

# DiSC Myths



## Myth 1

### DiSC measures personality type

"Personality Type" is a term used to describe the results of a personality test or the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). The **DiSC Model** does not measure personality type, but it does measure aspects of personality. To be more explicit, the words individuals respond to are attributes or qualities of the person. The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary definitions help to clarify what the profiles are measuring:

- *attribute* - an inherent characteristic; a word ascribing a quality
- *quality* - a peculiar and essential character; an inherent feature

What the DiSC profiles measure therefore is more stable than surface behavioural responses to external stimuli. They measure aspects of personality, but not *personality type*.

## Myth 2

### DiSC Profiles are personality tests

The word "test" implies a potential pass or fail result, or at least that there are good or bad results. The DiSC behavioural model is "descriptive", not "evaluative". That is, it describes differences between people in a non-judgmental way - it does not evaluate behaviour.

## Myth 3

### DiSC Profiles are designed to be used as selection tools

They are not actually designed to be used in selection. They were designed as self-assessment tools to give people an understanding of their behaviour so they could learn to increase their effectiveness. And yet many **DiSC Model** products are sold primarily, if not exclusively, to be used for selection. There are two significant dangers in using a **DiSC profile** as a selection tool.

The first is related to the fact that **DiSC profiling does not measure a person's behavioural adaptability**. Research has shown that the most effective people are those who can adapt to the environment and use the most appropriate behaviour in each situation. This ties in with research on *emotional intelligence* (EQ) that people with higher levels of EQ are more productive and effective in different situations, regardless of their personality or behavioural style.

All **DiSC Profiles** based on a 24 or 28 item forced-choice questionnaire are *impassive*, not *normative* measurement instruments. Being *impassive* means that it is measuring a person's own internal preferences. So if a person comes up high on the "Influence" or "I" dimension in DiSC when completing the **DiSC Profile**, it does not mean that they are skilful at using *influencing* behaviour; it simply means they prefer to use it. Some people really enjoy singing in the shower, but they are not necessarily good at it.

Because the instrument is not *normatively* scaled, two job candidates coming equally high on that "I" scale do not necessarily use the same level of *influencing* behaviour as perceived by others.

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While *impassive* tests are regarded as unsuitable for selection, *they are not inferior to normative tests*, and for certain purposes are the method of choice. Their primary usefulness is to help individuals *sort out or compare their personal preferences*. Scores on an *impassive* measure have meaning for an *individual*.

Individuals do not have to be compared unless one wants to examine the strength of one person's preference in relation to other people's preferences. In that situation, a normative instrument is a better fit.

So *impassive* measures, like the forced-choice **DiSC Profiles**, are more effective as learning instruments since they help individuals learn about themselves without making a comparison between themselves and others. Of course the instrument still needs to be valid so that it accurately measures what it says it measures.

That said, there is still some value in using the **DiSC Profile** as a part of the selection process. It gives you valuable information on how this applicant perceives themselves, and that gives you the opportunity to develop some questions to ask them and their referees about their ability to adapt to handle the various roles you want them to perform.

When used in this way, the **DiSC Profile** provides very useful information as a part of the selection process, at a modest price. The results of the profile however, *cannot tell you whether this is a suitable applicant or not*. **Beware** of the **DiSC Model** packages on the market that are being sold specifically for selection. Especially those that have a report that tells you whether the applicant is suitable or unsuitable for the job. DiSC can't do that.

## Myth 4

**DiSC Profiles measure adaptive and natural behaviour.**

**DiSC Profiles** based on the forced-choice questionnaire typically have three graphs to show the results. Graph I shows the result of the respondents "Most" responses; Graph II shows the result of the respondent's "Least" responses; and Graph III shows the combined result after subtracting the "Least" scores from the "Most" scores.

The purpose behind the design of this type of forced-choice questionnaire is to eliminate, or at least reduce any social desirability bias. When people complete a self-assessment questionnaire, there is a tendency to be influenced towards selecting socially desirable responses as "most" like them, and socially undesirable responses as being "least" like them. By subtracting "least" responses from "most" responses for the combined result, Graph III, much of the social desirability influence is removed.

So the results of Graph I and Graph II are not adjusted for social desirability.

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So why do some DiSC Profiles describe Graph One as measuring "How others see me", "The Mask" or "Adapted Behaviour" and Graph Two as measuring "Behaviour Under Pressure" or "Natural Behaviour"? There is no research to support these assumptions.

In fact Graphs I and II simply measure different aspects of "self perception". The questionnaire does not ask people to describe how they think others see them, nor how they adapt their behaviour. It also does not ask people how they behave under pressure. So we cannot claim the results to tell us these things and again, there isn't any published research to justify that we can.

Graph One and Graph Two in the **DiSC Profile** have limited relevance. Graph Three will be the most valid and reliable of the three graphs. Graphs One and Two are simply two halves that make a whole.

DiSC model providers who are still claiming that the three graphs measure different things, are simply demonstrating that they have not done any research and are still operating on false assumptions and out-dated research from the early 1970's!

## **Myth 5**

### **All DiSC Profiles are the same**

What is true is that they are all based on the same four dimensions or behavioural traits, namely Dominance, Influence, Steadiness and Compliance or Conscientiousness. However, most publishers of **DiSC Model** products have different questionnaires, even though some are very similar. They all originate from the same 24 item, four words per item, forced choice questionnaire that was developed by Geier and Hendrickson in the 1960's and revised in 1971.

Most versions have since had word changes, and some have been adapted into phrases. The challenge is to find a validated, reliable profile. To date, only one supplier has published results of extensive validation and reliability studies since 1971. They are Inscape Publishing Company (previously Carlson Learning Company) of Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Inscape Publishing Inc is also the first DiSC provider to release Circumplex DiSC profiles that measure behavioural style on eight scales rather than the traditional four scales. Their research in the early 1990's resulted in the forced-choice questionnaire being extended from 24 to 28 items to increase accuracy and internal reliability. Their research also resulted in significant improvements in the reliability of the instrument, particularly on the "I" and "C" scales, which was lacking with the 24 item questionnaire.

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