

Health New England

Health New England Finds Its Competitive Edge Through Self-Awareness



CASE STUDY AT A GLANCE

BUSINESS OVERVIEW

Health New England (HNE) is a managed care organization based in Springfield, Massachusetts. HNE employs 280 associates, and over 5,000 employers and 120,000 members choose HNE as their health insurer. HNE offers a diverse product line, with plans for the employer and individual markets, including Medicare and Medicaid recipients. It is HNE's mission to provide for the health care needs of its members, deliver superior value, and act as a leading corporate citizen by supporting the diverse needs of the people of western Massachusetts.

CHALLENGES

Massachusetts is one of the most competitive health insurance markets in the country, with 4 of the top 10 U.S. insurance companies located in the state. Between the competition and the regulatory challenges, HNE is motivated to differentiate itself through the creation of a strong brand identity and the loyalty of its constituents. The organization must also increase capacity within its existing staff base, requiring the team to perform at peak daily.

SOLUTION

HNE's president and CEO, Peter Straley, issued a challenge to create a high-performance culture, requiring the company to sharpen its competitive advantage by emphasizing excellence in interpersonal relationships and commitment to the HNE brand, in alignment with its guiding principles of trust and openness. The resultant program greatly leverages the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*[®] instrument in order to bridge "self-awareness" to "other-awareness."

RESULTS

The insights and techniques provided by the Myers-Briggs[®] assessment enabled HNE to overcome numerous obstacles, including the management–employee gap, a high-stress environment, and the challenges associated with entering the government market. HNE is profitable in a market in which many competitors are operating at a loss, and it is meeting its goals. Turnover is very low, and HNE is filling 35% of its open positions from within the organization.

Health New England (HNE) is a managed care organization of 280 employees that provides coverage for its 120,000 members in western Massachusetts. As a relatively small company, HNE offers the advantage of the personal touch—an advantage the company leverages to achieve its stated vision of becoming "the most trusted and valued health plan in the communities we serve."

"Our brand is centered on being personal, accountable, and local," said Peter Straley, president and CEO of HNE. "When our members call us, they're getting their neighbors on the line. We have a vested interest in their challenges and problems because we're literally members of the same communities."

ACHIEVING DIFFERENTIATION IN A HIGHLY COMPETITIVE MARKETPLACE

Stiff competition from the major national insurance providers—4 of the top 10 U.S. insurance companies are located in the state (*U.S. News & World Report*)—has motivated the company to differentiate itself by creating a stronger brand identity. However, for Straley, brand identity means more than marketing. It means fully aligning the company's culture with its guiding principles of trust and openness. According to senior leadership, the only way that the company would truly cement its brand identity was by "walking the walk"—not just by giving lip service to concepts like *service*, *respect*, and *relationships*, but by weaving them into the company's fabric.



The people development people.

cpp

Additionally, market pressures have created a need for HNE to step up its organizational capacity, accomplishing more without significantly increasing its staff size. “This is a complex business operating in a heavily scrutinized, harsh regulatory environment,” said Straley. “Our team needs to be fully dialed in and performing at peak daily. As this is no small task, we’ve enlisted the aid of the most effective engagement tools we can find.”

In 2002 Straley issued an organization-wide challenge to take performance to a higher level and sharpen the company’s competitive advantage. The strategy, which was centered around capitalizing on one-on-one service and customer relationships, heavily leveraged coaching to make HNE’s staff a higher-performing team, offering a level of service that its members could not find elsewhere.

Straley’s goal was for the company to fully adopt a high-performance business model that would emphasize excellence in an area crucial to HNE—interpersonal relationships. In order to accomplish this, HNE was to adopt a “coaching culture” that stresses use of the best tools and techniques to continually sharpen its employees’ skills and expand their knowledge.

ADOPTING THE MYERS-BRIGGS TYPE INDICATOR® (MBTI®) INSTRUMENT

As VP of Human Resources, Amy Trombley was charged with implementing the coaching culture. As a first step, she enlisted Woodstone Consulting, which worked with her to develop an initial training program, of which the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® (MBTI®) instrument was a central part. Trombley saw right away the power of the tool and the value it could bring to all levels of the organization.

