

# Med EDI » Q3 2021



Welcome to the **seventh edition** of “*Med EDI*”. Our goal is to raise awareness of the importance of working in an environment that is Equitable, Diverse and Inclusive and giving each of us the opportunity to understand the benefits from both professional and personal points of view. Through our own growth the Faculty grows too. In this quarterly edition, we place the spotlight on **Cognitive Diversity**.

We look forward to hearing from you so don't hesitate to contact us at [amessage@uottawa.ca](mailto:amessage@uottawa.ca) as we develop this new platform.

## What does Equity, Diversity and Inclusion mean?

**Equity** refers to the fair and respectful treatment of all people. This means that we do everything we can to identify and eliminate unfair biases, stereotypes or barriers.

**Diversity** in the workplace is having representation across our teams of people with a variety of thoughts, skills, world views, and experiences. **Inclusion** is making sure people are accepted as they are, appreciated for what they bring to the table and their differences are recognized as an advantage. Diversity without inclusion is worthless. You may have the most diverse workforce but lack the policies and/or practices to allow everyone to be included or lack the paths for all employees to grow to all levels of the organization.



## Cognitive Diversity: What is it?

When you think of diversity, you probably think of the kind of diversity you can easily see — or at least that you can identify easily. Diversity of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and age are all things that modern workplaces are striving to increase. Employers want to create vibrant, creative teams that better reflect the diversity of the people their products and services strive to reach.

However, there's another type of diversity that employers should be paying attention to, and it is cognitive diversity.

What is cognitive diversity? “Cognitive diversity” refers to the wide variety of ways individuals think and solve problems. One may also use the term to refer to different work styles, learning styles, personality styles, perspectives, backgrounds, or even cognitive levels within a group (for some employers, this includes recruiting employees with autism or Down Syndrome).

Cognitive diversity tends to get much less attention than identity diversity, because it's harder to see and isn't related to mandatory compliance efforts. But cognitive diversity can still deliver big benefits, as we'll explain.



## Cognitive Diversity: Engages Employees

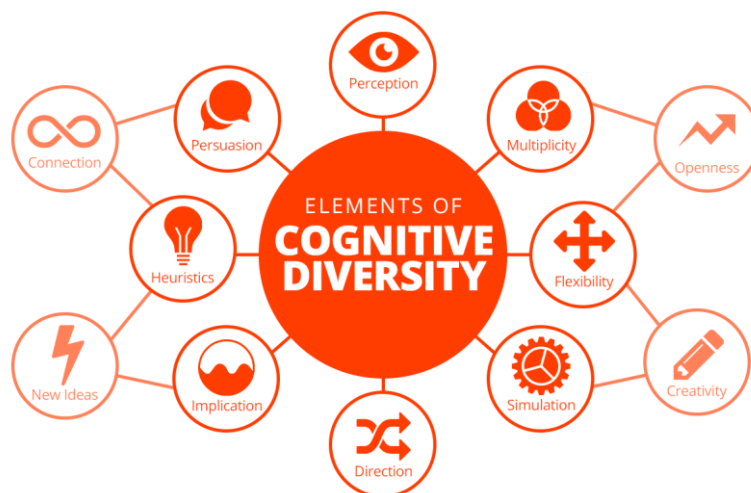
An article by Lydia Dishman published on FastCompany call “Millennials Have A Different Definition Of Diversity And Inclusion” cites a study from Deloitte and the Billie Jean King Leadership Initiative (BJKLI) that analyzed the responses of 3,726 individuals from a variety of backgrounds on the topics of diversity and inclusion.

The study found that Millennials (born between 1981 and 1996), in particular, viewed diversity and inclusion through the lens of teamwork. For them, “inclusion” means working in a collaborative environment where everyone’s input and experience is valued.

This view contrasts with those of older generations, who tend to view diversity and inclusion through the lens of fairness, equity, and civil rights.

One need to pay attention to how ideas about diversity are evolving, especially now that Millennials make up the majority of the workforce. These younger workers expect to work in an environment that encourages all types of voices and experiences, including their own.

