

Have you ever met someone who was thrilled to do a job or task that you absolutely detested and you thought to yourself, "What on earth? I'd rather claw my eyes out than have to do that again!"

Or, do you know someone who has what you believe to be your dream job and they complain about it? "How could they ever be miserable doing that?" you wonder.

Chances are you know someone who is in a job they're not thrilled about; or worse, it may be you. Different strokes for different folks, the saying goes. Not all jobs bring the same satisfaction to all people, and evidence shows that when people are jobs they don't like, rarely does their performance exceed expectations.

Some might attribute this to being lazy, incompetent, or lacking work ethic. Psychologists recognize that it is more a matter of job fit. Different jobs have different needs - pace, structure, interaction with others, willingness to lead and make decisions all influence the experience of a particular job. What energizes one person may drain another – and without energy, a person is almost guaranteed not to succeed.

If you've ever said to yourself, "This job just isn't *me*", you may be right. This paper describes and compares two psychological instruments designed to bring about greater awareness of human differences and offer insights into how one might be observed as compared to what he or she may be thinking / intending.

A look at MBTI®

A very popular tool used in organizations throughout the world is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®, or MBTI®. As explained in the MBTI® Manual, Isabel Myers' "primary aim [in developing the Indicator] was to give individuals access to the benefits of knowing their personality type" (p. 21). The MBTI® was designed to identify the primary way individuals process information and make decisions, as well as their preferred means of interacting with the world. The research of psychologist Carl Jung concluded that people have a dominant preference for behavior. Myers' work expanded upon the theory of Carl Jung, and hypothesized that "certain valuable differences in normal people result from their preferred ways of perception and judgment" (p. 11).

MBTI® sorts people into behavior types based on how they respond to a questionnaire. The MBTI® does not measure skill or competency, rather it sorts people's mental functioning into four categories:

Sensing, Intuition, Thinking, and Feeling

Sensing and Intuition refer to how people process information, the sources they consult, they way they take in information. Thinking and Feeling refer to how people make decisions, what factors they consider or pay attention to, what outcomes they seek to achieve.

In addition to identifying an individual's preferred mental function, MBTI® also identifies whether an individual draws energy from interacting with external world (Extraverted), or is energized by engaging in individual reflection and contemplation (Introverted). Last, the orientation of how individuals prefer to relate to the "outer world" is revealed by an individual's responses. There are those who prefer things to be orderly, planned, familiar, consistent, and conclusive

(Judging), and those who prefer things to be open, changeable, spontaneous, and new (Perceiving).

The MBTI® synthesizes the information provided by an individual and groups it into a 4-letter combination, referred to as a type. There are 16 different types, which reflect the 16 different possible combinations of Extraverted/Introverted, Sensing/Intuiting, Thinking/Feeling, Judging/Perceiving.

As it relates to a work context, people with a preference for extraversion will commonly exhibit their dominant, or preferred behavior; people with a preference for introversion will commonly exhibit their non-dominant behavior. This has implications for how employees' competencies are perceived, and consequently assessed. While dominant does not equate to competence, Jung believed that an individual is most consciously aware of his or her dominant function, and therefore most likely to defer to it. When a mental function most used is not visible to an observer, it can be erroneously interpreted as missing or lacking. Added to that, people with a preference for having things orderly, structured, planned, and conclusive will likely exhibit very different working behavior than those who most prefer things to be open, changeable, spontaneous, and new. Employees and managers without awareness of the benefits of each style may attribute the preferences of the other as a reflection of professional competence.

A look at DISC

A lesser known instrument, which has gained more popularity in recent years is DISC. Based on the theory of William Marston, DISC stands for (D)ominance, (I)nfluence, (S)teadiness, (C)ompliance; and refers to an instrument that measures what Marston identified as the four common categories of human behavior:

Dominance – how individuals approach and react to challenges, and how they use power.

