

## “DISC is a DISC”

by Markku Kauppinen

Some time ago I was flying back home from a trade show. I was feeling good. I was going home to have a few days off and the trade show expo had been a great success.

I sat next to a HR Director from a company with almost 20,000 employees. We started with small talk and shared our experiences about the conference.

After we did the usual “what do you for a living?” exchange, she asked: “I do not want you to take this the wrong way but DISC is a DISC, isn’t it? In fact, aren’t all behavioral assessments essentially the same? So, what makes Extended DISC better?”

This is a fair enough question and one that we get asked all the time. The honest answer is that Extended DISC may not be better for you. It all depends upon what you are trying to accomplish.

The success of the DISC-model is largely based on its user-friendliness. It is easy to learn and most importantly, easy-to-use. By using the DISC concepts the managers are able to communicate and lead better, and salespeople close more sales. In many ways, “DISC is a DISC.”

What kind of impact is your current assessment system making on your bottom line? I almost always way get a blank stare.

“We are definitely communicating better with one another and things have gotten better.”

“That’s wonderful. But really, if I were to ask your CEO what kind of impact it is having on your business, what would he say?” More blank stares.

We believe that development tools should go beyond improving communication, leadership, customer service, teamwork and sales. It should also provide the executives and business owners information that allows them to make better decisions that make an impact on the business.

Otherwise, they provide very limited strategic impact.

Let me illustrate. Many of our customers use *Extended DISC* for specific training applications. They may have, for example, identified a need to develop the management skills of their mid-level managers. At the same time, the executives of the same organization are:

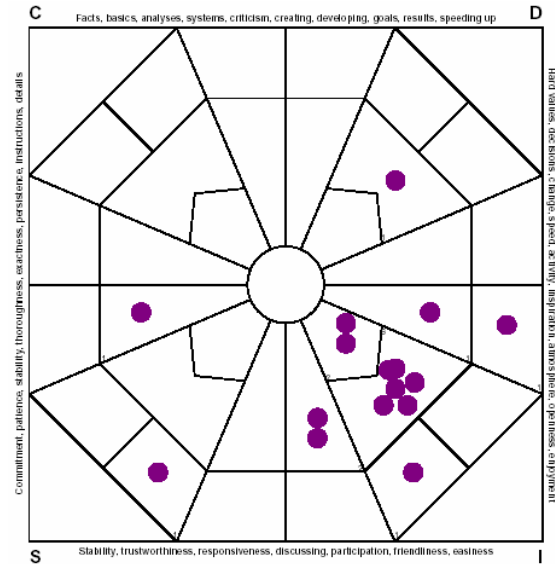
- Unhappy with their employee turnover. It is costing money and causing headaches.
- Frustrated because they cannot replicate the performance of their top producers.
- Afraid that they will lose their best employees.

Although *Extended DISC* can significantly improve the results of the training programs, it was specifically designed to provide information to help to solve these types of issues.

For example, we are working with an organization that was experiencing an employee turnover that was costing it millions. The recruitment costs alone for just one job position were almost \$50 million. When you add the other direct and incorrect costs, it was a significant problem, no matter what multiplier one chose to use for the calculations.

When the client correlated the length of tenure with the performance of the employees by using *Extended DISC*, it was clear what the root causes of the problem were. Simply put, the hiring managers were hiring people who interviewed well but did not stay for long and had below average production during their tenure.

The process was simple. The client simply 'mapped' the different employee performance levels and the lengths of tenure. This firm decided to use 20% brackets for the performance levels (i.e. top 20% performers, 2<sup>nd</sup> 20% performers, etc.) and 3 month tenure brackets.



### Map – Tenure less than 3 months, Region H

Next, we correlated the two and we had our answer. By the way, **do you have this information for your job positions?**

Meanwhile, of course, the individual employees also received their own assessment reports to enhance the effectiveness of the organization's leadership development program.

"I see. So, DISC is not a DISC", my travel companion noted.

It certainly is not.