The end goal of this kind of teamwork and idea equity, by the way, benefits everyone. The aim of more cognitive diversity at work is more innovation and better teamwork, which gets better results faster for everyone.



## Cognitive Diversity: Boosts Problem Solving

In the Harvard Business Review article called “Teams Solve Problems Faster When They’re More Cognitively Diverse” by Alison Reynolds and David Lewis, researchers describe the interesting trend that they noticed over years of observing groups work together to tackle new and complex challenges.

Alison Reynolds and David Lewis eventually concluded that the biggest factor in whether or not teams worked together effectively was greater diversity in the ways participants approached problem-solving.

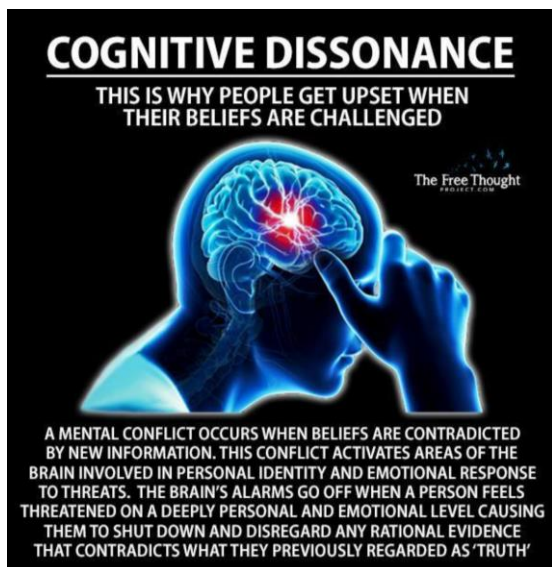
They measured the groups’ diversity in terms of how they “engaged with and reacted to change” and asked those groups to complete exercises that “require the group to formulate and execute a strategy to achieve a specified outcome, against the clock.” They found that those groups with the least cognitive diversity were the most likely to struggle to complete the task, and the ones with greater cognitive diversity completed it more quickly.

In fact, they believe that this cognitive diversity is even more important than identity diversity in predicting whether teams will work together effectively.

“Intuitively, this makes sense,” they write. “Tackling new challenges requires a balance between applying what we know and discovering what we don’t know that might be useful. It also requires individual application of specialized expertise and the ability to step back and look at the bigger picture.”

This balance is exactly what cognitive diversity provides in the workplace.

## Cognitive Diversity: Eliminates “Groupthink”



Along with helping teams solve problems more quickly and effectively, cognitive diversity also prevents the serious, innovation-killing side effects of the absence of cognitive diversity.

Namely, when everyone on the team tends to think the same way and approach problems with the same mental tools, it tends to create an echo chamber.

As humans, we're already wired to recognize and reinforce ideas that are the most similar to our own, and dismiss conflicting ideas. This is an example of cognitive bias, and it happens subconsciously. So when no one is around to object or even present other ways of looking at a problem, this tendency toward groupthink gets even stronger.

There are other natural tendencies toward groupthink in companies and organizations, as well. Specifically, even though one might instinctively approach a problem differently than their peers or have a conflicting perspective, many of them keep quiet and agree with the status quo in order to advance their own careers. In some cases, this pressure to conform may even be happening subconsciously.

This tendency to conform will be especially pronounced if employees have learned through leaders' words and actions that conflict and disagreement are not tolerated. This can be quite damaging, because respectful conflict keeps your company or organization innovative and in-touch.

*“What happens in a groupthink company when something new/big arrives, like mobile or digital? One person says ‘Pfft, that’s a fad’ and everyone else agrees. There’s no cognitive diversity.” Ted Bauer*



## Cognitive Diversity: Next Steps

Increasing the level of cognitive diversity on your team might be a little more complicated than increasing the levels of demographic diversity (although that, too, can be a complicated process that takes place over years and not months).