The Myers-Briggs® instrument, the world’s most widely used personality assessment, published exclusively by CPP, Inc., is based on Carl Jung’s personality type theory. According to the theory, we each have an innate fundamental personality type that, while not controlling our behavior, shapes and influences the way we understand the world, process information, and socialize. The Myers-Briggs assessment helps individuals determine which one of the 16 personality types fits them best, a discovery process that can uncover an abundance of information, including factors directly related to work habits, interpersonal relationships, and other elements affecting workplace cohesion. The 16 four-letter types are based on preferences for Extraversion (E) or Introversi

“The information provided by the Myers-Briggs assessment presented self-awareness in such a fun, useful, and enlightening way that we immediately saw its applications and became very excited about it.”

Amy Trombley,
Vice President, Human Resources Department

or Intuition (N), Thinking (T) or Feeling (F), and Judging (J) or Perceiving (P).

The work with Woodstone leveraged in particular the MBTI Step II™ assessment, an instrument widely used for individual and relationship counseling in order to provide an in-depth, expansive view of personality. It effectively demonstrated how the Myers-Briggs assessment could be parlayed into improving team relationships and used strategically to achieve specific objectives.

After working with Woodstone for several years, Trombley realized that she had an appetite for corporate training. With the support of HNE’s senior leadership, she became an MBTI® Certified Practitioner, followed by three of HNE’s HR staff members. Over time, Trombley and her team continued building their skills applying the MBTI assessment and are now among a small but growing number of MBTI® Master Practitioners worldwide—a higher-level designation that distinguishes them for their commitment to continuing education as well as demonstrated skill in the interpretation and application of the instrument.

At the core of HNE’s high-performance model is the concept of developing strong relationships with both internal and external stakeholders. According to Trombley, a key feature of the Myers-Briggs assessment is that it enables people to identify how various aspects of their personality are perceived by other people.

“People need to be self-aware before they can be ‘other-aware,’” said Trombley. “The information provided by the Myers-Briggs assessment presented self-awareness in such a

fun, useful, and enlightening way that we immediately saw its applications and became very excited about it.”

Trombley developed the High Performance Workshop, in which the MBTI Step II assessment was administered to 60 senior leaders. It included a two-hour, one-on-one briefing on how personality differences affect them at work, providing a framework that enabled the workshop to resonate on a personal level.

SURMOUNTING MAJOR OBSTACLES WITH SELF-AWARENESS: THE PREREQUISITE FOR “OTHER-AWARENESS”

Organization-wide type awareness has been particularly useful in helping the HNE staff successfully meet several recent challenges. “For many of our staff members, taking the MBTI Step II assessment is like lifting a veil,” said Trombley. “Suddenly they can make sense of themselves and the people around them. It serves as a key that unlocks mysteries behind behavior.”

As the “veil” has been lifted, HNE’s staff has been empowered to solve numerous problems that previously stood in the way of higher performance. “We talk about relationships on a weekly basis,” said Joanne Walton-Bicknell, provider relations manager. “When members of my staff have trouble with a stakeholder, we ask them to learn more about the individual’s MBTI type preferences. Then we discuss how to address communication challenges in our one-on-one meetings.”

The self-awareness provided by the Myers-Briggs assessment and other insights from the High Performance Workshop has aided in addressing numerous challenges, both specific and general.

ENTERING NEW MARKETS

Over the past few years, HNE has expanded into government programs such as Medicare and Medicaid. These ventures have presented unique challenges, as government programs differ greatly from private insurance programs. However, according to Trombley, coaching based on the Myers-Briggs assessment has enabled HNE to implement these changes without adding staff.

“Our entrance into government products has required tremendous changes and knowledge acquisition, which of course generates tremendous stress,” said Trombley. “People throughout HNE have expressed that if it weren’t for type-

based knowledge, they wouldn’t have been able to execute their projects as successfully.” For example, understanding of personality type and how it plays out in the way people absorb and comprehend information has enabled HNE staff to more effectively share ideas with each other.

“In Product Development we are responsible for presenting and gaining approval for concepts designed to help HNE grow its business and increase value to our members,” said Michael Gauvin, product development manager. “We’ve identified how each person on our ‘approval’ team likes to receive information.” This knowledge is, in turn, applied to more effectively present ideas by tailoring the level of presentation detail according to the needs of key constituents. Additionally, this technique has enabled HNE staff to more effectively build relationships of trust with crucial stakeholders.

