

San Francisco Child Abuse Prevention Center

case study | healthcare

Insights during leadership development program drives new team cohesion

Everyone has a role to play in protecting children, according to the San Francisco Child Abuse Prevention Center (SFCAPC). What's the best way to reinvigorate a leadership development program where the company's mission is so critical?

A non-profit organization dedicated to preventing child abuse and neglect, and promoting healthy families and children's mental health, SFCAPC has been serving the community for more than 38 years.

Four-and-a-half years ago, when Katie Albright became executive director of SFCAPC, she was immediately tasked with addressing challenges associated with the organization's rapid growth. Over the previous several years SFCAPC had evolved from a small grassroots organization to a larger, more complex entity charged with administering a significantly expanded scope of services.

Recognizing a need to channel the passion of the devoted staff more efficiently, Albright implemented a major organizational restructuring initiative, which included formation of a new leadership team composed of members with various levels of tenure and experience. In order to maximize the success of the initiative, Albright turned to The Myers-Briggs Company (formerly CPP, Inc.) to hone the leadership team's management skills, increase cohesion, and empower the organization to provide higher-quality services and outcomes for SFCAPC's families.

Business Challenges

- Rapid growth and recent organizational changes
- New leadership team not working together closely enough
- Outdated leadership development program

Company Profile

The San Francisco Child Abuse Prevention Center is dedicated to the prevention of child abuse and neglect, the promotion of healthy families, and the mental health of children. It provides a variety of direct services to distressed children and families, educates key members of the community on how to identify and respond to child abuse situations, and utilizes a vast partner network to promote the health of children.

San Francisco Child Abuse Prevention Center

Solution

The restructuring effort had given SFCAPC well-defined business practices and a consistent method for communicating and executing them. It had also clarified the chain of command as well as each staff member's role and responsibility. Albright's leadership team now sought greater alignment among its members, which included a vast range of experience and tenure, from years of management responsibility to starting out as a line staff position, and from brand new to the agency to decades-long tenure. The team's goal was to learn how to function more cohesively in order to help all staff members continually connect their daily tasks to the organization's larger purpose. SFCAPC looked to The Myers-Briggs Company to provide an external perspective and share its five decades of organizational development expertise.

"Our work with The Myers-Briggs Company came at a point when it was time to really move things forward," said Albright.

Over the course of a year and a half, The Myers-Briggs Company consultant Sarita Bhakuni, PsyD, engaged the leadership team in an intensive leadership development program that included individual and team coaching, as well as an executive retreat. Bhakuni leveraged four of their industry-leading assessments—the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®), CPI 260®, FIRO-B®, and Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) tools. After administering these assessments to the leadership team, Bhakuni coached members through a series of sessions offering insight into their own work styles, leadership strengths, and challenges; colleague preferences and behavioral tendencies; communication gaps; and ways to bridge divides and increase alignment.

The FIRO-B assessment provided new perspective on the team's interpersonal needs, especially in regard to receiving information and communicating with others. This tool identifies preferences in three areas of interpersonal need: Inclusion, Control, and Affection. It explores two dimensions of each need: wanted (how much the individual wants to receive a behavior from others) and expressed (how much the individual prefers to initiate a behavior).

Solution

- Use FIRO-B to understand personal needs better
- Use MBTI tool to understand strengths and development areas
- Use CPI 260 for clearer articulation and communication of vision to staff
- Use TKI to improve conflict management skills among new management team

“ Instead of working with only our own issues and positions in mind, we are looking at others' individual work styles, throwing everything on the table, and collaborating to find solutions that work for everyone. ”

Malcolm Gaines,
Clinical Director,
SFCAPC

San Francisco Child Abuse Prevention Center

“You tend to assume that everyone has the same needs as you, but in reality we all have very different needs around communication, collaboration, and many other factors,” said Albright. “FIRO-B insights gave us the language to have delicate or more difficult conversations easily, quickly, and smoothly. Staff decisions that might have taken months were completed in a few days.” Specifically, leadership team members discovered who liked to be thoroughly informed on all aspects of situations and who wanted only information pertinent to their immediate tasks. Equipped with this knowledge, the team was able to strike the right balance between keeping everyone adequately informed and not overburdening them with details.

