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Personality Assessment Soars at Southwest

By Margery Weinstein

Personality divergences are expected in the workplace, but when you support employees working thousands of feet in the sky, the last thing you need is a bickering team. To make sure that doesn't happen, Southwest Airlines decided to give the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) assessment from CPP, Inc., a try.

A personality inventory designed to give people information about their psychological preferences, the tool is used to aid team building, conflict resolution, and leadership programs. Since most problems center on communication, Southwest uses the assessment as a diagnostic tool to help employees identify how obstacles, stress, and potential conflict may arise, says Elizabeth Bryant, director of Southwest's University of the People. But the company also uses the personality assessment for intact work teams, which she says "helps leaders and teams by providing them with communication tools, helping them recognize and celebrate their differences. The teams then use this knowledge to achieve better results."

In addition, Southwest found the assessment can provide a foundation for building trust in developing teams. The company recently used the MBTI to establish trust among new leaders in one of its departments. The assessment illustrated to the new leaders how their co-workers could approach the same challenge from vastly different perspectives. The tool helped them understand the reasoning behind their co-workers' behavior, which, in turn, helped build trust and empathy within the department. "In these classes, we saw a lot of 'aha' moments," says Bryant. "Behaviors that might have once caused misunderstanding and frustration now are viewed through a different filter."