

The ABCs of Work: Diversity

Law Department Management

Career Development



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Is there a formula for success at work? Are there simple rules that you can follow to increase your chances of getting what you want? Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau thinks the answer is yes. In this series of articles, *The ABCs of Work*, he shares the formula with you.

Greetings readers and congratulations! Simply by virtue of being here you are already on the path to increasing your odds of success. While luck plays a gigantic role in life, that does not mean you are helpless to control your fate. If you want to think of it this way, the tips we'll explore are ways to increase your odds that luck will find you.

Today's topic is **Diversity**.

Last time we talked about Continuous Improvement, in the sense that small actions taken

consistently add up to big results. Today we discuss a great way to make course corrections along the way: diversity.

Diversity helps keep us humble

Diversity, in this article, means one thing above all others: diversity of thought. This may well come about from having a team comprising different cultures, genders, or races. But those characteristics do not guarantee diversity of thought. It is entirely possible to encounter monolithic thinking in a team that ostensibly seems very diverse.

Diversity of thought comes from two qualities: being open to the possibility that your idea is not necessarily the best one and allowing yourself to be confronted with multiple ideas.

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While I can state the two conditions simply enough, it is no small thing to achieve diversity of thought in our busy workplace. Why, you ask? Well, the very busyness of work is one hurdle. We are pressured to performand complete tasks. This means working efficiently and productively. It means making quick decisions and not second-guessing ourselves. That all cuts directly against any notion of mulling over multiple ideas and leaving open the possibility our preferred path may be suboptimal.

Although I am normally the biggest proponent of efficiency above all things, today I encourage you to consider slowing down. Make yourself inefficient, if only for a short while, to improve the end product’s ultimate quality. How so? We have fantastic and convenient access to humanity’s combined knowledge and experience: virtually everything that humankind has thought and done.



Meaningful ideation can often be a twisting, winding journey. Don't get discouraged! Artwork by Peiling Lee / *Shutterstock.com*

What are the chances that, without consulting anything but your inner thoughts, you already know everything you need to optimally solve this problem? If we're honest, we should be humble indeed. Chances are quite good that someone, somewhere has another insight on the topic.

And even if you do happen to possess excellent knowledge and experience on a topic, how likely is it that your first formulation of a solution is perfect? Really? There is *nothing at all* you can improve in your approach?

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Start by accepting your likely fallibility. You may be near perfect, but unless you can eliminate the "near," consider this easy solution: Do not be deeply committed to your initial idea. Be humble by allowing the possibility that there may be other solutions. That there may be better solutions.

Then go in search of those solutions by exposing yourself to other inputs and ideas. Research, read, talk to colleagues. And, crucially, do not go in search of confirmation for why your idea is correct. That is the default we easily slip into.

Remember, you are only weakly tied to your starting proposition. As such, you are looking for contrary and contradictory information. What could cause your initial hypothesis to be flawed? Could you tweak your idea, improve the implementation, anticipate a stumbling block?

Are there downsides to diversity of thought?

Invite uncertainty into your thinking, but not self-doubt. After canvassing the landscape for improvements, you must return to decision and implementation mode. Switching back and forth between open doubting and confident action takes practice. Most people tend to linger at one end of the spectrum: seeking more information while unable to make a decision. The other grows confident in their powers and closes to outside input.

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Stay in balance. Because people mostly tend towards confidence, I'll recommend one helpful tool. This is to say often, even if just to yourself in your inner thoughts, "But I could be wrong." Just allowing the possibility helps you remember to seek out more diverse inputs and ideas.

Honorable mentions

Leveraging a single tip to drive work success is a heavy lift, even a tip as important as diversity of thought. Our formula will necessarily be incomplete. But the formula has impact, and more so because we've kept things simple. Here, to finish, are some honorable mention tips to serve as food for thought:

Data — We need to do more than rely on our intuitions. Gathering data and measuring our progress is a great way to check whether we are really on track.

Delivery — It does not matter how hard we work, even though it sure feels like our sweat and tears should count for something. Ultimately, our performance will be measured by results. Do you reliably deliver on your promises? If yes, you will advance. If not, all your early mornings and late nights are for naught.

Detachment — In *The ABCs of Work*, we are exploring all the ways to improve performance at work. This can lead to helpful focus and intensity, but that comes with a downside, which is forgetting that you have a life outside work. Work hard, but don't be a workaholic. Enjoy what you do, but work should not be your only enjoyment. Detachment means that you see work in its proper perspective, not that you don't care.

Be well.

Question, comment? Contact Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau.

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James Bellerjeau



Lecturer

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Bellerjeau served for two decades as group general counsel for Mettler-Toledo International Inc., an S&P 500 company with its worldwide headquarters in Greifensee, Switzerland. He then led Mettler-Toledo's global Sustainability program for several years through June 2021.

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