Understanding How Personality Dimensions® and the DiSC™ Model Relate

By Irene Anderson CTACC

I have been facilitating Personality Dimensions® for a number of years now, and have sometimes been asked, “How does this (Personality Dimensions) relate to DiSC? Are they the same?” My answer for a long time was: “I’m not familiar with the model.” What was puzzling for me at first was some DiSC practitioners were using a colour model that just did not fit with temperament. This was confusing for participants who had previously taken the DiSC assessment, and for me as a Personality Dimensions facilitator to try to explain the correlation, if any. Needless to say, my curiosity got the better of me (second colour Inquiring Green) so I set out to understand for myself how the two models interact. If we look at the model without attaching colours it is much easier to understand and relate back to temperament, (Personality Dimensions).

But first a little bit about the DiSC model...

The theory of behavioural types was created by William Marston Moulton in 1928. His other claims to fame are the invention of the lie detector and creating the comic female archetype Wonder Woman, interesting! Marston’s theory was that behavioural types came from people’s sense of self and their interaction with the environment. Marston create a biaxial model to explain the four behavioural styles, based upon the Greek (Hippocrates) model of bodily humours. In the modern DiSC system, these axes are typically referred to as Assertiveness and Openness; we may refer to them as Introversion and Extraversion. In 1972, the actual DiSC assessment was created by researchers at the University of Minnesota.

“Dr. Marston’s model is based upon the concept that while all people are different, they are in some ways, predictably different.” Dave Meyer, Laurie Valaer.

DiSC™ differs from temperament theory in that it focuses on behaviour and not necessarily on innate or inborn psychological needs. It is totally context based.

DiSC™ and Personality Dimensions

The Personality Dimensions temperament system uses four colours to describe the four temperaments; we often refer to these temperaments as having innate psychological needs. These are:

Inquiring Green -- whose core psychological needs are Mastery and Self-Control, Knowledge and Competence,

Authentic Blue -- whose core psychological needs are Meaning, Significance and Unique Identity,

Organized Gold -- whose core needs are Membership or Belonging, Responsibility and Duty,

Resourceful Orange -- whose core needs are Freedom to Act - Now and the Ability to Make an Impact.
“The needs represent the basic psychological needs of the temperament, the driving force. Individuals, unconsciously and consciously, seek every avenue to have these needs met.” (Berens – Understanding Yourself and Others)

Berens further describes these needs as psychological and physiological, meaning that the need is visceral, can be felt physically, and therefore if not met can lead to great stress – or what we term in Personality Dimensions as ‘being out of esteem’.

Personality Dimensions is a simple but powerful tool to help people through a process of self discovery to connect – or reconnect -- with their inborn needs and values, and discover their true self, uninfluenced by their environment.

Often, participants in Personality Dimensions workshops will resist the model, saying that it is putting them in a box. Many will say ‘Well I can identify with all of these colours!’ Some may question that although they are a certain colour, that they identify with another, or that they don’t ‘look like’ someone else who shares the same temperament. Of course, as practitioners we know that temperament is just a tool and does not explain all human behaviour. However it does explain why we are drawn back to certain behaviours again and again, despite trying to change. One Authentic Blue person may not look like another. We need to resist the urge to ‘box’ people in; humans are shaped by many factors, including how they are nurtured and how they learn and develop. DiSC™ gives practitioners another lens to help clients understand why there are different types of the same temperament.

Let’s look at the process of Human Development...

You are Hard Wired!

(This illustration is based upon temperament theory)

Meet my little friend on the left. He comes into the world, hard wired with psychological and physiological needs. As you can see from the illustration, he first looks outwardly to have his needs satisfied, he needs to be clothed, fed and nurtured. His environment (parents) begin to influence and shape him.

Parents, siblings, the amount of nurture and surroundings shape the inborn tendencies this creature has. He quickly learns to adapt to his environment to have his needs met. He tries to please and to fit in, and ‘learns’ behaviours that allow him to survive. If he adapts, he is quickly taken into the family fold.

