EVERYTHING DiSC

FROM *DISC*® *CLASSIC* TO *EVERYTHING DISC*® :

How My Graph Became a Dot

for Adaptive Testing Assessment

by Inscape Publishing

FROM *DISC*® *CLASSIC* TO *EVERYTHING DISC*®:
HOW MY GRAPH BECAME A DOT

The DiSC® model has been used for decades to help people understand themselves and others. Practitioners continue to find ways to make the model simpler, more intuitive, and more relevant while still enhancing the richness of insight that has made DiSC so popular. In this paper, we'll discuss some of the different ways in which the DiSC model can be both measured and represented. More specifically, we'll explore how DiSC is measured and represented in the *Everything DiSC*® suite of application-specific products based on the third generation of the research-validated DiSC assessment. Finally, we'll discuss the implications and benefits of this approach relative to some of the more traditional approaches to teaching DiSC.

The traditional way to represent the DiSC model is a line-graph format, as shown in Figure 1. This format is used in Inscape Publishing products such as the *DiSC Classic* profile and provides separate scores on four scales: D, i, S, and C. The interpretation of this graph within the profile is based on a Classical Pattern, which describes a person's overall DiSC pattern as influenced by all four styles.

Figure 1. DiSC Line Graph
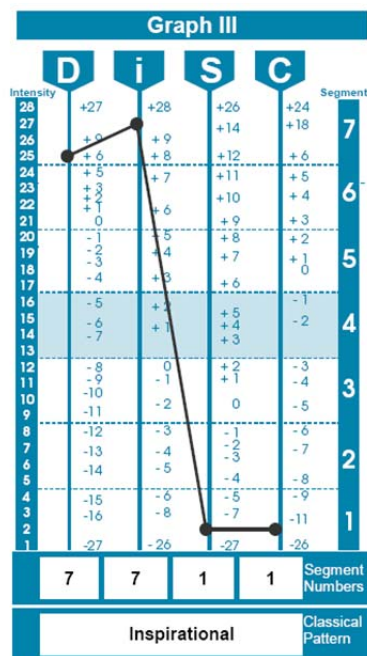
The line graph representation of DiSC®, however, is only one of many ways to discuss DiSC and present a participant with his or her DiSC style. The earliest representation of the DiSC model, as described by William Marston in his book, *The Emotions of Normal People*, was a circle.

Figure 2. DiSC Circle
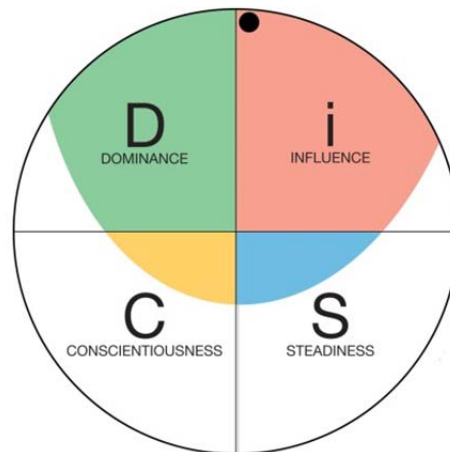
Hearkening back to the roots of DiSC, the DiSC circle, as shown in Figure 2, provides an intuitive way to show a participant her or his location within the DiSC model. This representation of DiSC is used in all *Everything DiSC*® reports. In this example, the circle, or circumplex, shows a participant who tends toward the i or Influence style but also has a strong tendency toward the D or Dominance style. If one were to take the line graph in Figure 1 and represent it in a circular format, Figure 2 would very likely be the result. In both cases, we have a person who is very high in the i and D styles and very low in the S (Steadiness) and C (Conscientiousness) styles.

HOW DOES THE DISC® CIRCLE WORK?

Although the circular representation of DiSC is designed to be simple and intuitive, it also conveys a great deal of information about a person's DiSC style at a glance.

DOT LOCATION

Within each of the four basic styles—D, i, S, and C—there are three regions where a person's dot may be located, illustrating the twelve different regions of the *Everything DiSC*® model. The **angular location** of a dot indicates a person's DiSC® style. Though everyone is a blend of all four styles, most people tend strongly toward one or two styles. For example, in Figure 3, we have a participant who tends toward the C style but also has some tendency toward the D style. Most likely, if he had taken the *DiSC Classic* assessment, he would have ended up with a Creative Pattern (composed of the C and D styles) or an Objective Thinker Pattern (composed mostly of the C style.)