“Understanding preferences is vital when building relationships,” said Jody Gross, director of business development. “Is the stakeholder an Introvert or an Extravert? Is he factually or emotionally driven? Is he big-picture or detail oriented? Answering these questions prior to reaching out to a stakeholder helps to shape our approach.”

Understanding of type has not only helped HNE address problems rooted in personality type but also leverage strengths in personality type to overcome various problems. “One of my team members is an ISTJ. Because of her drive for results and need for closure, I was able to use her strengths to assist in the recovery process,” said Ronda Carter, supervisor of liability and recovery. “She was able to assist the claims recovery specialist in eliminating months of backlog, saving thousands of dollars.”

BRIDGING THE AGE-OLD MANAGEMENT–EMPLOYEE GAP

Within HNE Trombley notes a strong preference for Thinking (vs. Feeling) within management. Thus, there is a strong natural tendency for managers to fail to take people’s feelings into full account when dictating or implementing policy. This, she says, is indicative of an age-old conflict between management and employees.

“We’ve got predominantly Thinking managers supervising predominantly Feeling employees,” said Trombley. “Understanding of type creates a research-supported basis for these two groups to empathize with each other.” This empathy, she says, creates a stronger understanding of roles within teams and how diverse opinions and multiple

perspectives are vital. Managers understand why the thoughts and feelings of their subordinates need to be taken into account. Conversely, employees understand the benefit of having managers that offer clarity and logic and are capable of making decisions largely independent of emotional persuasion.

“Using methods from the *Introduction to Type® and Teams* booklet, I presented the information on all of my team members’ types, and we were all able to learn about how we tend to lead, contribute, irritate, maximize effectiveness, and influence,” said Wendy Bergeron, underwriting manager. “Seeing each other’s types in print helps us avoid labeling. Instead of being annoyed by each other’s differences, we can constructively engage each other.”

MANAGING STRESS IN A HIGH-STRESS BUSINESS

One of the more effective stress management applications used at HNE involves “grip” theory, developed by Dr. Naomi Quenk, author of *In the Grip*. Based on the Myers-Briggs assessment, grip theory holds that how we normally act relies mostly on our “dominant function” (related to our S, N, T, or F preference), and that under intense stress we may fall into the grip of our “inferior function” (the dominant function’s opposite). Because we don’t normally use our inferior function, which is largely unconscious, we are less experienced and less adept at using it. Therefore, we may act out of character and behave in unexpected ways. Awareness of this “Jekyll-and-Hyde” phenomenon can be particularly useful in identifying signs of severe stress.

“If a coworker acts out in a way that contradicts her usual character, we know she is ‘in the grip,’” said Trombley. “As an ENFJ, when I’m under stress I tend to be overly logical and analytical when, in many instances, I ought to just trust my instincts.”

Grip theory has given HNE’s staff members language they can use to identify and, more particularly, let others know when they are under extreme stress. Phrases such as “I’m in the grip,” or “I’ve been emotionally hijacked” carry clear meaning, as well as connotations regarding what steps need to be taken to communicate effectively.

“When someone says, ‘I’m in the grip,’ people know exactly what they’re talking about and how to handle it,” said Trombley. “Someone might say, ‘What you said was threatening on an emotional level, and I’m not able to listen at my best

right now.’ While this expression might be confusing at other organizations, it’s very clear and specific to us.”

Understanding the impact of stress on personality has enabled managers to engage stressed-out employees and create productive solutions to otherwise destructive problems. “The *In the Grip* booklet helped me understand one of my staff members, who seemed to blame everyone for what she was doing wrong,” said Bergeron. “After reading about her type I realized it was a stress reaction and I could address the real issues.”

This technique has also been applied to addressing difficulties with various stakeholders, once again turning otherwise destructive encounters into constructive opportunities. “I have used grip theory to help my staff overcome roadblocks with stakeholders,” said Michael Gauvin, product development manager. “It enables us to understand why they may be acting in ‘difficult’ ways and apply techniques to appeal to their preferences.”

