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Breaking the bean-counter stereotype

Member research assesses personality traits for healthcare financial managers

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Prior research^{1,2,3} shows that those who seek financial management roles often possess inherent characteristics that are somewhat different from professionals in more visible leadership roles, such as chief executive officers and chief operating officers. The bean-counter stereotype of an introverted, spreadsheet-loving, number-crunching, financial-ratio guru who is drowning in an office of printed accounting ledgers is still quite common and cited during healthcare leadership forums, including a healthcare finance and insurance faculty forum at the Association of University Programs in Healthcare Administration Annual Meeting in June.

The bean-counter stereotype of an introverted, spreadsheet-loving, number-crunching, financial-ratio guru who is drowning in an office of printed accounting ledgers is still common, but MGMA member responses on the MGMA Member Community suggest a change.

Yet recent MGMA member responses to a Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) survey on the Member Community

(mgma.org/Myers-Briggs-Survey) suggest a change to this stereotype. While not a perfect science, the MBTI is a common way to assess individual characteristics and has been validated and used for decades in social research.³ It has been used as a fun, informational tool for professionals while organizations have incorporated it into executive professional development programs and upper management job application requirements.

The member survey suggests that industry changes, such as the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) have attracted a different type of person to healthcare finance or it might have prompted tenured professionals to alter behaviors and attitudes toward daily healthcare industry-specific tasks and challenges. For example, the ACA requires healthcare finance professionals to engage in collaborative roles with various leaders across the organizational chart to participate in pay-for-performance measures, value-based purchasing, ICD-10 implementation and the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act (MACRA).

Myers-Briggs results

Our most recent poll shows that, in general, MGMA financial managers possess a significantly high level of Extraversion and Sensing MBTI personality preferences. (See definitions of personality preferences on page 33.) The sample showed that MGMA financial managers prefer

A different breed?

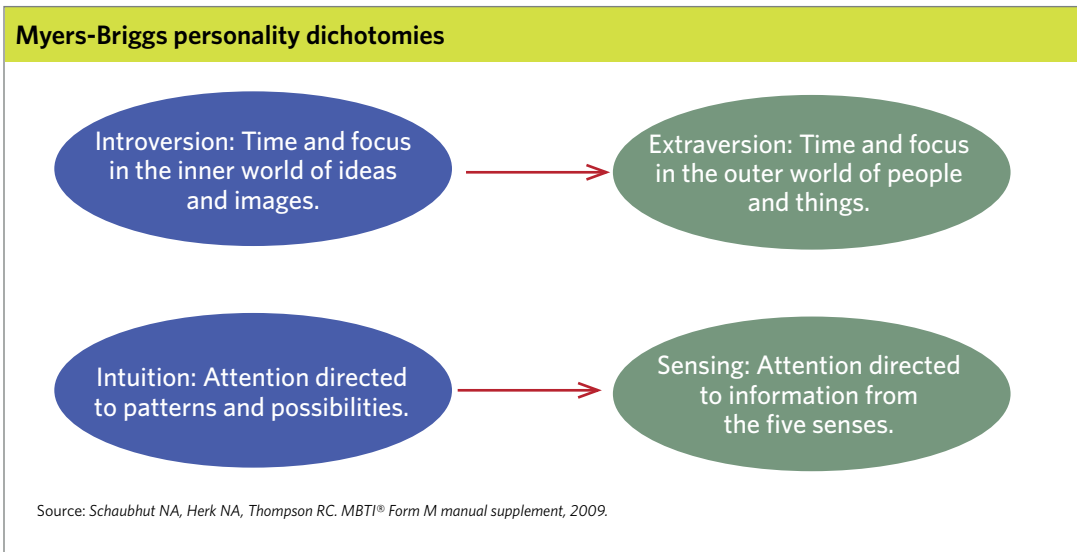
Lieneck and Michael Nowicki, EdD, FACHE, FHFMA, professor, School of Health Administration, Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas, conducted a primary quantitative replication study on the MGMA Member Community (mgma.org/membercommunity) with a free Myers-Briggs Type Indicator personality-type inventory for healthcare financial managers or those who have similar responsibilities in their organizations.¹ The study was funded through a Research Enhancement Program grant from the Texas State University; applicable Institutional Review Board approvals were obtained.

Sixty-two MGMA members responded and were sent their Myers-Briggs personality preference-coded inventory results after completing the survey. Aggregate results for the MGMA sample suggest characteristics such as low introversion and high extraversion of medical group practice healthcare financial managers and their contributions to effective governance of healthcare organizations.

Note:

1. Lieneck C, Nowicki M. "Healthcare finance executive personalities revisited: A 10-year follow-up study," *Health Care Manager*, 2015; 34(3).

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increased information gathering and analysis at service delivery and an increased use of all senses (Sensing) versus perceiving information using larger-scale, trending analysis methods that focus on the big picture in organizational operations (Intuition) (Figure 1).⁴ Additionally, higher sample levels of financial managers who fall into the Extraversion category suggest greater or more open communication skills compared with introverted personality characteristics.³

These findings suggest that there is a different batch of medical group practice financial managers entering healthcare or possibly a slight change of view with regard to recent organizational healthcare finance challenges and continuing industry change. This type of information might prove helpful to human resources professionals and others who are building healthcare teams.

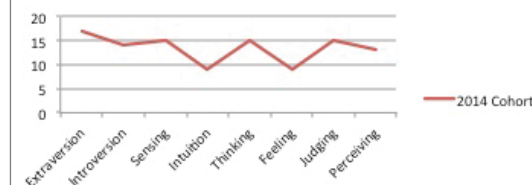
What makes you, you?

What do you think is driving the changes in personality type that I saw in this sample? In other words, what industry dynamics are driving the changes in personality type? Are there specific duties, responsibilities or other job tasks required of financial professionals that suggest the need for leaders who possess higher levels of Extroversion and Sensing personality characteristics?

If you are a healthcare finance professional, what changes – including government regulations – might affect those entering the field? Please post a response to the MGMA Community Forum to add to this study and support (or refute) the findings and how they relate to the current healthcare industry environment. ■

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Figure 1. MGMA member results from the 2014 MBTI survey (Form M)



Source: Cristian Lieneck

Notes:

1. Larrabe S. "The psychology types of college accounting students," *Journal of Personality Type*, 1994; 28: 37-32.
2. Shackleton V. "The accounting stereotype: Myth or reality?" *Accountancy*, November 1980: 122-123.
3. Otte P. "Do CPAs have a unique personality; are certain personality types found more frequently in our profession?" *The Michigan CPA*, Spring 1984: 29-36.
4. Schaubhut NA, Herk NA, Thompson RC. MBTI® Form M manual supplement, 2009. Retrieved from: mgma.org/form-m.

Post a response to the MGMA Member Community forum (mgma.org/Myers-Briggs-Survey) with your ideas or experiences that support (or refute) our study's findings and how they relate to the current healthcare industry environment.