You can try to recruit and hire for cognitive diversity, sure. But you can also try to bring out the cognitive diversity that might already be hidden amongst your existing team.

This requires cultivating a workplace culture where conflicting viewpoints are welcomed and listened to with respect. Leaders should be actively looking for employees who disagree with them and valuing the contributions they make.

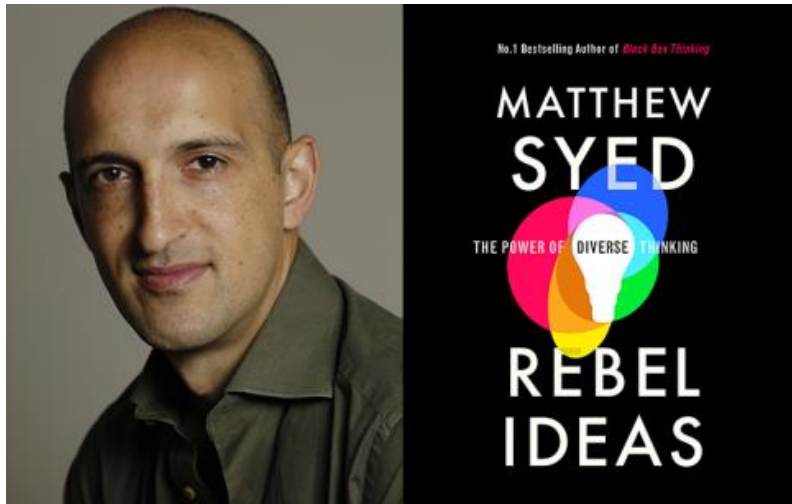
This mindset runs counter to some traditional management strategies and perhaps even counter to human nature. But unless a special effort is made to cultivate cognitive diversity, your company or organization may find itself falling behind competitors and out of touch with the people it's trying to serve.

Overhauling your workplace culture to one where dissent and healthy conflict are welcomed won't happen overnight. Leaders need to recognize the importance of cognitive diversity and be fully on board with efforts to increase it. And employees need to understand the importance of listening and apologizing, two of the most essential skills when it comes to creating a psychological safe workplace.

With adopting a growth mindset and being open one will learn — and more importantly, practice — the appropriate ways to respond to conflict and bad behavior.



## Book of the Quarter: Rebel Ideas



Ideas are everywhere, but those with the greatest problem-solving, business-transforming, and life-changing potential are often hard to identify. Even when we recognize good ideas, applying them to everyday obstacles-whether in the workplace, our homes, or our civic institutions-can seem insurmountable. According to Matthew Syed, it doesn't have to be this way.

In *Rebel Ideas*, Syed argues that our brainpower as individuals isn't enough. To tackle problems from climate change to economic decline, we'll need to employ the power of "cognitive diversity." Drawing on psychology, genetics, and beyond, Syed uses real-world scenarios including the failings of the CIA before 9/11 and a communication disaster at the peak of Mount Everest to introduce us to the true power of thinking differently.

*Rebel Ideas* will strengthen any kind of team, while including advice on how, as individuals, we can embrace the potential of an "outsider mind-set" as our greatest asset.

*Matthew Syed is the Sunday Times bestselling author of Black Box Thinking, Bounce, and The Greatest. He writes an award-winning newspaper column in The Times and is the host of the hugely successful BBC podcast Flintoff, Savage and the Ping Pong Guy.*

## National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

The federal government recently passed legislation to make September 30th a federal statutory holiday called the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. This day provides an opportunity for all Canadians to recognize and commemorate the legacy of Residential Schools.

September 30th has been recognized for many years as "Orange Shirt Day," a day to create meaningful discussion about the effects of Residential Schools and the legacy they have left behind. Late September is the time of year in which Indigenous children were taken from their homes to the schools. The symbol of the orange shirt was chosen following a reunion of former students who attended the St. Joseph Mission Residential School in BC. Phyllis (Jack) Webstad shared her story of her first day at Residential School when her new orange shirt, bought by her grandmother, was taken from her as a six-year old girl.