*Figure 3. CD Style on the Everything DiSC Circle*
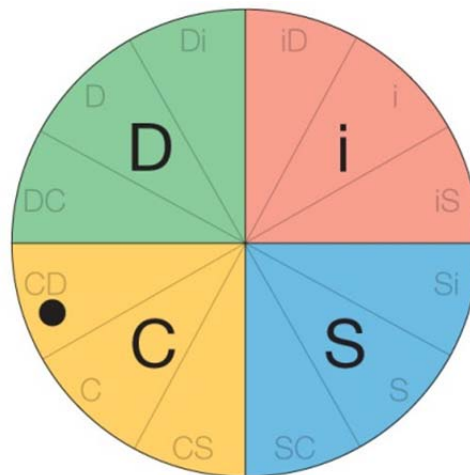
A dot's **distance from the edge** of the circle shows how naturally inclined a person is to encompass the characteristics of his or her DiSC style. A person whose dot is close to the outer edge of the circle is probably strongly inclined toward the characteristics of his or her DiSC style. A dot located between the edge and the center of the circle indicates moderate inclination. A dot positioned closer to the center of the circle indicates a slight inclination.

SHADING AND PRIORITIES

While dot location and DiSC® style can say a great deal about a participant, **map shading** is also important. The eight words around the *Everything DiSC®* map are called **priorities**, or the primary areas where people focus their energy.

The closer a participant's shading comes to a priority, the more likely he is to focus his energy on that area. Everyone has at least three priorities, and sometimes people have four or five. The three words closest to the dot are a participant's primary priorities, and personalized shading indicates whether the participant stretches to include up to two additional priorities. These additional priorities are marked by striped shading, as shown in Figure 4. In this example, a person with the "i" style, who prioritizes Action, Enthusiasm, and Collaboration, also has shading that stretches to include Accuracy, which isn't characteristic of the i style.

**Figure 4. i shading with additional Accuracy priority on the Everything DiSC Workplace® map**
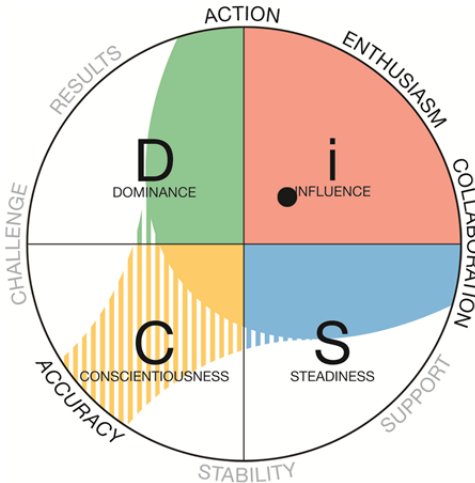
WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF USING THE *EVERYTHING DISC*® ASSESSMENT?

RELATIONSHIPS

One of the most powerful aspects of the DiSC® circle is that it allows us to show the relationship between two people in a straightforward, visual manner. For example, in Figure 5, the map plots a participant (represented by the dot) and her co-worker (represented by the star).

Figure 5. Two participants' styles on the Everything DiSC Workplace® map
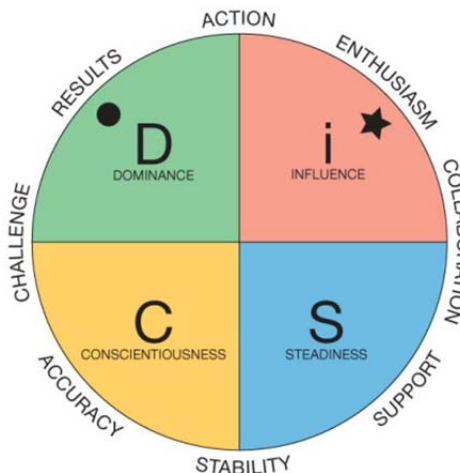
The participant can immediately see the similarities and differences between the two of them. Even though they both prioritize Action and may share a tendency to be fast-paced and outspoken, they also differ dramatically. The participant tends to focus on Results and Challenge, so she's likely to be questioning and skeptical of other people's ideas while also being focused on the bottom line. Her co-worker tends to value Enthusiasm and Collaboration, and may focus more on getting everyone involved and building team spirit. In this case, the participant can see how she and her co-worker complement each other and where they may share blind spots.

Although the line graph representation of DiSC allows us to compare the profiles of two people, a great deal more interpretation and coaching is often necessary before the

implications of that comparison become clear. With the circular representation, the implications and applications of the information are visually apparent. And while there is still a great deal of richness for a facilitator to add, participants can immediately begin to apply the information for themselves.

GROUP DYNAMICS

The circular representation of DiSC® also allows participants to quickly gauge the composition of their group and see the implications of that composition.

For instance, in the team represented in Figure 6, a disproportionately large number of group members tend toward C. Consequently, this group probably puts a very high priority on Accuracy and controlling the quality of their work. We can also see some potential group limitations. Because virtually everyone in the group may prefer to work at a cautious, stable pace in order to ensure high standards, the team may find that they often lack a sense of Action, or a focus on achieving goals quickly. And because they don't prioritize Results in their culture, they may lose out on opportunities to make their mark.

