

ACT Management

Background

ACT Management is a Benelux-based business consultancy specialising in team and executive coaching, and change management. They work with a variety of multinational companies, helping them through periods of change and supporting them in achieving success via their leaders. At ACT, the consultants are long-standing and dedicated users of the MBTI® instrument, with a particular passion for the detailed practical insights that the MBTI Step II can bring.

ACT's consultants began their MBTI journey back in the 1990s, after gaining qualification in Step I. Having discovered the power of this as a catalyst for development, their consultants became interested in using the MBTI framework to explore personality in more detail, and particularly to examine and explain how people of the same MBTI type or preference could sometimes demonstrate such differences in behaviour. Working with OPP®, ACT's consultants became expert practitioners in both the Step I and Step II versions of the instrument. So convinced are they by Step II's ability to prompt important and lasting moments of enlightenment for their clients that they now use it almost exclusively in all of their development interventions.

The Step II difference

ACT's Managing Director, Marc Potvin, describes the value he derives in his consulting work from the Step II instrument: "The main attraction of Step II for us is that it confirms for people that even though the main 16 types provide valid, resonant and accurate descriptions of people, each individual is still a unique person. It allows us to show them how they can develop not just through their four-letter type, but also through how they *express* that type as an individual."

At ACT, they see this multi-layered approach, which leads people through a gradually expanding process of self-awareness, as a big differentiator in the MBTI's favour – and for them, Step II has an edge over some more traditional trait-based instruments when it comes to development: "In our development interventions, what we really want to avoid is the idea of 'more and less' or 'better and worse'. Step II has the unique benefit of genuinely appreciating difference in people, and working with that difference in a positive and constructive way to get the best out of everyone." In this respect, it fits uniquely well with the 'positive psychology' approach that is informing so much coaching work today.

One of the most powerful ways into development or coaching discussions, Marc says, is drawing out where an individual's Out-Of-Preference Scores (OOPS) lie. These 'OOPSes' create the impression that a person exhibits contradictory or inconsistent behaviour. This can be bewildering for a coachee's colleagues and often lies at the heart of workplace misunderstandings. Marc is convinced that using Step II in these situations can accelerate progress towards conflict resolution, enhance communication, and ultimately

enable a way of working that is true to the individual and empowering for those around them.

Step II at senior level

When working with senior people, in particular, it's important to generate buy-in to a development intervention with some data about performance and personality. The ACT team's experience has led to frequent use of Step II in conjunction with a 360-degree feedback instrument for this purpose.

Typically, 360 feedback is solicited first, and used to set the agenda for coaching using the MBTI instrument. Marc always asks his clients to complete the Step II questionnaire, from which Step I reports can also be generated. After a group grounding in the basics of Step I, Marc uses Step II in a targeted personal development or coaching programme, or as the foundation for a teambuilding activity with functional or cross-departmental groups, or, sometimes, with an intact senior-management team.

Marc shares a specific example of such a process: "An ENTJ team leader was giving really mixed signals to his team, creating some management challenges. He would express his underlying preference for Intuition (N) when he gave out information, using a broad-brush, big-picture perspective. When he received information from his team, however, he asked for details. He would become frustrated when information was presented to him without what he saw as the necessary precision, apparently exhibiting typical S behaviour, the opposite of his supposed N preference on Step I. This seemed contradictory and unfair to his team, who could not understand why he continually seemed to critique their work when they completed delegated tasks.

"But for this team leader the behaviour was a natural outlet for what Step II revealed as a high score on the Concrete facet – a clear Out-Of-Preference Score that would not have been uncovered by using Step I on its own. Being able to articulate what was happening in this way enabled the team leader to achieve greater self-awareness and adapt his behaviour, and helped his team to understand the reasons for his actions and be readier to challenge or engage him on them. Such transparency makes a big difference to trust levels," says Marc.

One very practical and high-impact exercise that can be used in a Step II training is a 'facet line-up'. (This is often done with Step I using type preferences.) Consultants at ACT use this technique particularly with teams where new members have recently joined, but it can be just as effective with long-standing functional teams. It involves asking team members to stand in a line according to their Step II scores on a particular facet. This allows direct comparison between team members, and highlights where there is a concentration of one particular facet score, or where an individual is showing a markedly different facet score to their colleagues.

As Marc explains: "This exercise is most effective because the physical distance is a good metaphor for the mental distance, and really brings to life how people are different. In one example, a CEO and his Board members were asked to line up along the Early Starting/Pressure-Prompted facet on the J-P dimension. Whilst the CEO had a moderate Early Starting preference, six or seven of his colleagues were Pressure-Prompted.

“This difference was obvious for all to see – he was on one side and they were standing on the opposite side of the room. This was extremely resonant for all of them as it perfectly described what they had experienced in many of their real-life interactions. He was able to articulate to them that to meet his expectations as a manager, they would need to be more planful in their approach to projects and timely in their delivery of interim milestones.”

Marc’s example illustrates the subtly incisive effect of the Step II instrument. For this individual CEO, sharing his facet score as a means of articulating his needs and preferences was a breakthrough in his relationship with his team. It helped him see that it was not the missed deadlines *per se* that bothered him, for which there were frequently good reasons. It was that despite the fact that this behaviour was so alien to his perception of what was important, his team made no attempt to prepare him for late delivery and he was continually surprised and disappointed by it. This facet is all about peoples’ different relationships with *time*, and seeing their differences here helped the team resolve some important issues about working process that were undermining team performance. The CEO was able to agree with his team how better to work through such situations together, which meant that they had a model for more productive interactions in the future.

ACT have used Step II extensively in high-level strategic contexts. Marc has used it to facilitate thinking in leaders around links between an organisation’s theoretical ‘mission statement’ or their stated company philosophy, and the business reality of its operational culture. This can bring significant contradictions and points of weakness to light.

Understanding their Step II profiles can equip leaders to direct the working culture in a way that is more congruent with their values *and* business aspirations. Often, this is through understanding how conflicts can become complementarities; where ‘someone from a different planet’ becomes ‘someone who can really add value’. Feedback ACT has received indicates that Step II makes the benefits of learning already embedded from Step I much more tangible, providing vivid moments of awakening for individuals and teams.

Outcomes and benefits

ACT’s conviction in the benefits of the Step II instrument is well-evidenced. To add to an abundance of anecdotal examples of the instrument at work, they have also collected metrics about its efficacy. Client surveys indicate substantial and rapid improvements in results around employee engagement and management satisfaction during the year in which Step II interventions were introduced. Specific areas identified as needing attention in previous surveys were considered to have markedly improved.

There is also evidence of rapid acceleration of team progress after the teambuilding session or coaching in terms of performance targets being met. Perhaps the most telling evidence of success is that many of ACT’s clients ask how they too can become qualified to work with the MBTI Step II instrument.

For information about how we could work with your organisation to achieve individual, team or leadership development, please contact our Sales team on +44 (0)845 603 9958 or by email at enquiry@opp.eu.com.