For example, Joanne Walton-Bicknell reports that one of her staff members became “hijacked” by a series of interactions with a stakeholder. Before their scheduled meeting, she had her read the portion of *In the Grip* that discussed her type, ENFP, and the type of the stakeholder, ISTJ (the exact opposite). Once the staff member understood how the stakeholder appreciated receiving information, she was able to communicate effectively and their meeting was a success.

FINDING THE RIGHT FIT WITHIN THE COMPANY

HNE experiences its share of cases in which otherwise high-quality employees are not entirely fulfilled in their position. These are individuals who may exhibit excellent work habits but nonetheless do not “shine” for seemingly intangible reasons. This, according to Trombley, is often related to personality type. For example, for such an individual, his position may offer relatively few opportunities to work in accordance with his preferences (ways of thinking, acting, and interacting that come naturally) and conversely require a tremendous expenditure of energy from his nonpreferences. The job, therefore, may become an emotional and mental drain—even despite the individual’s high degree of competence and dedication.

One of the immediate applications of the Myers-Briggs assessment, therefore, involved helping employees find the ideal fit within the company. Some at HNE have switched jobs

with other employees. For example, Walton-Bicknell worked with an IT manager, an ENFP, who was not particularly happy in her “reporting analysis” function. She has since switched to a position in Provider Relations, where she solves *people* problems instead of technology problems. The effect has been visible—her energy is high, and she now champions type-based coaching within HNE.

In other cases, employees are empowered by their knowledge of type, which helps them pinpoint why their job seems to be draining. This knowledge, in turn, helps them find ways to adapt within the capacity of their job, perhaps taking on alternate roles that allow them to use their preferences more often. Regardless of the specific course of action taken, helping people find an optimum fit has the dual benefit of boosting performance while simultaneously increasing job satisfaction and thus reducing employee turnover.

CREATING AND MEETING A DEMAND FOR TYPE KNOWLEDGE

Though it is HNE’s policy to encourage every employee to make use of the Myers-Briggs assessment, it is not mandatory—no one is forced to take the assessment. Rather, Trombley and her team have focused on creating demand for the instrument and its insights. According to Trombley, when employees receive their Myers-Briggs type results it is typically a revelatory experience providing insight into a host of issues, including family. Some HNE staff members are now applying type to improve aspects of their personal life—for example, using their knowledge about type preferences to help their kids choose a college major.

“People seek me out to discuss marital issues and a whole slew of other problems that, though not directly related to the office, nonetheless may affect job performance,” said Trombley. Application of the Myers-Briggs assessment to family life, however, is more than just a side benefit, she says. Rather, it drives engagement at work. Once people get a taste for how its insights can improve their personal life, they’re eager to apply them at work, which of course drives demand for the Myers-Briggs programs that Trombley and her team offer.

The enthusiastic support of company CEO Peter Straley, who is currently sending his two college sophomores through MBTI interpretations, has set the tone and facilitated an atmosphere that embraces exactly the kind of insights the instrument provides. This is reflected in the numerous ways in which HNE

encourages the use of type.

“If you haven’t yet taken the MBTI assessment, the climate here makes you want to,” said Trombley. “As managers began going through the assessment process, light bulbs began to go off regarding applications of type and the energy became contagious.” For example, HNE presents an annual peer-nominated “Partner in Excellence,” or “PIE,” award. For fun, the team designed a sixteen-type chart called the “Piers Briggs” that described the kind of pie employees liked. Though intended purely for fun, Trombley reports that it actually helped create demand for the MBTI workshops. This hunger for type-based knowledge grew rapidly after the initial workshop with the executive team.

“People immediately understood its value for illuminating conflict,” said Trombley. “We were able to view our differences through a new lens, and those things that we previously may have seen as flaws in our coworkers were met with understanding. There was actually a rush of forgiveness that accompanied these initial breakthrough workshop sessions.”

The result has been almost universal demand for training based on the Myers-Briggs assessment. Consequently, workshops are now held on-demand, in essence enabling employees to attend whenever they want or have a need to. Trombley emphasizes, however, that MBTI workshops are now automatically offered to all new employees within their first three months of employment, with managers also being taken through the MBTI Step II process.

