

# Workforce

By Michele Chandler

Featured Article

## Further Assessment: More Companies Using Evaluation Tools to Identify Future Leaders and More

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When Driscoll's, a century-old California-based global provider of fresh berries, wanted to help its core workers hone their leadership skills, the company turned to employee assessment tools. Since 2004, more than 300 of the company's 500 full-time U.S. workers have finished a yearlong program that uses the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator assessment tool, which analyzes feedback from a series of questions to help employees recognize preferences that can impact their effectiveness on the job. The company wants all of its workers to eventually complete the program.

By shedding light on workers' differing communication styles and how they make decisions and settle conflicts, workplace assessments are credited with helping to boost team effectiveness.

"I think people see a value to it as to how they can help become a more effective team and also how they can understand their peers," says Janet Heien, director of Driscoll Strawberry Associates Inc.'s Growing Great People program, which is part of the company's talent management department and oversees employee development. "We're a really values-based company and how you get along with your co-workers is very important."

Driscoll's is one of a growing number of companies using workplace assessment tools.

Boston-based research firm Aberdeen Group reports in a recent survey that 49 percent of the companies it contacted said they had a formalized assessment strategy in place, up from 40 percent in 2011.

"Anecdotally, we are seeing increasing usage among organizations," says Mollie Lombardi, Aberdeen's research director for human capital management and author of the report, in an email.

The Aberdeen research report found that companies are including assessment tools in their efforts to identify high-potential talent, to develop workers' interpersonal and leadership skills and to set performance goals for their workers.

United Way of Greater Milwaukee regularly uses assessments as part of its hiring process, says Ken Vogel, director of human resources. His nonprofit organization often administers the ProfileXT assessment, created by Profiles International, a Waco, Texas-based provider of evaluation services and tools.

Here's how it works: First, United Way has its top performers take the ProfileXT assessment to determine the thinking style, behavioral traits and occupational interests that make those employees so successful. Then, job candidates take the assessment and have their results compared against the top employees' traits.

The candidates' results aren't measured as "good or bad. It's just how they're wired," Vogel says, with the goal to help determine if someone is right for the position.

In addition to personality assessments, some companies offer competency-based assessments and personality fit by job types, says Deb Calvert, president of Morgan Hill, California-based consulting firm People First Productivity Solutions.

"There are at least a dozen for sales suitability alone," she says. "Add in assessments related to critical-thinking skills, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, leadership behaviors, strengths, values and aptitude, and there are certainly hundreds that are used."

Other well-known assessments include the DiSC instrument, which is published by Inscape Publishing Inc. and the Keirsey Temperament Sorter personality questionnaire, developed by Keirsey.com.

Businesses with global operations are especially likely to utilize assessments, says Jennifer Overbo, who is director of product strategy for CPP Inc., the publisher of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. The benchmark tool, she says, is used by 89 of the nation's Fortune 100 companies.

"One of the trends that we're seeing is that there is a much more connected workplace," Overbo says. "Companies are trying to expand globally, so there's even a greater need to understand the individuals that you are working with, who you are bringing onboard and what their path may be in the organization."

Some organizations also are broadening how they use Myers-Briggs. "Before, they may have used it just for team development. Now, they're using assessments to really grow leaders, to bring teams together around strategic planning and innovation, and looking to create clear career paths," Overbo says.

In addition to a traditional base of big firms, she says Myers-Briggs publisher CPP is receiving "quite few inquiries from very small organizations" about how the tool can aid their employees' development.

"Companies are spending quite a bit of money training their employees, but no one has been measuring that return on investment," says Gretchen Lester, assistant professor in the Department of Organization and Management at San Jose State University in California. "So I think there's been a big push for more metrics around whether the training and skill development that companies are paying for are actually working."

Costs vary widely, and some tools are offered online for free. Industry experts say the cost of administering assessment tools and conducting follow-up training can cost companies thousands of dollars.

In its report, Aberdeen found that about 75 percent of high-performing companies can directly attribute positive changes in revenue or profitability to their assessment strategies.

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