The Centre for Indigenous Health Research and Education, the UGME Indigenous Program, and the Office of Strategic Planning and Implementation are organizing several online awareness activities during the week of September 27th to the 30th to help everyone learn about the legacy of the Residential School system and consider our shared role in reconciliation, in particular by implementing the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

***An agenda of activities for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation at the Faculty of Medicine will be shared as soon as it becomes available.***

For more information:

Orange Shirt Day - [orangeshirtday.org](http://orangeshirtday.org)

National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation - <https://nctr.ca/>





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## Upcoming Observances: August 2021

### August | Caregivers Month

**2 Civic Holiday.** The August Civic Holiday is known by a variety of names across Canada and is celebrated according to local municipal traditions and history. (Canada)

**9 International Day of the World's Indigenous People.** Pronounced by the UN, this is a day to promote and protect the rights of the world's Indigenous populations and recognize the achievements and contributions that Indigenous peoples make to improve world issues such as environmental protection. (International)

**10 Muharram.** The first month of the Islamic calendar. It is one of the four sacred months of the year during which warfare is forbidden. It is held to be the second holiest month, after Ramadan. (Islam)

**12 International Youth Day (IYD).** Held on August 12, this is a day to celebrate and mainstream young peoples' voices, actions, and initiatives, as well as their meaningful, universal, and equitable engagement.

**13-15 Obon** is a Japanese Buddhist custom to honour one's spiritual ancestors. For areas which follow the lunar calendar, Obon is celebrated from August 13-15. (Buddhist)

**15 The Assumption of Mary into Heaven** (often shortened to the Assumption) is, according to the beliefs of the Catholic Church, Eastern and Oriental Orthodoxy, the bodily taking up of the Virgin Mary into Heaven at the end of her earthly life. (Christian)

**15 National Acadian Day.** Observed to celebrate Acadian culture. (Canada)

**17 Marcus Garvey Day.** A day which celebrates the birthday of the Jamaican politician and activist who is revered by Rastafarians. Garvey is credited with starting the Back to Africa movement, which encouraged those of African descent to return to the land of their ancestors during and after slavery in North America. (Rastafarian)

**19 World Humanitarian Day.** This day is dedicated to humanitarians worldwide, as well as to increase public understanding of humanitarian assistance activities. (International)

**21 Raksha Bandhan.** The Hindu festival celebrates the love, bond and duty that exists between brothers and sisters. It can also be used to celebrate any brother-sister-like relationships even for those who are not biologically related. (Hindu)

**23 International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition.** A day designated by the UNESCO to memorialize the transatlantic slave trade. (International)

**29 Krishna Janmashtami.** A Hindu celebration of the birthday of the Hindu deity, Krishna, known for giving the message of the Gita, establishing vital and guiding Hindu principles. (Hindu)

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## Upcoming Observances: September 2021

### September | World Alzheimer's Month

**5 International Day of Charity.** This is a UN designated day which promotes charitable efforts made to alleviate poverty worldwide. (International)

**6 Labour Day.** This day celebrates the achievements of workers and advocates for their rights and privileges.

**6-8 Rosh Hashanah.** The Jewish New Year celebrates the creation of the first man and woman, and the first day of the Jewish New Year. (Jewish)

**8 International Literacy Day.** A day to raise people's awareness of and concern for literacy issues in the world. (International)

**10 Ganesh Chaturthi.** This Hindu festival commemorates the birthday of Lord Ganesha. (Hindu)

**10 World Suicide Prevention Day.** World Suicide Prevention Day is observed on September 10 each year to promote worldwide action to prevent suicides. Various events and activities are held during this occasion to raise awareness that suicide is a major preventable cause of premature death. (International)

**15-16 Yom Kippur.** The Jewish Day of Atonement which comprises a 25-hour fast whereby people refrain from working, eating, and drinking. Synagogue services are also attended in worship of this sacred day. (Jewish)

**20-26 International Week of the Deaf.** Celebrated annually across the world during the next last full week of September since 2009.