Each one of us is no different from my little friend – we all do the same things to survive – this is called ‘The Developed Self’ -- how we adapt to our environment and how we grow as individuals. In my Personality Dimensions work, I use the analogy of an acorn planted in a sunny meadow with lots of sunlight, nutrition and love. What will this acorn grow into? A mighty oak! If the acorn is planted in a dark part of the forest with little sunlight and nutrition, what will it grow into? A smaller, less robust version of itself. The same can apply to humans, the difference being that we have the free will to change the version of ourselves that our environment helps to create.
An additional layer of influence is the ‘Contextual Self’; that whom we become ‘in the moment’ when we try to adapt to our context, such as work, school, community groups etc. In DiSC™, this is called “The Mask”. In DiSC™, the Developed Self is called ‘The Core’.

Let’s Explore the DiSC assessment...

The DiSC assessment gives the client three additional lenses from which to look at what behaviours show up and why. These are displayed in graph form in the assessment. They are:

‘The Mask’ – How others see us: is the public self that we project to the outer world. It describes a person’s perception of their own behaviour. This graph is the one that is most likely to change over time since it is how the person adapts behaviour to a situation or environment. It is not necessarily a reflection of the person’s inborn self, but rather what they believe they need to be for short term gain or survival. Going back to the Berens model, this represents the Contextual Self.

‘The Core’ – Behaviour under pressure (please note that this definition of ‘core’ is different from the Berens model) – represents the person’s internal motivations and desires as created by the Developed Self. Development in this case means all development and learned behaviour right up to the present moment. Whether or not these behaviours are effective will in part be influenced by the person’s DISC style and by their orientation to the world. We tend to fall back on these learned behaviours because they have worked for us in the past, meaning that they will be the hardest behaviours to shift or change.

‘The Mirror’ – How I see myself -- is the key graph to review, since it reflects the person’s view of themselves and will generally drive their actual behaviour. This graph combines the learned responses from the past and the perceptions and requirements of the current environment. In the human development model this represents a combination of the Developed and Contextual Self.

“ We look into the mirror and see ourselves, our strengths and our weaknesses, our dreams and our hopes, our past and our future” “We see ourselves as no one else can.”

To me, this is where Personality Dimensions and DISC converge. This is the opportunity for practitioners to see the correlation between the two and to help explain why all Authentic Blues are not ‘touchy feely’, all Inquiring Greens are not ‘scientists’, not all Resourceful Oranges are ‘out there’ and not all Organized Golds are ‘bossy’. My apologies for using ‘Colour Bashing’ terms, however we all know that these are terms that are used frequently when we talk about temperament. If your clients have already been exposed to the DiSC model you can explain that it provides us with one more lens to explain the notion of ‘PLAID’ in Personality Dimensions™.
Let’s Explore the DiSC Styles...

DiSC is contextual – how we interact and communicate with others.

What The Letters mean...

**Driver, Direct, Decisive** – relating to control, power and assertiveness

**Influencing, Interactive, Interested in people** – relating to social situations and communication

**Steady, Stable, Secure** - relating to patience, persistence, and thoughtfulness

**Conscientious, Correct, Compliant** – relating to structure and organization

Description of the DiSC Styles...

Just like Personality Dimensions, you will have a preference for one behavioural style, but will be a blend of all 4 styles, further expanding the notion of ‘PLAID’. Just as in Personality Dimensions, DISC reflects each styles’ tendency toward Extraversion and Introversion, as ‘Active’ or ‘Reserved’.
What is different is that within each Personality Dimensions style, there are four DiSC styles represented. As illustrated in this model.

**DiSC and Personality Dimensions -- Correlation Model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Oriented</th>
<th>People Oriented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extraverted Blue/Gold</td>
<td>Extraverted Blue/Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Ni</td>
<td>Ne Fi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D</strong></td>
<td><strong>I</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introverted Blue/Gold</td>
<td>Introverted Blue/Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ni Fe</td>
<td>Fi Ne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C</strong></td>
<td><strong>S</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraverted Green/Gold</td>
<td>Extraverted Green/Orange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Ni</td>
<td>Ne Ti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D</strong></td>
<td><strong>I</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introverted Green/Gold</td>
<td>Introverted Green/Orange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ni Te</td>
<td>Ti Ne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C</strong></td>
<td><strong>S</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DiSC Personality Styles**

