

Transforming training methods with MBTI insights

A world-leading military organization wants to improve its instruction methods so its trainee pilots deliver high performances consistently. What difference will a coaching-oriented approach make?

The Royal Air Force (RAF) is an internationally respected organization with a proud history and a commitment to ongoing excellence. Maintaining this reputation requires a focus on continuous improvement, and sustaining within the culture a keen awareness of the responsibility the Force bears.

As part of this desire for continuous improvement, it was recognized that the method of instructing others would benefit from a shift from a traditional, instructional technique to incorporate a more coaching-based approach. As Squadron Leader Adrian Rycroft, formerly from the Central Flying School (CFS) at RAF Cranwell, commented at the time: "We were aware that the old system of 'explain, demonstrate, criticize mistakes then repeat' was not effective in producing consistently high performance. We saw that this teaching style does not suit everyone and for some, creates stress in itself over time, rather than building confidence."

At the time, the CFS's 'Airmanship and Human Factors' training program was covered by two courses: one for initial aircrew students and one for aircrew instructors who were beginning their professional training. Drop-out rates at a late stage in pilot training have could cost the RAF up to £2.5 million per student, so the desire to ensure success for participants on both courses was extremely strong.

Business Challenges

- Communication
- Decision-making
- Resilience
- Coaching

Company Profile

The Royal Air Force (RAF) is the UK's aerial warfare force. RAF Cranwell is home to the Royal Air Force College (RAFC), which trains the RAF's new officers and is the RAF's Central Flying School. It is the RAF equivalent of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, the Britannia Royal Naval College, and the Commando Training Centre Royal Marines. RAF Cranwell is considered by some to be the spiritual home of the RAF.

RAF Cranwell

Solution

The RAF designed a coaching program to train their flying instructors in the use of coaching techniques to maximize performance and increase retention. It was keen to embed a psychometric tool within the coaching program and opted for the MBTI® instrument over its competitors, for two reasons. They were attracted to its pedigree – a 50-year track record of well documented research and application – and to its versatility and flexibility – the different levels of depth that can be achieved when using it, and its applicability in multiple contexts. As a result, they approached us to co-design and deliver the program.

The 'Aircrew Performance Coaching' course was a four-week program consisting of the following elements:

- Week One: Introduction to coaching, basic coaching skills and effective communication
- Week Two: Attend the MBTI Qualifying workshop (Part One); Introduction to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy techniques and practical sessions
- Week Three: Attend the MBTI Qualifying workshop (Part Two); attend MBTI and coaching course; input on performance coaching and goal setting
- Week Four: Advanced coaching skills (including Gestalt principles of coaching); high ropes and a coaching assessment day

The whole program was run two to three times a year and was completed by a cohort of six people at a time.

The MBTI philosophy around the constructive use of differences was key to developing the Airmanship and Human Factors training. It helped the RAF nurture a genuinely supportive and productive environment, where difficulties were acknowledged, but in parallel, strategies for resolving them were taught that allowed everyone to progress.

As Squadron Leader Rycroft explained, "The MBTI tool provides various communication and problem-solving models with many practical applications for the RAF, including situational awareness,

Solution

- MBTI Step I and Step II development program
- Basic and advanced coaching sessions

“The MBTI tool provides practical applications for situational awareness, decision-making, and mental performance. It has been particularly helpful in encouraging people to think about the different communication styles that they and the people they interact with employ.”

**Squadron Leader
Adrian Rycroft,**
Officer Commanding the Human
Factors Centre, RAF Cranwell

RAF Cranwell

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“Everyone feels they can apply the MBTI tool, especially flying instructors; it equips them with the means to transfer their knowledge effectively, whoever their audience.”

Results

Feedback on the coaching element was very positive: “People have only good things to say about it!” says Rycroft. “Some students have told us that if it hadn’t been for this, they would have failed. Drop-out rates at a late stage in the training could cost the RAF up to £2.5 million per student, and this is helping everyone to get 100% out of the training and the money invested in it.”

The newly introduced coaching element was such a success that RAF Cranwell decided to apply for accreditation from the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), further cementing the credibility and long-term application of their work with the MBTI tool and our consultants.

Results

- A supportive and productive teaching environment
- Greater understanding of the need to adapt communication style to get the most out of others
- Increased awareness of and the development of coping strategies for stress



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