**20-27 Sukkot.** Commonly translated as Festival of Tabernacles also known as Chag HaAsif, the Festival of Ingathering, is a biblical Jewish holiday celebrated on the 15th day of the seventh month, Tishrei (varies from late September to late October). (Jewish)

**21 International Day of Peace.** This is a day to recognize the efforts of those who have worked hard to end conflict and promote peace. It is also considered to be a day of ceasefire- personal or political. (International)

**21 Mid-Autumn Festival (Moon Cake Festival).** A harvest festival occurring on the 15th day of the eighth month of the Han Calendar. It is commonly referred to as the Moon Festival due to the full moon observed that evening.

**22 Fall Equinox.** According to the Wiccans this represents the first day of Fall and one of two days in the year in which there are approximately equal amounts of day and nighttime. (International)

**23 International Day of Sign Languages.** Celebrated annually across the world on 23 September every year along with International Week of the Deaf. (International)

**27 Shmini Atzeret.** Literally meaning "The assembly of the eighth day", this holiday is a celebration observed after Sukkot. (Jewish)

**28-29 Simchat Torah.** A Jewish holiday that marks the completion of the annual Torah readings and begins a new reading cycle. (Jewish)

**30 National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (Orange Shirt Day).** This event commemorates the residential school experience. It honours Canada's commitment to reconciliation. The date was chosen because this was the time of year children were taken from their homes and placed in residential schools. (Canada)

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## Upcoming Observances: October 2021

**October | Autism Awareness Month | Disability Employment Awareness Month | Hispanic and Latino Heritage Month | Mental Health Awareness Month | Women's History Month (Canada)**

**1 International Day of Older Persons.** An international day to recognize the contributions of older persons / seniors and examine the issues that affect their lives.(International)

**4 St. Francis Day.** Feast day for St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals and environment celebrated by many Catholic denominations. (Christian)

**4 National Day of Action for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.** This is a day to stand in solidarity with Indigenous families and communities to honour the lives of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls whose lives have been cut short by violence. (Canada)

**5 World Teacher's Day.** A day that celebrates the role teachers play in providing quality education to all levels. This enables children and adults of all ages to learn to take part in and contribute to their local community and global society.(International)

**6-14 Navaratri.** A Hindu festival of nine nights in worship of the Hindu goddess Durga, celebrated with various traditions and rituals in honour of a different form of the goddess each night. (Hindu)

**10 World Mental Health Day.** A day with the overall objective of raising awareness of mental health issues around the world and mobilizing efforts in support of mental health.(International)

**11 International Day of the Girl Child.** This is a day which promotes girls' rights and highlights gender inequalities that remain between girls and boys. This day gives governments and organizations the opportunity to raise public awareness about gender bias and discrimination directed at girls.(International)

**11 National Coming Out Day.** An annual LGBTQ2SA+ awareness day. (United States)

**11 Thanksgiving.** A day of giving thanks to the harvest and blessings of the previous year. (Canada)

**15 Dussehra.** A Hindu celebration on the last day of Navaratri, celebrating the victory of good over evil. (Hindu)

**18 Mawlid al Nabi.** A Muslim celebration that commemorates the birth of Islamic prophet Muhammad in the third month of the Islamic calendar. It is recognized as a national holiday in many Muslim-prevalent countries around the globe. (Islam)

**24 Karva Chauth** is a one-day festival celebrated by Hindu women four days after Purnima (a full moon) in the month of Kartika. (Hindu)

**27 Lhabab Düchen** is one of the four Buddhist festivals commemorating four events in the life of the Buddha, according to Tibetan traditions. Lhabab Düchen occurs on the 22nd day of the ninth lunar month according to Tibetan calendar and widely celebrated in Tibet and Bhutan. (Buddhist)

**31 Halloween.** A North American celebration on the last day of October. On Halloween, many dress in costumes and children go door to door asking for candy, called "trick-or-treating".