Influence – how individuals relate to others and try to persuade others to see their points of view

Steadiness – how individuals deal with change, variety, and the pace of their environments

Compliance – how individuals respond to authority, and act in response to rules and regulations

According to the theory behind DISC, each person has a preferred way of exhibiting each of these behaviors, and an adapted way to exhibit them when he or she perceives their environment as unfavorable. The instrument was designed to compare one's preferred behavior/environment against the behavior he or she exhibits when adapting to an unfavorable environment (a job, for example). The degree to which an individual is adapting his or her behavior beyond a mode of preference can also be identified using this instrument.

Through the course of several revisions, DISC became an instrument that examines observable human behavior and addresses emotions. It does not, nor was it designed to measure intelligence, values, skills, experience, level of education or training. It focuses on how people act as opposed to what motivates them or the reasons behind why they do what they do. It measures *how* people behave in their natural, or preferred state, and *how* they adjust or adapt their behavior based on their perception of the environment. Since one's job is commonly not a person's "natural state" and presents an environment that may or may not be preferable to an

individual, DISC can be useful in identifying incongruence between one's natural and adapted states. In fact, certain variations in the natural and adapted graphs produced in a DISC report can indicate possible areas of extreme stress or job dissatisfaction. Only the user can verify what's true for him or her; however the information provided to them can be helpful in revealing the general source of any disharmony.

In addition to measuring preferred behavior and environment, the DISC instrument ranks common workplace activities according to an individual's natural behavioral style – activities which energize the individual. The behavioral traits ranked are:

1. Frequent Interaction with Others
2. Versatility
3. Customer Orientation
4. Frequent Change
5. Analysis of Data
6. Urgency
7. Organized Workplace
8. Competitiveness

This aspect of the instrument's reporting capability can provide helpful insight about an individual's preferred work activities which can be compared against the nature and amount of one's actual work activities to identify possible discord.

How are DISC and MBTI® similar?

- q The theories behind both DISC and MBTI® are rooted in Carl Jung's research.
- q Both MBTI® and DISC serve to identify personality "types" versus personality "traits".
- q Both instruments are used to help the instrument taker learn more about himself or herself, and apply such learning to more effective communication with others and more effective management of their conscious actions.
- q Both instruments make the claim that individuals are likely to perform best in their preferred states, but that preference does not equate to degree of competence.
- q Both instruments reference that individuals who are aware of the various ways people think and behave can likely contribute to the success of relationships by modifying their behavior toward others as appropriate.
- q Both instruments take into account how individuals prefer and respond to environments.
- q Neither instrument addresses the level of competency nor proficiency an individual has achieved in his or her preferred state or behavior.
- q Data from both instruments can be plotted (on a wheel or table) to indicate differences on a team or within an organization and highlight opportunities for managing differences in behavioral styles
- q Neither DISC nor MBTI® insists on a "right" way or behavior. They address what behaviors an individual prefers, and acknowledge that different situations may call for a particular set of behaviors. It is less about the ability to demonstrate a behavior as it is about the preference or tendency for exhibiting a particular behavior.
- q Both instruments serve to identify sources from where people draw energy; and makes conclusions about circumstances or instances that would diminish a person's energy
- q Both instruments serve to hypothesize about what situations an individual of a particular type or preference would prefer, and which ones he or she would likely prefer to avoid

- q Both instruments compare the results of preferences against those of different preferences, and indicate how two people with different preferences/preferred ways of doing things may relate best or most effectively

How are DISC and MBTI® different?

