

MBTI Assessment Can Improve Communication, Expert Says

January 17, 2006 - Cari McLean,
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For more than 50 years, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator assessment has been one of the most widely used personality evaluations by organizations worldwide to help improve individual and team performance, recruit and retain top talent, develop leadership skills and reduce conflict in the workplace. And even though understanding and recognizing people's differences and preferences definitely improves communication, HR professionals have struggled to quantify the financial impact of their leadership development, teambuilding and other communication initiatives.

According to Robert Weigand, director of management training and development at St. Luke's Hospital & Health Network, the ability to communicate with co-workers, patients and their family members is critical to delivering quality care and successfully running a health care organization. With four hospitals, more than 41,000 annual admissions, 1,100 physicians, approximately 5,000 employees and 1,000 volunteers, St. Luke's Hospital & Health Network provides ongoing education for all of its employees—especially its leaders—and the MBTI assessment is a critical part of its education. "When you come to St. Luke's as leader, it is our responsibility to help continue to grow your leadership skills on an ongoing basis," Weigand said. "We are very mindful in carving out experiences that are going to be helpful and when people come into our organization they are involved in a six-month leadership and development plan that assess their leadership skills."

In fact, Weigand personally coaches new employees, gets them accustomed to St. Luke's culture and equips them with the skills to understand people and how they work and act in an environment. "We do extensive work in the MBTI," he said. "We have used it extensively here and used it as one way to assess gains through the lens of personality type. The MBTI is a way of assessing what we have learned of application of type, and one of the things that improve when people get to know and apply it is that communication improves between people because you get to understand the person's type preference and how you need to flex out if you are not the same type."

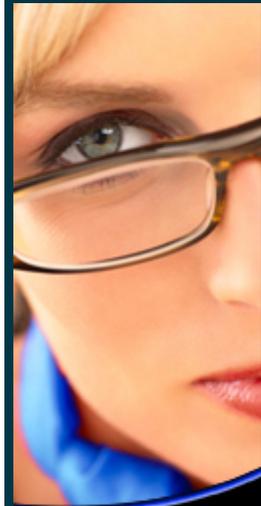
And because Weigand has seen the successful results of using MBTI first hand, he and Richard J. Wagner, professor of management at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, wrote the book, "Measuring Results of MBTI Type Training: ROI in Action." The book provides a way to assess the changes that can occur in an organization by evaluating people's personality. "We chose the MBTI because we have used it extensively at St. Luke's, but you can use our resource with other things besides the MBTI," Weigand said. "But basically you look at what areas could change from using the MBTI in your organization and there are seven areas."

The seven areas include partnering and mentoring, communication, problem solving, type flexing, customer service, performance contracting and workforce diversity. And because MBTI assessment highlights people's differences and preferences, MBTI educated workers and leaders are able to identify and adapt to internal and external customers' needs. Therefore, this ability to adapt will foster a healthy, productive work environment that will lead to improved problem solving, better customer service and business growth.

However, according to Weigand, the only way an organization can actually quantify the return on learning and development investments is by initially, continuously and subsequently asking the right questions. "If you ask the right question and you look for the data in the right areas—and

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this is a real analysis, you cannot fudge it—you can find and extrapolate the data out and then use that data to compare the application process of MBTI to the ROI,” Weigand said. “You must mine the data, determine the behavioral results of the training, determine how changes affect cost and then link behavioral measurements to those things that are already being measured, like productivity.”

So if the right questions are asked and the leadership and development initiatives created accordingly, positive results are likely to be realized. “We have trauma doctors here that have all taken the MBTI and all of them have become so savvy with this that it has helped them tremendously with their work relationships as well as the overall functionality of the trauma unit,” Weigand said. “Helping a trauma surgeon understand the type of staff that he works with—as individuals—has helped communication, and the bottom line is that when you have communication everybody benefits.”

Weigand stressed that such results and benefits are not merely realized in external and internal customer-based scenarios, but also in performance management functions, such as retention. For example, if a department’s director is a poor communicator and turnover is problem in that department, it is likely that he or she struggles to flex out of their MBTI personality type. Therefore, if he or she were MBTI educated, the director would be able to adapt to the workers’ personalities and improve communication—inevitably resulting in increased retention.

“We are at a point right now—and again it is an ongoing piece of work—that we are approaching where we want to be. We have made steady gains over the years, but it is absolutely an ongoing effort,” Weigand said. “At St. Luke’s Hospital & Health Network, we value soft-skill improvement because that is what continues to bring people back here. It is an ongoing, everyday, day-in and day-out, conscious and mindful effort to understand people and how they work in their environment.”

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