

AN OVERVIEW OF THE DISC ASSESSMENT AND ITS APPLICATIONS

THE DISC TECHNIQUE

PRINCIPLES OF THE DISC ASSESSMENT

Our **DISC** assessment consists of twenty-four questions. Though our assessment **DISC** asks considerably fewer questions than many other behavioral assessments (some ask an individual to answer upwards of **600** questions), **DISC**'s ability to construct an effective personality profile from such a simple question set is undoubtedly a major reason for its success.

Each of the twenty-four questions consists of four words, each word describing a Dominance, Influence, Steadiness or Compliance trait. For each question, the person completing the questionnaire is asked to select one of the four words that describes them the *most* while in a working environment. They are then asked the opposite; which of the remaining three options describes them the *least*? This process can be administered quickly, taking, on average, ten minutes to complete, and rarely more than twenty.

Collecting a person's responses to a **DISC** questionnaire is only the first step of the **DISC** assessment. Once this information has been obtained, it will need to be scored to produce a **DISC** profile. Performing this task manually can be an arduous task, and is unavoidably prone to errors. For this reason, many companies have introduced laborsaving techniques such as telephone marking, or color-coding systems. But perhaps the best solution for avoiding input errors and decreasing the time it takes to score a test is to use a software-based system, such as the **Strategic Assessment System (SAS)**, to expedite the marking and calculation process.

DISC DEFINITIONS

D FOR DOMINANCE

The first of the four **DISC** dimensions is Dominance, or 'D'. As its name suggests, Dominance is the dimension of directness, assertiveness and control. The Greeks, whose theory of personality is mentioned in the history section of the training manual, would have associated Dominance with blood and fire, a fitting combination for this frenzied personality dimension.

I FOR INFLUENCE

After Dominance, the next **DISC** dimension is Influence, or 'I'. Influence is associated with a sunny, friendly and extroverted personality, warm and open to others, sociable and good-natured. Personalities with a high Influence score often possess excellent social skills and have an urge to meet and talk with other people.

S FOR STEADINESS

The third of the four **DISC** dimensions is Steadiness, or 'S'. As its name suggests, personalities showing a high level of Steadiness take a measured, steady approach to life. They are patient and undemanding, often showing sympathy for and loyalty to those around them.

C FOR COMPLIANCE

The final **DISC** dimension is Compliance, or 'C'. This is perhaps the most complex of the four dimensions. Traditionally, High 'C's were categorized merely as 'rule-oriented'. Recent investigation, however, has shown that this is only part of the story, and the dimension represents a far more sophisticated element of the behavioural style than was previously thought.

APPLICATIONS OF THE SYSTEM

RECRUITMENT

DISC can be used to perform a wide variety of functions. Of all the possible applications, recruitment is probably the most common. The majority of practical **DISC** systems are used for this sector, and many people see **DISC** only as a recruitment tool.

SHORT-LISTING

In times of economic hardship, job vacancies attract large numbers of potential candidates. Application rates often run into the dozens or even hundreds; far more than can be practically interviewed. To solve this problem, most organizations make a short-list of the most promising candidates and interview only the members on the list.

Because **DISC** results can be produced from a paper questionnaire, it is possible to include such a questionnaire when mailing candidates' application forms. As this questionnaire determines an applicants' preferred work style quickly and easily, the results can be immediately compared to the company's predetermined, 'ideal' profile for the position, expediting the shortlisting process. Although this technique can always be used manually, when an extremely large number of applications is involved a computerized **DISC** system simplifies the process even further.

It is important to note that in shortlisting, as with all **DISC** applications, **DISC** is merely an aid. Because **DISC** has no way of measuring other, important information, such as education, background and previous experience, it only evaluates one aspect of a person's personality, their work style. To draw a complete, comprehensive short-list from work styles alone is not practical.

PRE-INTERVIEW TESTING

Once a shortlist has been completed, and invitations to interview have been sent, **DISC** has another important part to play in the recruitment process. This is the point where most commercial **DISC** users apply their systems - to test and assess the candidate on their premises before an interview.