- q There are multiple versions of DISC reports, developed and administered by different organizations.
- q There are multiple versions of MBTI® reports, developed and administered by one authorizing organization.
- q The DISC report describes how a person may be observed reacting under moderate and severe stress.
- q The MBTI® does not reveal specifically how a person may react under moderate and severe stress, but does speak to circumstances or events that may cause stress.
- q The DISC report makes predictions about how an individual may respond in certain situations; the MBTI® reports do not.
- q MBTI® results identify a person's personality "type" as reflected by a combination of four components. There are a total of 16 types, and each type has a dominant or preferred function, and a preferred way of orienting to the world. No one component is used to describe an individual's type; rather it is expressed as a combination of the four.
- q DISC results identify a person's preferred behavior; DISC does not combine the order of the remaining behaviors to create a "type".
- q MBTI® does not address the situational factors contributing to how one might respond to an item on the Indicator. In fact, the Indicator items were designed to remove all situational reference, and simply ask the individual to indicate a preference between two psychologically opposite terms. A person's reported type (a report out of how the individual responded to the items) may not reflect his/her "true type", and he or she is able to decide which is more appropriate for him/her. Alternatively, DISC reports two graphs of information, so a person can compare how their "natural" state and "adapted" states may explain the outcome of the results.
- q DISC does not require the interpreter be certified to review results with an individual.
- q MBTI® requires the interpreter be qualified to deliver the results to an individual.
- q DISC provides a language that is described as "universal" and may appear to users to be less clinical and more reflective of commonly used business terms.

When would using one be more appropriate than the other?

Both the DISC and MBTI® are helpful in identifying individual preferences and below is a list of scenarios where using either may be helpful.

MBTI® could be used in instances where/when:

- q A team is experiencing repeated conflict amongst the team members
- q An employee is regarded by senior management as lacking a particular competency (may be a result of him/her introverting a dominant way of thinking or problem solving, or extroverting a perceiving function would could be interpreted as having poor decision or planning skills)
- q A manager is receiving complaints from employees for the way he/she is handling personnel issues
- q Management consistently notices a group of employees not participating in planned company events or social activities

- q A manager's behavior is having adverse effects on the rest of the team
- q An office is planning a move or a redesign of the work environment

DISC could be used in instances listed above, and where/when:

- q An employee is appearing stressed at work for an extended duration of time
- q An employee's environment or role has changed and he/she doesn't seem to be adapting well or producing the intended results (e.g., an individual contributor is promoted to a team leader role; an outside sales rep becomes an inside sales rep)
- q A team has come to an impasse in making progress toward a goal
- q An organization's reorganization plans are not producing the intended results
- q An employee is having trouble selling in a new territory or with a new set of prospects
- q A team member's behavior is having adverse effects on the team
- q When the "front office" and "back office" cannot seem to get along
- q A historically outgoing employee or manager has become withdrawn and unsocial

Neither DISC nor MBTI® should be used to determine whether someone is ready or suitable for hiring, firing or promoting. They are not performance measurement tools and therefore should not be used to assess readiness or competence. And, while they do speak to preferences and styles an individual may exhibit, they should not be used exclusively to determine fit for a team or role. The information they provide is useful for consideration and examination, but should not be regarded as a litmus test or final determination for success in role or team.

Since many jobs/positions can be assessed in terms of how much dominance, influence, and degrees of steadiness and compliance are required/involved, the language in DISC translates well into a work environment. The components of the MBTI® (Extraversion/Introversion, Sensing/Intuiting, Thinking/Feeling, Judging/Perceiving) could also be used to describe a job/position; however these terms tend to speak more to the way an individual in the role might behave/perform than describe the nature of the role itself.

Conclusion

Anyone who's worked for more than a day has probably picked up on the fact that more goes into a job than what's in the job description – management style, company culture, work environment, industry regulations, expectations for managing or influencing others, and the pace of change all contribute to one's experience, and very likely, one's satisfaction in a particular role.

Tools such as MBTI® and DISC offer helpful ways for individuals to identify what types of environments and situations they prefer, as well as how they think and go about things. Both instruments can be beneficial to an individual and a team. While neither tool is designed to measure competency in a particular job, both offer clues to what state and environment is likely to be the most appropriate for a person to excel. The MBTI® is designed to identify what faculties an individual uses to process information and make decisions, as well as how or she prefers to relate to the world. The DISC instrument is designed to show not only what an individual's natural state of being is, but the degree to which an individual is exhibiting behavior counter to his or her natural state. Both instruments reveal what environments and situations are likely to energize a person; DISC communicates these preferences in terms that are more reflective of work situations and contexts. Additionally, DISC which is currently the lesser known instrument of the two, offers a fresh perspective and way to discuss information previously touched upon by the MBTI®.

References

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