**Characteristics of the High D (upper left quadrant)**
They are outspoken, welcome challenge and are decisive. They will seek out positions of authority and leadership. They are not necessarily great team players, but are often good team leaders. They focus on results and tasks, or getting things done. They make decisions quickly, process information rapidly - trust gut reactions and like to move ahead. When at their best, they are driving for efficiency, participating and directing, when ‘out of esteem' may become alienating or be forceful, make snap decisions and be unaware of group dynamics. They may also miss details.
High D and Personality Dimensions

So, how does the high ‘D’ fit with an extraverted Authentic Blue? As seasoned practitioners, we can see the correlation to Inquiring Green and Organized Gold, and maybe Resourceful Orange - it fits with behaviours we normally see. We don’t typically see the Authentic Blue temperament as being directing, it seems to fly in the face of the descriptions we often make of Authentic Blues (that they are harmonious, empathetic, connecting and cooperative). In this context, we see the extraverted Authentic Blue as ‘taking charge’ – mobilizing people to get a result. If the person is highly evolved, they will be able to ‘temper’ their high ‘D’ with their innate talent and ability to create rapport with people (their inborn temperament). The key word is ‘context’ - DiSC is a model that explores social styles and behaviour.

Blind Spots for High ‘D’s
- Don’t know when to quit.
- Can become argumentative
- Impatient with poor performance
- Impetuous
- Too quick to make decisions
- Can be sarcastic
- Opinionated
- Overly focussed on task
- Miss details

Characteristics of high ‘I’s (upper right quadrant)

High ‘I’s are very energetic and upbeat. They are excellent communicators and rely heavily on natural charm and enthusiasm. They love to have fun and be popular. They are always ‘up’ for new experiences and will engage others to share in the excitement. They appear very confident, outgoing and trusting. In fact, they may ‘over trust’ in an effort to get along, and possibly be disappointed. They tend to gloss over problems and avoid confrontation. They prefer to look to the future and not be reminded of past problems. They are often viewed as leaders, and they tend to be naturally inclusive of others. They are really good at big picture thinking, but may lack the skill to execute the plan. They can tend to avoid details. They are relationship oriented and will surround themselves with other high ‘I’s because relationships are easier to manage.

High ‘I’s and Personality Dimensions

Sounds a bit Authentic Blue doesn’t it? Keep in mind that there are four ‘colours’ of high ‘I’s. Once again, as practitioners we tend to describe Inquiring Greens as being perceived as aloof and cold, but that doesn’t quite fit with this description does it? Again, we have to fight the urge to make things fit, and understand that DiSC is a model that looks at social behaviour that is learned and is contextual. The High I style is represented by an urge to get everyone involved and move toward action. They will create an energy for their vision and discover new ways of doing and seeing things.

Blind Spots for High ‘I’s
- Talking too much
- Not listening
- Skip over the details
- Unrealistic
- Can be disorganized
- Impulsive
- Too trusting
- Values communication over results
- Lacking in follow through
Characteristics of High 'S's (bottom right quadrant)
The high 'S' style is people oriented and aims to please. Getting along is high on their list. They are friendly, family oriented and very good team players. They are generally likeable. High 'S' can be perceived as followers, not leaders, but don’t be misled – they can lead, but it will probably be from the sidelines, and they will not seek out the limelight. They dislike conflict, enjoy cooperation and will work hard to what needs to be done. They like the familiar, and enjoy a close group of friends. They are good listeners and dependable. They are supportive and tolerant of others, sometimes to the point of being 'people pleasers,' and can lose sight of their own goals, you then may see ‘the silent martyr syndrome.’ Change needs to have a purpose to be accepted, and decision making may appear slow because they want to consider all options.

Blind Spots for High 'S's
- Avoid controversy at all costs
- Can play the victim
- Resistance to change
- Makes decisions slowly
- Overly willing to put their own needs last
- Can appear indecisive
- Goals set are not challenging enough

High 'S's and Personality Dimensions
When I read this description, it sounds first Organized Gold then a bit Authentic Blue. Organized Golds are often branded as being resistant to change, and Authentic Blues are often described as using passive aggressive behaviour when under stress. So, what would a high 'S' Resourceful Orange look like? They are reserved, although living in the moment. They would be excellent negotiators, yet not seeking attention or the limelight. I think of careers like nursing, photography, filmmaking where there is variety and an opportunity to respond to crises. A high 'S' Inquiring Green is open minded, reserved and enjoy brainstorming and listening to the ideas of others. They may be drawn to teaching, especially to areas like philosophy and psychology.

