

How senior leaders used the MBTI and FIRO tools strengthen the way they work together

Each individual leader in a talented team has been promoted from within the company. How do they become aware of – and act upon – any blind spots?

Hotel Chocolat's senior leadership team has 11 heads of department and three managing directors, all of whom are 'home-grown' leaders – progressing through the ranks of the organization via their technical specialisms.

The company's Head of HR Rasila Vaghjiani worked with the senior leadership team to identify areas for improvement. They were very aware that the team, while talented and successful, included no external appointments, and there was a feeling that this might have produced some blind spots, with each person grounded in their own insular departmental background. They agreed that a leadership program focusing on the development of behavioural competencies would be extremely beneficial, and Rasila embarked on designing a program looking at self-awareness, situational leadership and breaking down interpersonal barriers.

Solution

Vaghjiani, who qualified in both the FIRO® and MBTI® instruments, devised an in-depth leadership program revolving around these two tools for the key leadership group of 13 managers. By combining the two tools, she was able to get a dual view of how people experienced their MBTI preferences, and of how the FIRO needs motivated their behaviour.

Business Challenges

- Leadership development for technical specialists
- Competency-based improvements for senior staff
- Greater self-awareness and knowledge of blind spots
- Improved cross-departmental functioning

Company Profile

Luxury chocolatier and cocoa grower Hotel Chocolat has been selling original, top-of-the-range chocolate since 2004. Starting as an online retailer, they now have over 70 stores across the UK, Europe and America, as well as a top-notch hotel at their chocolate plantation on the Rabot Estate in St Lucia.

Hotel Chocolat

The first stage of the program was a 360-degree feedback appraisal process, where Vaghjiani gathered information about the managers' performance from their managers, their peers and their direct reports. This feedback would be used to benchmark individual performance, and give the leaders some honest information to use as a starting point for their action plans and development journey.

Individual MBTI feedback sessions then took place in preparation for a 'how to apply the MBTI' group workshop. This workshop focused on using the insights from the MBTI framework to address the actions coming from the 360 process, looking particularly at the self-awareness it gave the leaders about their own natural style. "It was very well received," comments Vaghjiani. "The team got a lot of value from the MBTI session, which, like the other sessions, was geared very much towards the specific audience, with a lot of new activities."

Once the group had mastered the basics of the MBTI framework and started to see how this could be directly applicable to improving their work, the FIRO tool was introduced. Vaghjiani says: "The FIRO concepts really stood out for this group. The results showed everyone why people do what they do, and why they behave in a certain way. It's direct and honest – just like the company culture at Hotel Chocolat – taking away a lot of the mystery of why individuals behave the way they do." This demystification of individual drivers and motivators really helped the group grasp what leadership behaviours they adopted by default, and started them thinking about different, more productive ways of operating as leaders.

She helped the senior teams further embed their new learning with personalized leadership coaching for each participant, to encourage ongoing development.

In addition, the team participated in a practical teambuilding exercise to practice their newly acquired leadership skills. This involved spending two days on three boats on the sea. They were challenged to learn how to do everything on the boat, from rigging to cooking to rescuing a dummy, and to keep the three vessels

Solution

- MBTI training to understand personality differences and raise self-awareness
- FIRO training to improve interactions with each other

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Rasila Vaghjiani,
Head of HR, Hotel
Chocolat

Hotel Chocolat

within 200 metres of each other at all times. Vaghjiani comments: “It took people away from their comfort zone. It was a very wet and cold two days in which the lessons in self-awareness, understanding and mutual appreciation really came together. People couldn’t depend on their technical specialisms because they were in a different context – and their FIRO needs and MBTI preferences were brought into sharp relief.”

Results

Vaghjiani and the team of managers (as well as their respective teams) have seen considerable changes in behaviour. People are actively adapting their behaviour in the light of the insights from the sessions, with an awareness of other people’s needs, as well as the skills to incorporate a range of viewpoints to make the best business decisions.

“People’s approaches are now completely different. Their teams are saying ‘Something has changed, but we don’t know what it is!’ Our managers have become more inclusive and understanding. Subtle changes have made big differences – for example, people have become aware, when giving feedback, how they would want to receive it, and incorporating this into the feedback they now give.”

With a new understanding of the science behind behaviour, managers are willing to be flexible, to empathize and to not hide behind their default ways of doing things.

Keeping the lines of communication open has also helped to unite and bond the management team – so people are more willing to talk things through with their peers and sort out any problems.

The positive effects are so obvious that other teams are now asking for similar development. Vaghjiani plans to cascade a simplified version of the training, commenting: “These will be more focused on the basics: self-awareness in the areas of conflict management, change management and decision-making.”

Results

- Greater inclusion of different viewpoints
- Less dependence on technical specialisms
- Strengthened interpersonal relationships



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