



**A Comparison of  
*DiSC<sup>®</sup> Classic*  
and the  
*Myers-Briggs Type Indicator<sup>®</sup>*  
Research Report**

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# A Comparison of *DiSC*<sup>®</sup> *Classic* and the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*<sup>®</sup>

## Research Summary

Both *DiSC*<sup>®</sup> *Classic* and the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*<sup>®</sup> are currently used in business settings for the purpose of employee development and team building. Each has its origin in theories developed during the first decades of the twentieth century. *DiSC Classic* is based on the theories of Dr. William Marston while the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* is based on the theories of Dr. Carl Jung.

The purpose of this research report is to compare *DiSC Classic* and the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* as instruments used for employee development and team building. It is written to explain the theoretical origins of both instruments, to elaborate on how they differ in purpose, and to suggest the appropriate application of each. It will also address how the profile obtained from one instrument relates to the profile obtained from the other.

This report shows that in addition to arising from different theoretical origins, the instruments measure different things. *DiSC Classic* describes behavior based on how people view themselves in their various environments. The *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* describes how people approach the environment intellectually and attitudinally and how they process information.

The profiles obtained from each instrument can not be expected to be correlated. They were designed for different purposes and based on different views of human behavior. Because the two instruments provide different kinds of information, they might very well augment each other as separate views of the same individual.

## A Comparison of *DiSC Classic* and the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* as Instruments Used for Employee Development and Team-building

### Theoretical Origins

Each of these popular instruments reflects important theoretical developments which started when psychology was in its infancy, and theorists were exploring ways to explain human behavior. Each one has been refined by more contemporary students of the theory. Inscape Publishing refined and expanded on the theories of William Marston to create *DiSC Classic*, originally called *Personal Profile System*<sup>®</sup>, and Katherine Briggs and her daughter Isabel Myers adapted the theories of Carl Jung to create the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*.

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An important distinction between the two measures is found in their theoretical origins. Both original authors sought to find a systematic way to understand human behavior.

Dr. Marston intended to explain how normal human emotions lead to behavioral differences among people as well as to changes in a person's behavior from time to time. His work focused on finding practical explanations which would help people understand and manage their experience in the world. He also related his ideas to issues in interpersonal relationships.

Inscape Publishing used Marston's theories to develop a measuring tool using words and phrases in forced-choice, four-item sets. In so doing, they built on a body of research into the semantic meaning of words. Unlike most word-choice measures, they focused primarily on positive words and created a four-dimensional profile which highlights preferred behavioral strategies for coping with a particular environment (point of view).

This instrument, *DiSC Classic*, is a measure of "surface traits" or characteristic ways of behaving in a particular environment. It is not designed to describe human characteristics that are not readily observed. The assumption is that inferences about core personality traits are best left to someone trained in the clinical use of tests designed for that purpose.

Dr. Jung intended to explain both the conscious and unconscious forces affecting behavior and to identify core personality traits that differentiate among people. As a medical doctor working in the analytic tradition begun by Freud, he looked for explanations in (a) the "inner core" of personality that first appears after birth and (b) human history and literature, particularly myths and symbols that explain how people through the ages have tried to understand their experience. His theories were designed to explain how abnormal, as well as normal, behavioral adjustments occur.

Myers and Briggs added to Jung's three, bi-polar dimensions of personality a fourth dimension grounded in his theory. These four dimensions comprise the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*<sup>®</sup> and are scored in an either-or format depending on an individual's forced-choice response to pairs of phrases and single words. The scoring format is based on Jung's belief that while both facets of a bi-polar dimension are present in personality, one is emphasized more than the other. In fact, an individual may use one consciously and with deliberate intention, while the other influences behavior only unconsciously.

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The following discussion highlights major similarities and differences between these theories and the instruments designed to measure them.

## Theoretical Basis of the Instruments

### **DISC<sup>®</sup> Classic**

Dr. William Marston, a physiological psychologist writing in the 1920s and 1930s, explored the meaning of normal human emotions by relating how a person perceives himself or herself in relation to the environment and describing how the person is likely to behave in response.

The two dimensions of Marston's model:

- The environment is perceived as favorable or unfavorable.
- The individual perceives him or herself as more or less powerful than the environment.

In response to the environment, the individual either acts on or accommodates to that environment which is seen as either favorable or unfavorable.

