

It's All About Personality: DiSC Drivers

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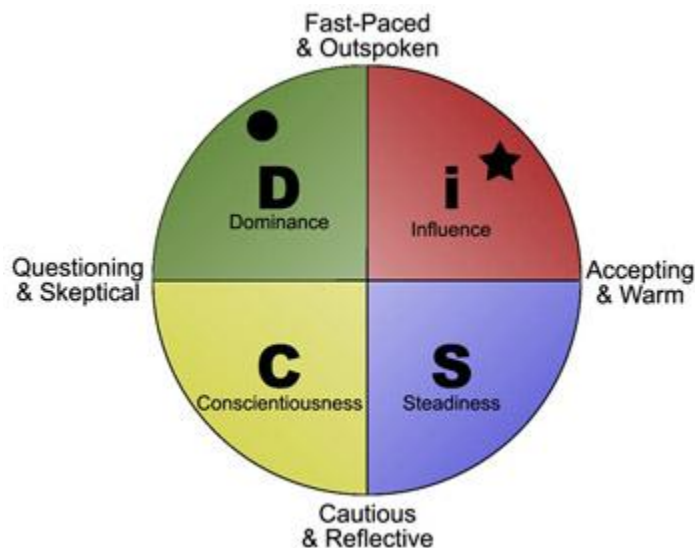
Communication works only from one member of "us" to another. Communication in organization—and this may be the true lesson of our communication failure and the true measure of our communication need—is not a means of organization. It is the mode of organization. —Peter F. Drucker, 1973

By Jeffrey Sugerman and Mark Scullard

Research on "the real work" of middle managers in both large and small organizations consistently identifies a cluster of important capabilities associated with leveraging informal networks of people inside a company that make substantive, lasting change possible. According to Quy Nguyen Huy, author of "In Praise of Middle Managers" (2001), "Effective middle managers stay attuned to employees' moods and emotional needs, thereby ensuring the change initiative's momentum is maintained." In short, organizations demonstrating high effectiveness in initiating change employ successful managers who exhibit well-practiced behaviors related to effective conflict management and communication.

The good news for organizations and managers alike is that a straightforward model of understanding management-employee interactions is available. Research shows that managers can be trained to discern a typology of employee dispositions and priorities, and it is called DiSC.

The DiSC personality model explores people's behavioral style based on their personality and the situations they find themselves in. DiSC is an acronym for Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness. These four dimensions can be grouped in a grid with D and i sharing the top row and representing extroverted aspects of one's personality, and C and S below, representing introverted aspects. D and C also share the left column and represent task-focused aspects, and I and S share the right column and represent social aspects. The method is illustrated partially by the following 2x2 matrix:



To better understand an employee, a manager is asked to consider the person along a dimension of being "fast-paced and outspoken" to "cautious and reflective." Next, the same person is considered along a dimension of being "questioning and skeptical" to "accepting and warm." The combination of these dimensions places the individual in one of the four quadrants.

Some of the people in the organization may lean toward the D or Dominance style. They are direct and not afraid to be forceful. People with this style are results oriented and push to keep things moving. Those with the D style enjoy the challenge of working with a manager who creates a sense of urgency.

Naturally, every person has an individual style that most likely fits into more than one quadrant. They may, for example, tend toward i (Influence). People with the i style are outgoing and lively. They love to be around people, and their enthusiasm is obvious. They enjoy the spotlight and love getting recognition for their work, particularly if it is public recognition. Those with the i style thrive in a fun, colorful environment. They are talkative and appreciate

opportunities to work with others.

Other people, however, may have more of an S or Steadiness style. They are accommodating and considerate and have a gentle and sincere manner. People with the S style show their concern for others and appreciate a patient manager who is willing to listen. They also prefer a stable, predictable environment where everyone gets along. If they can be told what to expect around the corner, it will give them time to mentally prepare.

Finally, some of the people may fit in as a C or Conscientiousness style. These people are analytical and care about accuracy. They also can come across as reserved, and perhaps a bit skeptical. Those with the C style like having the time to do a quality job and enjoy situations where they can be the experts. They show self-control, and prefer an orderly, businesslike environment where people concentrate on logic rather than emotions.

During the learning process, managers often discover it is easier to adjust to certain styles than others. This is in part because of the manager's own DiSC style. For instance, if a manager has a D management style, he or she probably drives toward new goals, insists on immediate action, and challenges people with high expectations. This process is likely effective when managing other D-style employees. Employees with the S style, on the other hand, may find this same D approach to management to be blunt, intimidating, or insensitive.

By contrast, a manager with an i management style probably encourages others, creates a collaborative atmosphere, and takes quick action. A person who also tends toward the I style might find this encouragement and energy exciting, even if the two might be a little too optimistic at times. Those who lean toward the C style, however, might find this sort of enthusiasm and fast pace to be sloppy or reckless.

Some managers have an S management style, meaning they are supportive of the people they manage, and are focused on creating a stable, reliable environment that encourages teamwork and collaboration. Employees with the S style probably will appreciate that their manager cares about them and will try to avoid sudden changes, even if that means there is little sense of urgency. But those with the D style might see this environment as stagnated or wishy-washy.

Finally, those with a C management style probably focus on analysis and objectivity, use logic to challenge ideas, and maintain standards of quality and reliability. Colleagues with the C style might agree that prioritization is vital to getting things right, even if they get bogged down in analysis. But for people with the i style, this cautious pace may feel dry, sapping their natural energy.

Every employee and manager has a unique blend of DiSC-based characteristics. The key to a successful relationship lies with the manager's ability to identify what interpersonal style he or she prefers, and how to engage employees whose own DiSC styles may be quite different. When it comes to delegating, motivating, or developing employees, a truly great manager has to connect by anticipating the temperament of each worker. The DiSC model provides a better sense of when and why that sort of adaptation is so crucial to not only the manager's success, but also that of his or her employees.

For more information on DiSC and DiSC-related assessments, contact www.traininglocation.com.