If a set of results has already been produced through the shortlisting process, it is not necessary to test the candidate a second time.

INTERVIEWING

Ultimately, **DISC** results can aid the interviewer during the interview itself. It can do this in two ways:

- First, the **DISC** interpretation of a candidate's preferred work style can bring to the surface potential difficulties that may not emerge during the course of a normal interview. Knowing the potential problems before the interview allows the interviewer to prepare questions that will address those issues, which enables them to assess the problems' relevance to the job in question.
- Second, **DISC** can help improve communication during the interviewing process. Though

this is a subtler, less tangible benefit, it can have a significant impact on the progress of the discussion. By being aware of an interviewee's motivating factors, the skillful interviewer can help relieve the pressure of being interviewed. This opens the lines of communication, encouraging the candidate to reveal pertinent information.

TEAM BUILDING

Why is it that some teams work smoothly and effectively together while others break down with internal conflicts and achieve little? There are, of course, many reasons for this, but one of the main, contributing factors is the interaction of personalities within the team. **DISC** can provide a useful predictor of team effectiveness by highlighting possible problem areas and suggesting ways of resolving these problems.

DOMINANCE

Dominance, the dimension of control, is particularly suited to a leadership role within a team. Dominant people have a natural urge to take command, and will fit easily into such a position. An important consideration with personalities of this type, however, is that the number of highly Dominant team-members should be kept to minimum. Several people attempting to take control within a team will have a negative affect on team performance.

INFLUENCE

Influence is the social cement of the team. Unless they possess specialized skills, highly Influential people often appear to have little practical value to the team, and are often undervalued. It is important to remember, however, that for a team to work effectively, its members must have a sense of cohesion, and, because Influential styles have excellent communication skills, this cohesion can be achieved by the inclusion of one or two Influential individuals within the team. The communicative abilities of Influence can also produce a useful representative or spokesperson for the team, presenting their findings and ideas to others.

STEADINESS

Steadiness represents the team's 'brake', holding the other members back from making hasty decisions or from acting too quickly. The importance of this particular team function becomes evident once the internal, social relationships have formed and the team begins to perform the required task. When dealing with Steadiness, bear in mind that they are naturally passive individuals. This trait often prevents them from giving input unless directly requested, and it is often helpful to develop the structure of the team in such a way that Steady members feel their contributions will be valued and accepted by the other team members.

COMPLIANCE

Compliance is a dimension important in achieving the results required from the team. Those members with high Compliance scores will tend to be the ones who generate ideas and produce materials and reports. The passive side of the Compliant personality, however, will normally require more assertive team-members (specifically Dominant and Influential types) to implement and monitor and plans or suggestions they may produce. The Compliant members of the team are often those who possess the specialized skills and knowledge appropriate to a project.

For any team to be effective over the long term, regardless of its constitution, it must pass through an initial period of flux and uncertainty before it will begin to perform, during which relationships and roles within the group are formed. This formative period is an ideal time to introduce any formal structures considered necessary to the smooth running of the group.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

DISC also has possibilities in terms of personal development. The clearest example of this is in helping with an individual's career development.

In its simplest terms, using **DISC** for career development is a very similar process to that seen in recruitment or assessment scenarios. A person's **DISC** profile series is compared against an ideal Position Analysis for a particular career, and the closeness of the match between the two styles will give an indication of how well that individual's personality is suited to the career being investigated.

While this is an appropriate method if a decision is being made between two or three possible career directions, it becomes inappropriate if a person has no clear idea of the type of career they may be interested in. This situation might apply, for example, to students leaving college or university. In this case, a library of Position Analyses is needed, representing a variety of jobs in different career areas. Comparisons of this kind, incorporating hundreds of possible matches, are impractical for manual **DISC** systems, but computerized **DISC** systems are sometimes able to provide these matching applications. This can be an effective way of suggesting career ideas that a person may not have considered.

Once a career decision has been made, **DISC** can also help in preparing application letters and curricula vitae. **DISC** profiles help to highlight the particular areas of strength within a personality, and these can be included in applications. Because so many organizations use **DISC**, it may even be plausible to include a printed **DISC** report with a job application.