Linking Behavioral Styles of Leaders to Organizational Success:
Using the DISC Model to Grow Behavioral Awareness

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ABSTRACT

Organizational success is directly related to the ability of leaders to influence followers in support of strategic goals. Leaders utilize interpersonal skills to communicate goals, brainstorm actions, create collaboration, and move followers in desired directions. Successful leaders must be astute at recognizing key characteristics in followers, characteristics that may help or hinder meeting performance expectations. Hence, the ability to generalize and predict behaviors was paramount to leaders adapting to the work environment. Ultimately, leaders who use DISC systems to predict and influence the behavior of followers were more effective when the leaders can generalize distribution data to groups of followers as they recruit, hire, set work expectations and provide training. This article provides a meta-review of organizational initiatives in which DISC assessments were used as tools for leaders. The article includes a distribution study of 100 respondents in leadership development programs intended to aid leaders in predicting follower populations and behaviors.

INTRODUCTION

Personality and behavioral assessments are at the very least entertaining. Such is evident by the multitude of quizzes shared via social media. Additionally, experts and lay people publish opinion-laced blogs, podcasts and books with little if any scientific support. The information highway is saturated with unsubstantiated material and thus diminishes the reputation of legitimate behavioral study models such as DISC (an acronym which reflects a prominent trait of each of the four styles, dominant, influencing, steady, compliant). This study highlights the connection between organizational success and behavioral styles. It includes a number of recent studies across a variety of workplaces and how a behavioral tool based on the work of William Marston (1928) has been instrumental in the understanding of behaviors. The study also surveyed 100 respondents in leadership development programs to compare their distribution to commonly accepted distribution data. In particular, this study looked for significant distribution differences based on generation, gender, and country of origin. Leaders who use DISC systems to predict and influence follower behaviors may be more effective when the leaders can generalize distribution data to groups of followers as they recruit, hire, set work expectations and provide training.

Organizational success is incumbent upon the collective outcome of employee behaviors. The ability to predict behaviors is critical for leaders at the task and executive levels. Therefore, it is vital to recognize that the leader's psychological development level dictates the organizational experience of followers as they convert leadership directives into action (Harung, Travis, Blank, & Heaton, 2009). In other words, behaviors typically deemed as soft skills are vital to organizational success. Soft skills, personal attributes that when well-developed aid in the influence of others, are frequently overlooked as a strategic asset and are seldom targeted for development with any quantitative expectations upon completion.

As organizations are a collective endeavor of the contributors to whom they belong, understanding the behaviors and preferences of the contributors is critical. Consider the effectiveness of leaders who designate work goals, build work teams from otherwise disjointed departments, and develop consequences for actions. The scientific community affords leaders tools which can be readily adapted to the workplace culture and support each of the three competencies mentioned. Practitioners with well-rounded insight to the majority group will more accurately utilize communication modes and collaboration styles that appeal to the majority which increases cultural elements such as trust and ultimately increases loyalty to the organizational unit's mission. Leaders who by default have enhanced soft skills as well as leaders who lacked such traits yet endeavored to develop and maintain them are far more likely to reach personal and organizational goals. One such endeavor for improved social skills is the study of personality styles using a model such as DISC.

The DISC model is a behavior prediction tool that provides insight to one's own manner of operation and allows for the transfer of understanding of self to the prediction and understanding of the behavior of others. A rich understanding of the

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