“Although it’s incredibly advantageous to know I’m the type of person who only wants the information I need, it’s even more insightful to understand that other team members want more interpersonal and historical context of a situation,” said Malcolm Gaines, clinical director at SFCAPC. “Now, one of my colleagues and I laugh when she asks me more questions; I understand that she needs the information and that she’s not questioning my judgment.”

Each person’s work style was further clarified by the Myers-Briggs® assessment, the world’s most widely used personality tool, which is based on Carl Jung’s theory of personality type. According to type theory, we each have innate personality preferences that shape and influence where we focus our attention and get energy, how we take in information, the way we make decisions, and how we deal with the outer world.

The Myers-Briggs assessment helps people determine which of sixteen personality types fits them best, a discovery process that yields an abundance of information related to work habits, relationships, and other elements affecting workplace cohesion. The sixteen four-letter types are based on preferences for Extraversion (E) or Introversion (I), Sensing (S) or Intuition (N), Thinking (T) or Feeling (F), and Judging (J) or Perceiving (P).

The assessment brought to light each team member’s assets and potential areas for improvement and made them aware of their

Results

- Greater leadership confidence and organizational trust
- More collaborative approach to daily tasks among leadership team
- Staff aligned with vision of executive team

San Francisco Child Abuse Prevention Center



own and others' blind spots. They gained insight into what they did well and why, and, more important, thanks to this deeper understanding they now had greater patience and a way to work around areas that came less naturally to co-workers.

In one instance, understanding the difference in their preferences along a single dimension of personality type enabled two team members to dramatically improve their communication with each other.

"Suddenly we had a constructive way to question each other," said Gaines. "Instead of wondering why a colleague proceeded with a project a certain way, we observe that people of varying preferences tend to approach tasks in different ways."

The MBTI-based training also drew attention to the issue of stress management—a critical area of focus for an organization that deals with a constant stream of crises. As team members learned about their own and colleagues' personality types, they also gained insight into how they react under stress, and were empowered to more effectively handle those situations.

Each member of the six-person leadership team also took the CPI 260 assessment, which provides an in-depth portrait of an individual's professional and personal styles. By describing individuals in the way others see them, the assessment illustrates a range of personal and work-related characteristics, motivations, and thinking styles—as well as different ways people manage themselves and deal with others. CPI 260 results showed that the group consisted of people who were high performers. Bhakuni confirmed this finding, asserting that SFCAPC's management team members could easily excel in high-paying positions at for-profit companies.

"We understood that as a team we have the capacity and skill to move the work forward, which gave us confidence in our ability to accomplish our deep responsibility to protect kids and families in crisis," said Albright. "It also helped us recognize areas for potential improvement."

For example, CPI 260 scores indicated an overall low level of "self-care," which can erode performance over time. "Much like firefighters, our team has to be there for the community, families, and staff—often we don't have the

San Francisco Child Abuse Prevention Center



opportunity to step back and take care of ourselves, which is so important,” said Albright. “The training has given us tools to invest in our own well-being, which in turn has allowed us to provide better support for the families and children we serve.”

Bhakuni helped the team learn how to integrate self-care into their culture and establish a system in which team members “watch out” for each other. When team members are pushing themselves too hard, co-workers encourage them to take a break and recharge the batteries.

CPI 260 results also revealed a tendency among team members to feel more comfortable implementing ideas and management practices than creating new ones. This is not to say that the team lacked creativity. Rather, over time the rapid pace of the work had left members feeling that they did not have the luxury of reevaluating aspects of operations, leading to an inclination to be content with getting things done through existing processes. As the team became aware of this predisposition, members were better equipped to question the status quo, when necessary.

