

Making board-level interactions better with the MBTI assessment

The decisions of the board of directors have large implications for management and the entire company. Often, however, personal opinions and board politics can slow the decision-making process significantly. How can a board work together to make the best decisions quickly for their companies?

Resultive Boards' name illustrates precisely what co-founders Lorin Letendre and Tom Wohlmüt are trying to accomplish. Says Wohlmüt, "In my previous life in the media industry, you had to think of what the end product should look like. You had to think about the results before you created them—and that's what we help boards do."

Resultive Boards began using the Myers-Briggs® assessment to bring more self-awareness, efficiency, and collaboration to boardrooms and has gained a wealth of insight into how the instrument helps executive directors work together to become an effective executive board.

For example, Resultive Boards recently held a workshop for the homeowners association of a high-end condominium development, whose board at one point consisted solely of members of the builder's association. As residential condominium owners were gradually added to the board, politics began to take over and the number of issues being resolved decreased.

Business Challenges

- Improving interpersonal interactions
- Slow decision-making processes

Company Profile

Resultive Boards is a consulting firm which focuses on executive boardrooms. They bring more self-awareness, efficiency and collaboration to teams that are often formed more from personal connections than business need. They provide board governance consulting services to not-for-profit organizations and private companies, from initial consultation and strategic planning to goal setting and comparisons with board best practices.

Resultive Boards

Solution

“To be effective as a board,” says Wohlmut, “you need to be able to put yourself and your personal needs aside—that’s hard to do when the decisions being discussed directly affect your home. That’s where the Myers-Briggs assessment was really helpful—it gave everyone a common language to respect the perspective that others brought to the table.”

Adds Letendre, “We chose the MBTI assessment over others because it’s the leading personality assessment in the world. We knew this particular board would benefit from personality insights as a foundation for building rapport and mutual respect and enhancing their problem-solving and decision-making abilities as a team. I wasn’t sure how receptive the board would be to the MBTI tool, but everyone was intrigued to take it individually, and from there I ran the team report based on their results.”

Letendre and Wohlmut found that the board’s “team type” was INTJ—not a personality type whose primary focus is typically group harmony and working collaboratively.

Wohlmut explains: “INTJs prefer to be focused on building systems. They have an incredible strength in being able to pick out inconsistencies and possible failure points, but not always in the most congenial manner. Explaining the Myers-Briggs preferences and their team type helped them understand that, as a group, they need to pay attention to the people side of making decisions in order to stay balanced rather than focusing on only the task side of things, where most INTJs prefer to give their attention.”

Resultive Boards found that in keeping with the team type, all but one member of the board had a preference for Intuition, which is associated with taking in information by first looking at the big picture.

“It becomes problematic when you intuit what you want to see in a building but the details get overlooked,” Wohlmut points out.

Solution

- Use Myers-Briggs assessment to increase self-awareness
- Identify team type to help board’s awareness of diversity of thoughts and ideas
- Raise awareness of strengths and weaknesses in the decision-making process

“Managing board dynamics is probably the best use I can think of for the MBTI tool.”

Resultive Boards

Resultive Boards suggested that the group check in with the one person who had a preference for Sensing before making a group decision. It also had a recommendation regarding those on the team who preferred Introversion: that the board make an effort to ask whether anyone had additional information to share and then wait at least 10 seconds for an answer.

Results

According to Letendre, “these small suggestions based on MBTI type and associated communication preferences have made a significant difference in how efficiently their board meetings are run and how communication progresses.”

Letendre and Wohlmutter have previously used the MBTI instrument with other boards, focusing on nonprofits and private companies. They suggest that board chairs, if no one else, take the MBTI assessment so that they can understand their personal working style and the strengths and differences their style may have in relation to those of other members of the board. Multiple training sessions are typically scheduled to achieve the maximum ROI.


“One of the most common misconceptions about working with boards,” says Letendre, “is that you can hold a one-stop-shop governance training and expect an immediate change in behavior. Like most habits, changing communication styles and sticking to the resolutions made at board retreats takes time and effort. Conveniently, the Myers-Briggs instrument is also helpful in illustrating the different ways in which people deal with change.” Wohlmutter adds that “a lot of the research about effective board processes revolves around how to conduct meetings and effective decision making. All training that we do involving board members and their Myers-Briggs type preferences has to include these components. You can’t just say ‘well...this is your type—now go forth and prosper!’”

Resultive Boards works not only within the boardroom but also with those managing directors who directly interact with the board, as board responsibilities and management responsibilities don’t always align on objectives and audience served.

Results

- Improved decision-making and problem-solving through understanding type diversity
- Increased efficiency of communication
- Introduction of a nonthreatening language for all members of the board
- Reduction in decision-making time

Resultive Boards



They've given the MBTI assessment to the C-level executives to see how their type relates to the individual and team type preferences of those on the board of directors. Though it rarely occurs, Resultive Boards has sometimes faced resistance when using a personality assessment in its work with boards. Says Wohlmüt, "You start with a very diverse group of people who don't know where they stand. Some may have heard misconceptions about what type means and that some types are meant to be leaders, while others aren't cut out for management roles. Especially among INTP and ISTJ types skepticism is innate, which isn't necessarily a negative. We explain that all MBTI types can do all things. There's no one type or team type that a board should look like. One group in particular was skeptical about the process in the beginning, but by the end they said they felt like the whole presentation was a 'Christmas in July.'"

Resultive Boards has also found success in connecting the MBTI instrument to board diversity.

Letendre recently published an article for the National Association of Corporate Directors (NACD) specifically on the topic and often speaks at their conferences. "To me, the MBTI tool is ideal for dealing with issues of diversity because you're looking at what each person brings to the board that can be positive—or areas for improvement—regardless of gender, orientation, race, or socioeconomic status. Research shows that the more diverse a board is, as long as conflict and interactions can be managed in a healthy way, the better decision making on the board as a whole becomes. The MBTI tool helps manage that conflict and improve communication by giving members a non-threatening language for expressing differences."

"Managing board dynamics," Letendre continues, "is probably the best use I can think of for the MBTI tool, and director and new board member orientations are a great place to do it. How people work together—team structure and functioning—these are already established takeaways of the MBTI assessment that are perfect for working with a high-powered board." Muses Wohlmüt, "It's a bit like having satellite weather capabilities. Anyone can look into the sky and tell you it's sunny, but we can use it to forecast storms far beyond the horizon."



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