

Unipart Consumer Logistics

Background

Unipart Group employs more than 9,000 people worldwide and has an annual turnover of more than £1.1 billion. It is the UK's largest independent supplier of car, truck, and bodyshop parts and workshop consumables. The Unipart Logistics division provides logistics for blue-chip customers, and the Consumer arm of this focuses on major retailers such as ASOS (Boots), Halfords and Homebase.

One of the ways in which the organisation has been able to differentiate itself in the highly competitive logistics marketplace has been through service excellence. This has not been without its challenges, however, given the exacting standards of its retailer customers.

The Divisional MD, Ian Smith, saw clearly that unless his managers, from the top down, had a deep understanding of the mentality of their customers, it would be difficult for them to sustain equal and positive relationships with them over time. Being reactive to customer demands can create tensions; Ian wanted to empower his people to change the dynamic of customer interactions.

He believes training should visibly support the objectives of the business at the same time as developing interpersonal skills. Ian comments, "The MBTI[®] tool perfectly fits our goal of becoming the 'Ultimate Logistics Partner' and helps to support our philosophy of 'understanding the real and perceived needs of our customers.'" It is a simple tool that helps everyone understand themselves, and others, much better, ultimately leading to better partnerships with our clients.'

Solution

Kirsten Steer, Unipart Consumer Logistics' Group Head of Talent, had recently attended an OPP-run MBTI qualifying workshop, and recognised the MBTI instrument as a potential solution to the need Ian had identified. She says: "I felt the very practical approach the MBTI provides into understanding others' behaviour would engage our managers. Learning to read and understand others' cues as the basis for adapting their own style gives them a new way in to influencing others that works across a range of situations and levels."

She worked with OPP consultants to develop a 2-day workshop for an intact team of managers from the sales, operations and support teams. Many had been in the logistics business for many years and were unused to reflecting on the importance of 'soft skills' to their effectiveness at work.

The bold opening session was designed to show senior leaders' commitment to the MBTI 'toolkit' and to demonstrate power of the MBTI instrument in action. Four senior managers, each with different preferences, talked to the group about themselves – their careers, who they were, why they had made the choices they had. The participants were introduced to the definition of the two middle letters of the MBTI type and asked to diagnose who fitted against each of these. It quickly became clear that the S and N, and T and F dimensions were relatively

easy to read, but also that the differences in behaviour preference were sufficiently marked to make communication 'across type' potentially challenging.

Participants then role-played a sales situation with a colleague with a preference opposite to their own. The difficulty of influencing someone with a contrasting orientation was vividly revealed, and helped them appreciate the need to adapt their approach relative to the listener. As they began to do so, they saw the impact on the direction and outcomes of the conversation. As Kirsten puts it: "The MBTI demonstrates itself. People can see it, hear it – it's live in the room."

Working with the OPP learning consultants, participants practised adapting their style according to that of their role-play partner and uncovered some interesting type differences in action. For example, in selling to an 'SF', an 'NT' decided to appeal to his personal needs and make him feel especially valued. The 'SF' was much more receptive to the 'NT's suggestions as a result. The 'NT' had been very cautious about this approach and doubted that it might lead to changes in their relationship; when he saw the outcome he was utterly convinced.

Participants reflected on the wider impact of their learnings too. One manager shared how he saw his clear 'T' preference impact on his relationship with his wife, whom he believed to be an 'F'. He told the trainers at the end of the programme that he would be going home to have a different kind of conversation with her.

As Kirsten explains: "The MBTI tool has such great transferability. It's a tremendous eye opener when you come out of your own preference and see how it works. Managers also recognized the potential for this learning to benefit themselves personally – it's a more holistic development experience." OPP's consultants are experienced at getting participants to see the full potential of their new insights.

Business benefits

Feedback from the participants has been "absolutely amazing, fantastic, not a single negative", Kirsten says. "The fact that senior managers were so willing to engage and model sent a very positive message about the MBTI as a tool." To build on this success, Kirsten is currently working with OPP on a follow-up workshop that goes one step deeper into building influencing skills.

This will help managers examine the inner dynamics of preferences under stress, and challenge them to think about removing barriers to effective communication by focusing on their own and others' inner dialogue. The aim is to help remove the negative thoughts and feelings that inhibit them from achieving success, so becoming more influential in their relationships.

Kirsten is enthused by the double benefit of the development programme. Unipart Consumer Logistics is set to become even more successful through better-managed customer relationships – and its managers are on the road to lasting personal change as individuals.

For more information on how OPP could help your organisation, please contact our Sales Team on +44 (0)1865 404500 or by email at: enquiry@opp.eu.com.

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