The TKI instrument further illuminated this reluctance to challenge the status quo. The TKI tool identifies people’s tendencies in dealing with interpersonal conflict. It describes five different conflict-handling modes—competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating—and helps individuals learn which modes they tend to favor, and how and when all five modes can be used effectively. The instrument describes conflict-handling behaviors along two dimensions: assertiveness, or the extent to which one tries to satisfy his or her own concerns; and cooperativeness, or the extent to which one tries to satisfy the concerns of another person.

The staff’s collective TKI results revealed that the team’s preferred conflict-handling mode was avoiding. The long hours and the brisk pace at which employees work indicated that this was not due to disinterest or lack of care, since the staff was so committed to the organization’s mission. Rather, the same empathy and compassion that motivated the staff to commit so much of themselves to their job also held them back from criticizing people or processes—even constructively—so as not to hurt co-workers’ feelings.

San Francisco Child Abuse Prevention Center



Albright points out that members' preference for the avoiding conflict mode was also rooted in an acute awareness of the stress with which each team member was already dealing. "Our employees spend much of their day dealing with families in crisis, and are already experiencing stress on so many levels. Collectively, we didn't want to bring more 'crises' to our colleagues," she said.

In addition, the TKI assessment showed the positive aspects of the management team's preference for the avoiding mode, including the ability to judiciously "pick battles," thereby sidestepping many unnecessary conflict situations that teams with more assertive conflict styles often fall into. According to Albright, the TKI enabled SFCAPC's leaders to really dissect how, as a group, they worked together, and to make the necessary steps to bring more collaboration into their conflict style. Since the training, the management team has seen tremendous growth in this area.

Results

SFCAPC's intensive self-examination has begun to pay dividends that can be seen in the non-profit's operations, performance, and morale. The six-person leadership team now functions more cohesively, fostering conversations that drive innovation at all levels of operation. Moreover, The Myers-Briggs Company's training program's enhancement of team members' understanding of themselves and their colleagues has helped build trust and instill confidence that the team can solve any issue at any time.

Now, if a problem arises at the end of the day on a Friday, any combination of executive team members is fully equipped to resolve it, because each person understands the styles and preferences of his or her colleagues. The training has also helped the leadership team develop assurance that those handling the situation will communicate back to Albright and the rest of the staff in a manner that is accurate, timely, and fair. Furthermore, Albright herself has come to understand the part of her personality that wants to focus on high-level strategy and vision and has given the leadership team and staff the leeway to take necessary actions.

Meanwhile, all employees now have a clearer understanding of their leaders' vision for SFCAPC and of how day-to-day efforts support the organization's immediate goals and overall mission. This is in part because SFCAPC's leadership

San Francisco Child Abuse Prevention Center



has improved communication to the rest of the organization to better align staff with the executive team's objectives and strategy.

Thanks to the collaborative techniques introduced in the training, the staff also functions more cohesively on a peer-to-peer basis. Rather than focusing solely on individual goals and responsibilities, staff members now take into account the needs of their co-workers. "Instead of working with only our own issues and positions in mind, we are looking at others' individual work styles, throwing everything on the table, and collaborating to find solutions that work for everyone," said Gaines.

Non-profits, Albright asserts, are always mission driven but often don't have an opportunity to self-reflect on how to work more effectively. The work with The Myers-Briggs Company, however, has helped create the right atmosphere with which to optimize the leadership team's collective strengths and move forward. "Their expertise, drive, and determination have enabled us to help kids and families and move our work forward in ways that we could not have otherwise. Our people—at all levels—are visibly excited about where we're going as an organization."



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The Myers-Briggs Company empowers individuals to be the best versions of themselves by enriching self-awareness and their understanding of others. We help organizations around the world improve teamwork and collaboration, develop inspirational leaders, foster diversity, and solve their most complex people challenges.

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