

**Cognitive
Diversity
Institute**

**Research and promotion of Cognitive
Diversity® in the information age.**

Cognitive diversity describes the ability to take on multiple perspectives and apply different information processing styles to solving hyper-complex problems.

Lightpaper 0.1b

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Abstract

This document is meant to give a brief overview on the Cognitive Diversity Institute, its mission and the reasoning behind the initiative. The document does neither claim completeness nor universal truth. It is in constant work in progress. Its main purpose is to provide more context to the reader.

A very short Introduction

Information bubbles, oversimplification and hyper-complex challenges have disrupted humankind's ability to take adequate decisions in a hyper-complex world.

The **Cognitive Diversity Institute** researches & promotes [cognitive diversity](#) to meet these challenges and provides a way to stay actionable in our information age.

We support individuals, public and private organizations in

- **unlocking** their cognitive diversity potential for better decision making,
- **becoming** more resilient to crisis and
- **developing** common and complex enough narratives that can help guide humanity into a future where humans, technology and nature can thrive.

We do this through:

- **Raising awareness** for cognitive diversity to counter the proliferation of fracturing societies caused by echo chambers and information bubbles.
- **Helping organizations** at implementing cognitive diversity in their decision making process.
- **Creating a platform** in form of summits (e.g. the Revision Summit), workshops and seminars to bring together a network of highly diverse minds, leveraging cognitive diversity to address the most pressing problems of our hyper-complex world.

We strive for a future, which effectively builds on humanities differences and harnesses every individual's uniqueness. It is our vision to establish a global movement offering alternative narratives, which build on interconnectedness, community and collective intelligence, fostering an inclusive and diverse world. A world where we are not driven by the idea of 'survival of the fittest', but rather by a desire to collectively find the correct answers to the hyper-complex challenges we are facing together as humanity.

Background

The Cognitive Diversity Institute is driven by the awareness that a complex world demands complex answers. Today, we stand on an essential crossroad with new technologies reshaping the very idea of humanity and nature, but often enough the current discourse is not apt to the world's complexity. The impact of the actions we take today and over the next 10 years will strongly shape the world we will live in. Therefore we need to be cautious of oversimplifications and truly ask ourselves: What type of world do we want this to be?!

Acknowledging that we live in times of great potential the Cognitive Diversity Institute (CDI) builds on the success of the Revision Summit, which has been initiated by [Amatus](#) in 2018. [Amatus](#) identified the strong need for - and extensively supported the creation of Revision and subsequently the CDI as action driven platforms to proactively bring together leaders of all sectors to engage in a discourse about emerging technologies and foster cognitive diversity in the creation of future narratives and decision making processes on our future.

The importance of Cognitive Diversity

While we have reached abundance of data and information, we have not yet mastered new ways to collectively understand complexity and mirror it in our decision making. Not only on the technological front can we observe a growing complexity of things, but in areas such as globalisation, climate change or economic crisis as well. New technologies on the one hand yield new approaches to this complexity, but on the other hand have also contributed to the creation of echo chambers and information bubbles leading to oversimplification. This has accelerated disinformation and polarised and fragmented society, instead of uniting people and skills to focus on today's most pressing problems.

Therefore we have to ask ourselves, which approaches, technologies and methods we can use to cope with such hyper-complex environments and set free the collective intelligence of interconnected networks?

While big data or artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain or other emerging technologies already offer us some potential solutions, in order to really succeed we have to explicitly make use of the massive intelligence we already have among us.

“To engage cognitive diversity we need to encourage people to reveal and deploy their different modes of thinking. This means leaders will have to get much better at building their team’s sense of psychological safety.”¹

Cognitive diversity (attitudes, opinions, information, and values) describes the ability to take on multiple perspectives and apply different information processing styles to solving complex problems². Established and supported effectively it increases the capabilities of individuals, groups, organizations and societies to address complex phenomena and deal with novel challenges.

So far, the contemporary diversity debate has been centered around demographic diversity, focusing on increasing the differences of gender, ethnicity or age within groups or organizations. One motivation was to create equal opportunity, regardless of background, another was to increase the problem solving capacity of teams. The former of course still holds as a premise and a political goal, the latter has been contested and disapproved of over the last couple of years. As for now, research has shown there exists no positive correlation between demographic diversity and group performance. The contrary is true for cognitive diversity³. Groups bringing together cognitively diverse people enable themselves to reach higher performance levels when dealing with complex tasks and unknown situations.

Alison Reynolds and David Lewis research, published in the [Harvard Business Review](#), give insights on this matter. Running multiple tests with executive teams having to solve complex strategic tasks under time pressure, they revealed that high demographic diversity (gender, age, race) in teams had no correlation to the teams results. Teams with proven cognitive diversity though exhibited a positive correlation adding to the groups different perspectives and knowledge processing styles.⁴

We still too often underuse the power of diverse cognitive perspectives. Therefore, explicitly assembling diversity of ideas through bringing together a cognitively diverse group of people should be our primary task when trying to address the urgent challenges of today’s hyper-complex world.