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Walking under a ladder. Breaking a mirror. A black cat darting across our path. Whoa! Most of us scorn superstitions as silly beliefs of the primitive and uneducated. Deep down inside, we assure ourselves that we're above these antiquated notions.

Not so fast. To a degree, we're all superstitious. In many cases, the higher we climb the organizational totem pole, the more superstitious we become.

Psychologically speaking, superstitious behavior comes from the belief that nonfunctional activity followed by positive reinforcement is actually the cause of that positive reinforcement. Years ago, psychologist B.F. Skinner showed how hungry pigeons may repeat nonfunctional behavior when their twitches and scratches are reinforced by small pellets of grain. From my experience, hungry corporate leaders may also repeat nonfunctional behavior when large pellets of money and recognition follow.

Superstition is merely the confusion of correlation and causality. Any human (in fact, any animal) tends to repeat behavior that is followed by positive reinforcement. The more we achieve, the more reinforcement we get. One of the greatest mistakes of successful leaders is the assumption, "I behave this way, and I achieve results. Therefore, I must achieve results because I behave this way."

Almost everyone I meet is successful because of doing a lot right, and almost everyone I meet is successful in spite of some behavior that doesn't make any sense. One of my greatest challenges is helping leaders avoid the "superstition trap." This occurs when we confuse "because of" and "in spite of" behaviors.

Consider Harry. He was a brilliant, dedicated executive who consistently made his numbers. He wasn't just smart. His creative ideas led to groundbreaking new processes and procedures. Everyone agreed that he had been instrumental in helping turn around his organization. He sincerely cared about the company, employees,

## "Avoiding the Superstition Trap"

by Marshall Goldsmith

customers, and shareholders. On top of all that, Harry had a great wife. His two kids were enrolled in top colleges. He lived in a beautiful home in a great neighborhood. Overall, life was very good for Harry.

Except for one thing. Harry was a remarkably poor listener. Even though his direct reports and coworkers respected him, they felt that he didn't listen to them. They were somewhat intimidated by his genius and creativity. At times, they felt that if Harry had made up his mind, it was useless to express another opinion. His wife and kids loved him, but they also felt that he didn't hear a word they said. If his dog could speak, it would have said the same thing.

I suggested to Harry that he was probably successful because of his talent, hard work, and some good luck. I also said that he was probably successful in spite of being an appallingly bad listener.

Harry acknowledged that other people thought he should become a better listener, but he wasn't sure that he should change. He had convinced himself that his poor listening actually helped him succeed. Like many high achievers, he wanted to defend his superstitious beliefs. He pointed out that some people present awful ideas and that he shouldn't just pretend to listen to those stupid suggestions to make them happy. He proudly asserted that he didn't suffer fools gladly.

When I asked whether he really believed that his coworkers and family members were fools, he grimaced and shamefacedly conceded that his comment was stupid. These were people he respected. Upon further reflection, he concluded that perhaps he sometimes acted like a fool. Harry then went into defensive reaction number two: fear of overcorrection. He expressed concern that he might start listening too much and that the company might not benefit from his creative ideas. Perhaps he would become too unwilling to share his opinions. I pointed out that the danger that a 55-year-old man who had been seen as a bad listener for his entire life would overcorrect and become excessively interested

in others' opinions was extremely remote. I assured him that he could remove this concern from his things-to-worry-about list. Ultimately, he decided it was more productive to hear people out than waste time justifying his own dysfunctional behavior.

Think about yourself. What are you doing because it helps you achieve results? What are you doing because of some irrational superstitious belief that may have been affecting your life for years?

What's on your because-of list? I have never met anyone who was so perfect that there was nothing on her in-spite-of list. What's on yours?

***Dr. Marshall Goldsmith*** recently been named by the American Management Association as one of 50 great thinkers and business leaders who have impacted the field of management. His 18 books include the Business Week best-seller, *The Leader of the Future* and *Global Leadership: The Next Generation*. Marshall is a world authority in helping successful leaders achieve positive change in behavior: for themselves, their people and their teams.

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