

Shifting team performance with a deeper use of the MBTI tool

A team of remote managers needs to move on from being a new team to being a high-performing team that delivers results for the business. Key to this is how they communicate and make decisions.

In 2013, John Lewis created a new function within their organizational structure. The function provides confidential support for the Partners – i.e. the permanent employees – in areas such as financial difficulty, emotional well-being, practical help and signposting the other expert departments, organizations or charities, preparing for and being retired and more.

The management team consists of five people who work remotely and in different locations. Their development training within the team's first year focused on the team as a whole: delivering new ways of working, embedding the functions, and making sure that the team was settling in. The next stage was to go beyond settling in and to start performing.

Solution

The head of the Partner Support Function, who had already had an MBTI® Step II™ feedback session, wanted the team to find their strengths so they could work better as a team. The objective was, to use the terminology of Bruce Tuckman's team development model, to go from storming to norming to performing. The team already had MBTI knowledge, and a Step II team training day presented itself as the best option for team development.

Business Challenges

- New management team of remote workers
- Conflict management/handling
- Independent decision-making

Company Profile

The John Lewis Partnership is one of a growing number of businesses with an employee-owned structure. It has 85,500 staff – Partners – who own 50 John Lewis shops across the UK, 353 Waitrose supermarkets, an online and catalogue business, a production unit and a farm. Partners share in the benefits and profits of a business that puts them first.

John Lewis

Each team member completed a Step II questionnaire and had an individual two-hour feedback session before the training day. To make sure that a connection between personal feedback and group training was made, Alison Cripps – John Lewis Development Facilitator, who delivered the training – asked each person to remember a ‘light-bulb moment’ from the feedback and be ready to share it on the training day.

The team also agreed on two applications to explore in the afternoon session: conflict and decision-making.

MBTI Step II: new insights

To provoke a good initial discussion, the group shared Step II profiles, out-of-preference scores and personal light-bulb moments. One team member, who was passionate about consistency in performance management and was perceived as a Thinking type, surprised everyone with her Feeling preference. Her insistence on rules was because she wanted things to be fair for everyone.

Identity and flipside

Step II data identifies a team’s collective type – its identity – and its flipside (i.e. blind spots/development areas). For this team we have:

- Team identity = ENFP (clearest preferences: pressure-prompted, tender, accepting, accommodating, spontaneous)
- Team flipside = ISTJ (development areas: critical, tough, concrete, reasonable, experiential, early starting)

Here, the implications start to emerge for this small team. The team’s P preference, and critical/tough development areas, could explain the lack of closure with decision-making.

Conflict and decision-making

Meetings, and individuals’ differing styles, had given rise to some points of tension, so the big outcome from this part of the training was clarity around underlying preferences and facets. One source of tension was a person who was perceived as being challenging, yet Step II revealed this to be a clear questioning preference – curious,

Solution

- MBTI Step II program to focus on deeper personality type differences

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Anne Buckley,
Team Leader,
John Lewis

John Lewis

rather than challenging. Similarly, understanding the team's identity and overall E preference meant they could begin to understand why the two introverts might feel pressured and less able to contribute. Making sure that everyone has the opportunity to share became a key development point.

The team had been cautious around making decisions. They tended to talk about a lot of things but not to have any decisive actions – possibly because everyone was new. The decision-making exercise provided a framework where they could ask themselves bold questions: do we need to make a decision collectively or individually? Does this decision really need to go up to head of department?

Results

One of the aims of Team Leader Anne Buckley, who also attended the Step II training, was to make the team feel confident to make those decisions. What has happened since the training?

"I have seen a tangible shift within the team," said Buckley, "in terms of how they have knitted together and gathered momentum in moving things along. It has made a real and sustainable difference to the way that we work." She has more confidence in the team delivering what they need to, and she now feels able to step back more.

The team's feedback to the Step II training has been equally positive. Trust has increased between each individual, they've gained a better understanding of where they are all coming from, and they've noticed a more open, honest style of conversation. "I would recommend it to any team, but especially those who are not working as effectively as they'd like. Knowing each other and their characteristics makes a real difference."

Alison Cripps revisited Step II with the team when one person left and another one joined. "I firmly believe that Step II has helped the team to accommodate a new person better than they would have done before the training," she said, "and I will do this again with future changes. The work is ongoing, it's not a one-off. Step II offers a real learning and development journey for teams."

Results

- More open conversations
- Greater trust between team members
- Increased confidence when decision-making



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