¹ Alison Reynolds and David Lewis 2017:

<https://hbr.org/2017/03/teams-solve-problems-faster-when-theyre-more-cognitively-diverse>

² <https://hbr.org/2017/03/teams-solve-problems-faster-when-theyre-more-cognitively-diverse>

³ <https://spssi.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/josi.12163>

⁴ Alison Reynolds and David Lewis 2017:

<https://hbr.org/2017/03/teams-solve-problems-faster-when-theyre-more-cognitively-diverse>

With our cognitive diversity method (CDM) we propose a proven concept to establish the needed amount of diversity of mindsets and ideas to create highly performing groups apt for addressing hyper-complex phenomena.

CDM builds on psychological and social theory combining it with today's possibilities in data technology. We offer a way to display cognitive biases, mind sets, values and attitudes within individuals, groups or organisations. Building on these insights, we use the concepts of the CDM to support organizations and individuals to develop a higher degree of cognitive diversity and develop an inclusive culture for different mindsets to thrive together.

Embracing this multiplicity will help us to tackle today's most pressing problems. It can also set a framework for the future of work, where we will have the possibilities to additionally enhance our decision making capabilities through the help of AI and big data. Rather than fearing to be overtaken in cognitive abilities by a singular hyper-intelligent AI, cognitive diversity offers a tangible approach to unlock our own next stage of thinking and creates a space for AI to support our work.

The Question regarding our future

By adhering to the things said above, the importance of cognitive diversity for understanding complexity, yielding the right answers to it and being innovative regarding today's challenges, became clear. Additionally to that, It can create the opportunity to engage into an inclusive discussion asking the question

- how we want the future to look like?-

drawing upon the diversest approaches possible and through that creating the best ideas.

Unfortunately though, in the face of the overwhelming amount of technological possibilities, information overflow and our daily challenges, we sometimes forget to ask this question, innovating and developing without a clear common goal.

Innovation became a sort of positivist mantra with us venerating logic and reason as our new gods, disregarding the metaphysical, the introspective and intuitive. Gandhi used to talk disparagingly of "dreaming of systems so perfect that no-one will need to be good".

Why ask for virtues, which humankind may never acquire, when scientific rationality and technical competence is all that is needed?

It seems as if we are trying to implement this dream with the powers of science and technology. But is this actually the only kind of vision we want to dream regarding our future? Are we enabling the right cognitive diversity to find correct answers to such a complex thing? The CDI wants to engage its methods and skills to support answering this question.

The power of technology

Thinking about the future today also implies thinking about digital technologies. New technologies always have the tendency to change the way we do things and subsequently change the structures of society. Over the last decades new digital technologies changed power structures, our ways of communication, offering huge numbers of innovations and new forms of convenience. But where is this leading to?

On the one hand, in the first wave of the internet in 1996 John Perry Barlow published the famous [Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace](https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence), a prime example of envisioning the future in the realm of technology. He envisioned the internet and new technologies to create a space where individuals would be liberated from the monopoly of government and corporate power⁵. The internet 2.0 has offered us space to imagine what a P2P world could look like. Most recently with blockchain technology we have even established a distributed infrastructural technology with the potential of shifting the understanding of ownership and governance - all being specific visions and ideas of possible futures.

On the other hand, already today parts of the technology industry have grown to dominate many aspects of human life and in the internet sphere power concentration has even increased. Algorithms owned by private companies bias online communication, organisations and autocratic states use data to manipulate political campaigns. Moreover does spreading disinformation fragment societies keeping it in a constant state of skepticism, as Adam Curtis describes in his 2016 documentary *Hypernormalisation*⁶. This feeds into a growing intolerance for diversity of opinion and ideas additionally threatened by filter bubbles, rarely challenging us to leave our personal comfort zone of an ever growing confirmation bias.

At the societal level this leads to distrust in institutions and entire groups of people. At the individual level, we are seeing rising levels of burnout, apathy and mental illness.

⁵ Barlow 1996, <https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence>.

⁶ Curtis 2016, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HyperNormalisation>.

Judging from this latter perspective it actually seems we are living in dark times and creating even darker ones to come. It sometimes seems our reality slowly manifests narratives of science fiction books such as George Orwell's *1984* or Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*.

How does this comply to principles we want to live by? What future do we actually envision? And how can we develop a discourse that generates the best narratives apt to our world's complexity?

Cognitive Diversity - meeting complexity with complexity

We believe that a society that does not make space for empathy, pluralism, dialogue and diverse forms of life to interconnectedly coexist, has a great chance of becoming a big delusion for their citizens leading to a dystopian future.

While there are many individuals and organisations already working on alternative futures there is a tendency of each staying in their community and information bubbles. Not always, but often enough the narratives that emerge keep their community's bias and specialize on a specific challenge. This in itself is not a problem, unless these narratives claim universal adoption, allegedly solving many more challenges they were designed for. Following, this creates a void of thinking diversity in public discourse.

But today's interconnected world does not allow for oversimplification concerning its future. What we need are narratives, that mirror this complexity, combining the different perspectives into a powerful tale that we can use to venture into unknown waters. Cognitive diversity offers an approach to bring together the different communities, meeting complexity with complexity. We actively open up ways to exit information bubbles and community silos, weaving the multiple perspectives on the future into a common discourse. The world needs new narratives to rethink its future. Cognitive diversity enables us to create these narratives, adhering to the complexity of the world, its people and our common story.