### **Myers-Briggs Type Indicator<sup>®</sup>**

Dr. Carl Jung, a psychiatrist originally affiliated with Sigmund Freud, developed during the 1920s and 1930s a typology for explaining human behavior — both normal and abnormal. The essential ingredients of Jung's model are:

- Individuals are predisposed to pay more attention to either (a) the external world of objects or (b) the inner world of ideas and feelings. Thus, they exhibit either *extraversion* or *introversion*.
- Individuals naturally prefer to use one of two "functions" for gathering information — either *sensing* what the objective facts are or *intuiting* relationships and possibilities. One is grounded in reality, the other in imagination.
- How individuals process and evaluate information depends on their preference for the *thinking* versus *feeling* "function." The first approach is based on logic and objectivity, and the second is based on subjectivity and personal values.

Myers and Briggs added to Jung's three dimensions a *judging-perceiving* scale, which is designed to measure one's attitude toward the "outer world" — i.e., how people manage their lives.

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**Theorist's Purpose**

Marston sought to explain how people adjust to varying environments, by starting with their emotional response to it and relating this response to behavior.

Jung sought to explain why people differ from one another by identifying fundamental personality traits or preferences rooted in biology.

**Appropriate Applications**

Because Marston focused on the individual in relation to his or her environment, it is appropriate to use this instrument to help people understand individual behavior — their own and others in a particular situation. Such information may be used by the respondent to determine how he or she may want to adjust behavior to work more effectively with others or better adapt to a situation. However, neither *DiSC<sup>®</sup> Classic* nor the theory behind it evaluates one kind of behavior as preferable to another.

Because Jung focused on trying to explain individual differences, including a range of normal and abnormal behavior, it is appropriate to use this instrument to help people determine whether their behavior should change to become more effective.

Many individuals use this instrument to further understand themselves and others. However, the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator<sup>®</sup>* and the theory on which it is based can also be used to identify underdeveloped behavioral strategies that can be developed to enhance interpersonal effectiveness. The assumption is that more mature persons bring unconscious elements of their nature into conscious use and try to employ the little-used parts of their profile more and more as life goes on.

**Practical Uses**

*DiSC Classic* is primarily suited for increasing self-awareness in a setting where the individual can decide how to use the information in his or her relations with others.

*DiSC Classic* is self-scored and self-interpreted, and respondents using the paper or Web-based version may keep their information private if they choose.

The *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* is primarily suited to increase self-awareness for the purpose of getting along with others more effectively. It is also used to identify the source of problems in relationships with the help of a skilled counselor and to prepare a therapeutic plan for growth or change.

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The *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*<sup>®</sup> is available in a self-scored form. However, greater use is made of forms that must be sent to the publisher to be scored.

From the forms, the publisher is able to develop norms for determining how normal or abnormal a particular response pattern is, in relation to a reference group.

## **Ease of Interpretation**

Sufficient information is provided in the *DiSC*<sup>®</sup> *Classic* instrument itself to aid the respondent in interpretation. The trainer or facilitator adds to participant understanding through (a) a broader knowledge of the theory behind the instrument, (b) illustrative examples, and (c) facilitated discussion of individual results.

With the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*, little information is provided in the instrument itself to aid the respondent in interpretation.

Most forms of the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* are sent in for scoring; thus the instrument itself is a response form. Individuals receive a computer-generated profile and narrative report once the instrument is scored. It includes a description of the person's type and descriptions of how indicated preferences relate to the work setting, communication style and problem-solving style. Group- or organization-level applications are also available.

## **User Qualifications**

In addition to a three-volume facilitator's kit for *DiSC Classic*, a one-day training program is offered to those who wish to expand their information on the use of the instrument as a trainer, counselor, or consultant. The respondents are considered the experts on themselves and the instrument is self-scored and self-interpreted. No other educational requirements are made.

Purchasers of the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* are required to submit evidence of one or more college courses in behavioral measurement and complete a three-day training program on the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*.

## **Additional Resources for Interpretation**

Periodic conferences on *DiSC Classic* offer additional learning opportunities to attendees. Books and articles written by users are available to explain and illustrate a variety of applications. The facilitator's manual and occasional white papers offered by the publisher are available to justify claims made for the instrument.

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A variety of books and manuals are available to persons using the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*<sup>®</sup> in training, team development, and counseling. In addition, a number of academic research studies are available, and presentations and conferences are offered throughout the year.

## Comparing Results

Users sometimes ask how a profile obtained from one instrument relates to the profile obtained from the other. The following discussion addresses this question.

There are significant difficulties encountered in trying to infer one profile from the other, because they clearly measure different things. At the start, they are designed for different purposes.

## *DiSC*<sup>®</sup> Classic

*DiSC*<sup>®</sup> Classic addresses behavioral responses based on the individual's emotional reaction to a particular environment. This model is not designed to support inferences about what an individual is like at the core of his or her personality or to predict how she or he will behave in the future. Further, it does not attempt to determine how effective the person's behaviors are. If behavioral consistencies are evident over time, it is either because

- people develop a predominant view of the world and themselves that becomes rather fixed;
- or, people are able to create or locate themselves in environments that have similar characteristics.