WINNING OVER THE SKEPTICS

Despite its current level of success and acceptance at HNE, use of the Myers-Briggs assessment did not escape resistance. On the contrary, it was a new concept, and many employees were initially afraid the company was using it to keep records on their mental habits for discriminatory or pigeonholing purposes.

“We actively asserted that we don’t use MBTI type for hiring or any kind of personnel file,” said Trombley. “We made it clear that we were following the intent of Isabel Briggs Myers, who wanted to help people improve their lives through self-awareness.”

The staff, which includes several physicians and lawyers, has not been without its skeptics. Yet, as Trombley relates, they typically change their attitude when they begin discussing

their experiences and witness the applications. “It took our Harvard-educated chief medical officer two years to fully come on board,” she said. “However, now that he sees the value, he’s one of its biggest proponents, and uses it to explain staff issues all the time.”

This is not entirely surprising to Straley. “We’re using the MBTI assessment not simply because it is interesting but primarily because it produces tangible results,” he said. “We evaluated plenty of tools, and if it didn’t work for us we would have moved on to something else.”

AN ORGANIZATION IMMERSSED IN TYPE

Myers-Briggs type is now a part of the company’s fabric, and it is referenced in every conference room and throughout community and individual offices. In fact, there have been numerous requests for a public type reference document that individuals can view before going into meetings, and HNE has amended its phone directory to incorporate four-letter type into employees’ extension numbers.

“People reference type in literally every meeting—it’s part of the vernacular,” said Trombley. “It’s not uncommon, for example, for some to say, ‘I’m an I, and I’m getting a little overwhelmed by having so many people involved in the discussion.’” While such a statement might have previously been considered brash and puzzling, now it is largely met with understanding. According to Trombley, type provides a framework for people to discuss behavior in terms of communication, information assimilation, and decision making.

“We have posted our entire team’s MBTI type on the wall in my office, as well as on all reps’ chairs, and talk about what the letters mean and how to use type when working with

different people,” said Sarah Fernandes, member services manager.

SERVING THE COMMUNITY

In addition to directly benefiting HNE, the High Performance Workshop—based on the Myers-Briggs assessment—has given the company an additional means to serve the community as a valued corporate citizen. As word has spread regarding the tremendous success that HNE has experienced in using the Myers-Briggs tool to address a host of issues, so has demand for the knowledge the company has attained.

Consequently, Trombley and other members of her team have provided pro bono training at local educational and community institutions, including colleges, high schools, and the Dunbar Community Center. Additionally, they will present workshops at the local Martin Luther King Center.

RESULTS

Use of the Myers-Briggs assessment has clearly boosted HNE’s bottom line. The company is profitable in a market in which many of its competitors are operating at a loss, and it is meeting its goals. Additionally, turnover is very low, and HNE is filling 35% of its open positions from within the organization—no small feat for a relatively small company. HNE recently did an engagement survey through Gallup, which found that in the program’s first-year participation was at 99% and the ratio of “engaged to disengaged” was ten to one.

HNE plans to further hone its program and continues to offer workshops and look for innovative and creative ways to get new employees up to speed more quickly.

About CPP, Inc.

At CPP, our only job is to help you be a better HR professional and, in turn, help every employee flourish. While we're best known for our products, like the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® assessment, CPP is also a group of people who can offer you the information, guidance, and support you need.

We offer solutions to help you improve organizational performance and address whatever challenges you face—from team building, leadership and coaching, and conflict management to career development, selection, and retention. Perhaps that's why millions of people in more than 100 countries use our products each year. They include individuals at Fortune 500 companies and businesses of all sizes, as well as educators, government agencies, and training and development consultants.

Since its founding in 1956, CPP, Inc., has been a leading publisher and provider of innovative products and services for individual and organizational development. Available in more than 20 languages, the company's hundreds of products help people and organizations grow and develop by improving performance and increasing understanding. Among CPP's world-renowned brands and services are the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*®, *Strong Interest Inventory*®, *Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument* (TKI), *FIRO*®, *CPI 260*®, and *California Psychological Inventory*™ (CPI™) assessments, and CPP Professional Services.

**Let's make a difference together.
Talk to us today to see how.**

1055 Joaquin Road, Suite 200, Mountain View, CA 94043
800-624-1765 : www.cpp.com : The Myers-Briggs® experts