Characteristics of High 'C's (lower left quadrant)
High 'C’s like to be correct under any circumstance. They have a tendency to collect data, facts and figures. They also share this information in their communications. Often, their tendency to get things right at any cost can lead to 'analysis paralysis.' They are the 'worker-bees' on the team. High 'C's prefer to work independently, they are thorough and conscientious. They may be perceived as ‘nit pickers,’ but they want to ensure there is no room for error. They are patient and diplomatic, they can be perfectionists and thus they may add stress to their own lives. They are organized and controlled. They are attentive to detail and can keep on task. They may not appear to be open and friendly, and be perceived as aloof, since they focus on data and details, not people.

Blind Spots for High 'C’s
- Can be defensive when criticized
- Hampers creativity by following rules
- Don’t always express themselves
- Get lost in the details
- Methodical to the extreme
- Overly critical of self and others
- Impatient with errors.

High 'C's and Personality Dimensions™
Sounds a bit like the descriptors we attribute to Organized Golds and Inquiring Greens: analytical, attention to detail, and perfectionism. Doesn’t sound too Authentic Blue or Resourceful Orange? A high ‘C’ Authentic Blue might look reflective, imaginative, caring and idealistic. They will appear private and independent. They are
values driven, so will seek organizations that support this. Some careers they choose might be ministry, or
counselling. A high ‘C’ Resourceful Orange will appear logical, straightforward and realistic. They do like
constant action, but prefer not to be centre of attention. They like to have a lot of problems to solve – they want
to get the job done right, but not necessarily following the rules.

In Summary

The essential difference between DiSC and Personality Dimensions is, the DiSC model suggests that human
behaviour is based upon the person’s view of themselves (The Mirror) and how they relate to their environment.
(This is particularly valuable to coaches, looking to move clients to more successful behaviours). Person
ality Dimensions takes participants a step deeper, taking participants through a Self Discovery process
that explores innate (inborn) psychological needs. Personality Dimensions takes the participant beyond what’s
expected of them, allowing them ‘just to be’. This is the real magic of the Personality Dimensions model.
Participants can discover and embrace who they really are, accept strengths and flaws and move beyond the
‘box’ of their colour to be a more rounded individual. Both tools are valuable for anyone seeking to create more
success for themselves.

These brief descriptions are by no means a full description of either the DiSC styles or Personality Dimensions
temperaments. This information will give you some basic background to try to help your participants and yourself
understand why not everyone with the same temperament looks the same. It may help in the discussion when
the question arises – are you trying to put me in a box? Your answer might be -

“There are four behavioural styles for each colour”, some are Direct (Assertive) some are Influencers
(people oriented), some are Steady (patient and persistent) some are Conscientious (like structure and
stability) (DiSC in a nutshell)

As with any assessment or instrument, it is crucial that we don’t try to pigeon hole, or make people fit into a box.
When asked how we explain it when what we are seeing does not necessarily fit with what the temperament
model states the answer is, there are many facets to the personality make up of an individual – what we see is a
collection of development, nurture, nature and the context they are in at the moment.

In my experience, the Personality Dimensions temperament model is one that is fully grounded in empirical and
scientific data (available upon request from the Personality Dimensions Manual), making it stand out from other
temperament models that are weak in the development of assessments and theory. Some models out there
have not been updated or tested in over 30 years. Every time I deliver a Personality Dimensions workshop
with corporate teams, I am confident that I have a tool that delivers practical and theoretical results.

When looking for a model to use with staff, why do leaders choose Personality Dimensions? The assessment is
consistent, and is continually updated to ensure that there is no gender or cultural bias. Leaders in organizations
appreciate the simplicity of Personality Dimensions, it can be easily understood, referring to the four colour
styles, yet is firmly grounded in solid research. Personality Dimensions creates a common language that
participants can ‘talk’ to each other in. In many workplaces, former participants actually ‘talk in colour’, and if
taken beyond just the introductory workshop this can be a solid foundation for coaching, leadership
development, conflict resolution, sales and marketing and many other applications.
These descriptions are adapted from “You’ve Got Personality – An Introduction to the Personality Types described by Carl Jung and Isabel Myers” – by Mary McGuiness