model and the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument® (HBDI®), which is the thinking styles assessment at the core of Whole Brain® Thinking. After reading Ned Herrmann’s *Whole Brain® Business Book*, she immediately realised that understanding others’ preferences for thinking would be an enormous help in streamlining processes and communications, and in helping

people tailor their approaches to different people or problems. By building Whole Brain® Thinking skills into the program in addition to project management models, she would be giving participants the tools to improve communications and minimise conflict—two of the most critical issues affecting the project management arena.



The Whole Brain® Model graphic is a registered trademark of Herrmann International

Another important factor in choosing the HBDI® assessment and Whole Brain® Model as core elements of the program was the scientific validity of the HBDI®. As a public sector organisation, Tina says they are highly cognizant of how they spend the public’s money and wouldn’t consider a methodology that wasn’t validated.

"It's also a great model because it's rooted in something biological and physical as opposed to the type indicators that focus on the psychological," Tina adds. "Those don't really have the same appeal, and after a few months, you don't even remember what your type is. This is a single, easy-to-understand and use tool but based on robust methodology."

Tackling the toughest part of project management

After completing Herrmann® Certification, Tina began developing the initial project management course through collaboration with Herrmann International Denmark (www.hbdi.dk), weaving the Whole Brain® Model and HBDI® throughout.

After the first course was delivered, she was a bit surprised by the reaction:

"What people really took away from the first course—the thing they talked about the most afterwards—was the Whole Brain® Model. Even though the course included a brand new project management model, the participants said they thought the Whole Brain® Model was the most valuable thing they learned."

Tina believes that is because the 'easiest parts' are the project management tools. The more difficult elements, the ones project managers struggle with the most, are the communications and conflict issues that commonly occur when working with a wide range of people with many different backgrounds, interests, preferences and goals.

She notes that people can quickly consume a great deal of energy with 'antagonistic dialogue' if they are unable to find common ground to move forward, so participants saw this as a huge value.

"With so many different, multifaceted professions, Whole Brain® Thinking was giving them a way to bridge the professions, from economists to engineers to caretakers for the elderly."

Particularly because stakeholder management is such an important part of project management, the project managers found they could use the model and language of Whole Brain® Thinking to plan and facilitate better communications with stakeholders of all types.

Tina describes it as an environment where people 'do their research' before a meeting so they can adequately prepare. For example, since the program, project managers have begun applying Whole Brain® Thinking to ask for help in planning for meetings or communications, asking questions like: "If my preferences are high yellow (D-quadrant big-picture thinking in the Whole Brain® Model), how should I approach this meeting with someone I know is high green (B-quadrant detailed thinking)?"

They also find that simply mentioning an upcoming meeting will trigger conversation and advice, such as "You both prefer conceptual thinking, so be sure to structure the meeting and have an agenda to keep on track", and "He prefers analytical thinking, so you better bring your facts and figures."

Most importantly, the approach is grounded in acceptance: "It's not about trying to change someone; you don't see them as 'faulty', it's just how they are", Tina says, "so you can leverage people's thinking styles and strengths and adjust your own to adapt to them. You use thinking constructively in the situation you're in."

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“It has significantly minimised conflict—within the project management groups, with the work they do with people outside the groups, and with the stakeholders outside of the organisation.”

Simplifying the complex

The municipality is following the project management program with initiatives involving HBDI® Team Profiles, department programs and several courses that have the Whole Brain® Model at their core, including a meeting facilitation course and a conflict management and teamwork course.

“We’re experimenting with using the Whole Brain® Model in all areas and encouraging people to do so”, Tina says. “If the topic is innovation or economic development or something else, let’s walk around the quadrants to see how we can best tackle it. And what are the profiles of the people involved? How can we use that in our thinking?”

Tina says the approach is “so good at creating awareness about preferences that it helps you get through all four corners of a topic to address it completely. What might seem complicated on the surface can be tackled in a straightforward way because the model ‘helps it come out quite easily”.

And while she continues to work on additional course offerings, Tina says project managers are already using the concepts ‘on the fly’ in meetings with outside municipalities.

better results through better thinking

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