

On Target!

A Publication from Target Consultants, Inc.

Info-Letter #501

The difference between DISC and MBTI®

What's the difference? Do we need to use both?

Straight talk about each instrument.
Target Consultants, Inc.

Both the DISC instrument and the MBTI® (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) are widely used and accepted in thousands of organizations around the world. Since DISC has grown at an enormous pace over the past two decades, the two instruments may be tied for the number of instruments sold annually. Since DISC instruments are provided through at least a dozen vendors, the specific numbers of instruments used are more difficult to track.

Some type of four-dimensional model of behavior has been in existence since about 400 BC with Empodocles (air, earth, fire, and water), Hippocrates (sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic, and melancholic), Galen in 170 AD, Carl Jung in 1921 (thinking, feeling, sensing, and intuiting), and William Marston in 1928 (Dominance, Inducement, Steadiness, and Compliance). Currently there are over a dozen DISC-type models in the marketplace, and since the DISC concept is in the public domain, other iterations may continue to emerge.

What each of the DISC models have in common is that they attempt to describe observable behavior, that is, **HOW** someone does what they do. If you are a salesperson, **how** do you sell? Do you sell as a high or low D, I, S, or C, or most likely, a combination thereof? If you are a manager, **how** do you manage? As a D, I, S, or C, or a combination?

Both DISC and MBTI have a wide recognition

continued on page 2

DISC Behavior dimensions:

Dominance: Approach to Problems

- **High**: New problems solved quickly, assertively, actively. Gets to the bottom-line quickly.
- **Low**: New problems solved in a controlled, organized way. Thinks before acting.

Influencing: Approach to People

- **High**: Meets new people in an outgoing, talkative manner. Gregarious and emotional.
- **Low**: Meets new people in a quiet, controlled, reserved manner. Emotionally controlled.

Steadiness: Approach to Work Pace

- **High**: Prefers a controlled, deliberate work environment. Values security of situation.
- **Low**: Prefers a flexible, dynamic, changeable environment. Values freedom of expression.

Cautious: Approach to Procedures

- **High**: Likes things done 'the right way,' and says, "Rules are made to be followed."
- **Low**: Works independently of the procedures and says, "Rules are made to be bent or broken."

MBTI Preferences:

- **Introversion -- Extraversion**: Orientation to the world around us: Outer world, with others, or inner world with self.
- **Sensing -- Intuition**: Ways of perceiving or gathering information: Real and actual, or looking at patterns and meanings.
- **Thinking -- Feeling**: Decision-making based on careful analysis, or consideration of the impact on others.
- **Judging -- Perceiving**: Dealing with outer world in orderly, planned manner; or in a spontaneous, flexible manner.

and acceptance in the marketplace. MBTI gained initial recognition from the academic community and has maintained a presence both in academe and in the business arena. The DISC model has grown faster over the past thirty years, and with current research projects, it is gaining attention in the academic community with a number of doctoral dissertations exploring the range of the model.

The **DISC** model has been of enormous benefit in determining the **HOW** of our behavioral choices or style preferences. These uses include coaching, placement, management, team-building, and numerous other practical uses. The DISC model is not a personality test. It explores four traits within our personality, but the term 'personality' goes far beyond the amplification of four behavioral traits. As a result, relatives of this four dimensional model have been called: Type, Style, Preferences, and many other terms related to components of personality. However, most of the models avoid the use of the word 'personality.'

The **DISC** model itself is one of the most widely used non-clinical behavioral instruments in the marketplace, and it has gained wide acceptance in the US, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Its success comes in large part from its ease of use and interpretation as well as the memorable and pronounceable name, DISC.

When we've asked people who have taken both DISC and MBTI to recall their style or type about six months after taking the instruments, responses differ. Those taking the DISC will usually say, "Oh, I'm a High D," or "Sure, I'm a High I." Many who have taken the MBTI six months ago will say, "I can't remember all of it, but I think it's 'E-' something." Therein one difference: DISC terminology is more memorable for many people.

MBTI has advertised in the past as "the most widely used personality inventory in the world," although many DISC experts claim that the combined sales of DISC instruments has now surpassed sales of MBTI. MBTI specifically uses the words "personality type," which are terms that

DISC vendors usually avoid.

The MBTI brings some advantages to the marketplace: There is an extensive research base and many academic studies that have used the instrument. It has broad-based acceptance in the academic arena and widespread support therein. It is relatively inexpensive to use in paper form.

When asked which one is best, the answer depends on the needs of the client. When asked how are they different, the answer can be distilled to this: The MBTI illuminates ways of thinking and dealing with information internally. That is, how we think about the world around us. DISC illuminates one's behavioral style, that is, HOW we do what we do.

We could ask a sales manager: What is most important for you to know about your salespeople? What they think about internally, or how they sell your products? We could ask a customer service manager: What is most important for you to know about your personnel? What they think about internally, or how they interact with your customers?

If the answers tend toward a preference for the knowledge of **how** the personnel interact with others, then the DISC instrument may be the instrument of choice. Additionally, when MBTI users are given a sample DISC report of their own, the choice may become clear. A client would need to purchase three or four different MBTI computer reports to gain the same information contained in one **Style Insights®** report, and spend many times the cost of a single **Style Insights®** report. This is important information for your clients to know.

The information provided above is the opinion of the author, Russell J. Watson, Ed.D. There may be other researchers who may disagree. **For more information, contact your TTI distributor.**

Style Insights® is a Registered Trademark of TTI Performance Systems, Ltd.

MBTI® is a Registered Trademark of Consulting Psychologists Press.