We can suppose the pull toward similar environments is based on stable characteristics of a person that make them prefer certain environments over others. These characteristics, however, are not measured by *DiSC Classic*. Nor is it appropriate to suppose one can match a person to an "ideal" environment and count on the match to remain intact. Learning how to adapt is a more functional approach, given the dynamic character of the environment.

This instrument helps individuals recognize the environmental cues to which they are reacting and the strategies they are using to adjust to their environment. It helps respondents determine whether another environment or strategy may be more effective and to become more skillful in adapting to circumstances in which they find themselves.

Versions of *DiSC Classic* are available in paper, software, and Web-based forms; in word or phrase input formats; and for youth and adults separately.

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## **The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®**

The *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® addresses both thinking and behavior responses based on acquired habits of viewing and responding to the world in general. Preferences are categorized into types, with a belief that certain habits predominate. The assumption is that people will act on their preferences regardless of the situation. However, it is also assumed that as people mature they can learn to use more of the neglected approaches in an effort to increase their capacity for being successful in a variety of situations.

This instrument offers a prescription for increasing interpersonal effectiveness and individual problem-solving ability when present strategies prove less than optimal. It is available in a variety of group and individual forms.

## **Specific Comparisons**

The *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* starts with an assumption that some individuals preoccupy themselves from birth with looking outward at the world, including people, around them (extraversion or outer focus of attention); while others come into the world paying more attention to what they are thinking and feeling inside (introversion or inner focus of attention). An argument can be made that this dichotomy is unrelated to D, i, S, and C because individuals scoring high on these *DiSC*® *Classic* scales can theoretically score either high or low on the EI scales of the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*. The rationale is as follows:

- Those persons who feel they are in a vulnerable or subordinate position in the environment may either (E) focus more on the outer world to recognize objects and cues that will inform them how they should respond to it or (I) focus more on self-directed activities to satisfy themselves when they're unsure of the rewards available from the environment.
- Those persons who feel they are in a comfortable or superordinate position in the environment may either (E) engage the outer world to enjoy the rewards of membership or (I) retreat from it, satisfied there is nothing there with which to concern themselves.

The *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* measures two dichotomous functions for receiving and evaluating information from the environment:

- The Sensing/Intuiting scale identifies an individual's preference for receiving information from tangible objects and facts (S) versus imagined possibilities and perceived interrelationships (N).
- The Thinking/Feeling scale identifies a preference for evaluating information based on impersonal analysis and logic (T), as opposed to personal values and group goals (F).



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The instrument also measures people's attitude toward the world in which they live: The Perceiving/Judging scale distinguishes people who are typically more open, curious, interested, and ultimately adaptable (P) from those who are organized, purposeful, logical, and decisive (J).

The last three scales are theoretically more closely aligned with the *Team Dimensions Profile*, published Inscape Publishing, than *DiSC<sup>®</sup> Classic* — primarily because they measure both thinking and behaving.

The Spontaneous-Methodical approaches on the *Team Dimensions Profile* contrast people who approach problem-solving with a certain openness, curiosity, and spontaneity (P) with those who prefer a more organized, purposeful, and logical approach (J).

The Conceptual-Normative approaches contrast people who take an impersonal, logical approach (T) with those who identify solutions based on tradition and values (F). Based on this comparison, it is worth examining the relationship between Creator and TP, Advancer and FP, Refiner and TJ, and Executor and FJ.

As with the attitudes of Extraversion/Introversion, the Judging/Perceiving attitudes are expected to bear no systematic relationship with *DiSC Classic* scales. The JP scale measures an orientation toward the environment, not a reaction to how the environment is affecting the individual emotionally.

Because of the cognitive elements at work in planning, analyzing, deciding (J), and in adapting and "going with the flow" (P), little correlation with the DiSC behavior measures is expected.

Some observers have hypothesized about how the 16 types in the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator<sup>®</sup>* output relate to the 15 Classical Patterns. If the fundamental scales measure different things, there is no basis for generating valid assumptions about the relationship among profiles from each instrument. However, research should explore whether any empirical correlations exist, and the study should include *Team Dimensions Profile* in the comparison.

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## Conclusion

*DiSC® Classic* describes how respondents tend to behave when they respond emotionally to their environment, especially when the emotions have to do with how they see themselves in relation to the environment. The level of scores indicates how intensely they react to the perceived relationship.

The *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®* describes how respondents approach the environment intellectually and attitudinally, and what modes of information processing they use most often. The level of scores indicates how strongly they prefer one approach over another.