*Figure 6. Team represented on the Everything DiSC Workplace® map*
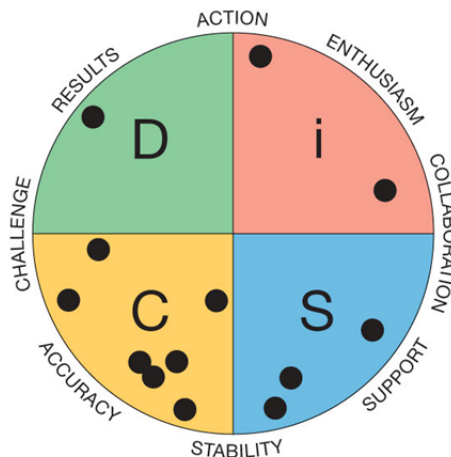
Further, by simply glancing at the map, we can start to understand some of the frustrations that individual members may experience. For instance, the two people in the

i quadrant may, in many respects, feel alienated or misunderstood by the rest of the group.

ADAPTATION & STRESS

For years, consultants, coaches, and facilitators have used DiSC® to help people recognize the occasional need to adapt their DiSC style to the people or situations around them. As mentioned earlier, the *Everything DiSC®* profiles use shading to help participants understand the areas on the DiSC map where they might have difficulty stretching. For example, the map in Figure 7 shows a manager who tends strongly toward the C style.

Figure 7. C style represented on the Everything DiSC Management map
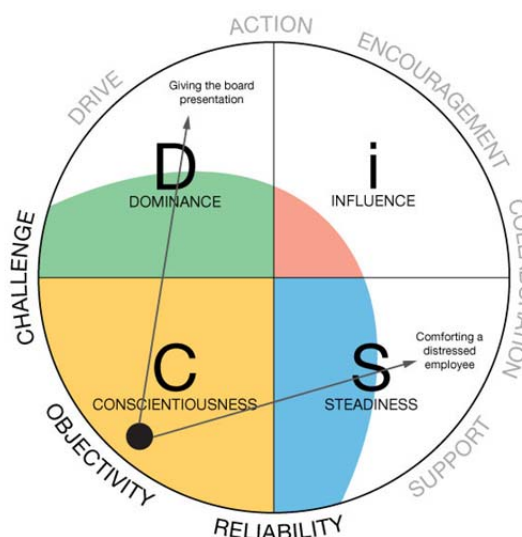
Using the map, she can quickly see how certain situations require her to stretch beyond her natural tendencies. She can visually understand that when she needs to comfort a direct report who is upset or frustrated, she'll probably need to project more support and acceptance than is naturally her style. Using the shading, she can also see that this is most likely out of her comfort zone, and she will find it stressful if she has to do this kind of activity on a regular basis.

If, on the other hand, when this same manager is giving a board presentation to a group of very driven, results-oriented executives, she can see that a different type of adaptation is necessary. It's clear that she needs to pick up her pace and be much more outspoken with her ideas. If she's a mature manager, she can probably make the stretch, but the map helps her understand why it may be draining to do so. Although a facilitator can certainly discuss the concepts of adaptation and stress using the line graph representation of DiSC®, the visual, integrated nature of the circular representation makes this process simple and intuitive for the participant.

INTEGRATION OF THE FOUR STYLES

Instead of presenting the four DiSC styles as four separate traits, the circular model shows the true continuous nature of DiSC. For instance, there is a meaningful difference between someone who has a pure D style and someone who has a Di style. In both cases, the D characteristics express themselves differently because the four styles do not live in isolation. This is a clear case where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Marston recognized this fact when he compared the DiSC circle to a color wheel, where colors flow into each other in a smooth, continuous fashion, and where the combination of red and blue form the color purple, which has its own unique properties separate from either red or blue.

The *DiSC Classic* assessment uses Classical Patterns to capture the integrated, interactive nature of the four styles. For instance, the Inspirational Pattern describes someone who is high in both the D and i styles and how these two styles uniquely combine to form the pattern. The circular representation of DiSC presents this integration, however, in a simple, visual manner. Participants can clearly see how the different styles blend into one another and where they fit within that blend.

MEMORABILITY

One of the reasons that the DiSC model has been so successful over the years is because it gives people a simple, memorable way to understand themselves and those around them. The DiSC profile could have been designed to contain 20, 50, or even 100

different scales, but while such a profile might contain a lot of information, it would lose most of its practical usefulness. Its complexity would keep people from internalizing the information. It would be difficult to organize and remember. Consequently, people would be far less likely to practically apply the information.

Even though the line-graph representation of DiSC® has proven to be incredibly powerful, the circular representation of the DiSC model is even more intuitive and memorable and doesn't sacrifice the richness of information. Instead of learning about four separate scales, participants learn about one integrated model.

Psychologists have long known that people can remember information much more easily when they "chunk" it together into smaller, unified pieces. With the circular model people are asked to carry around in their heads *one* unified piece of information (i.e., the circular model) rather than *four* separate pieces of information (i.e., the four DiSC® scales). Although it may sound like splitting hairs, study after study shows the profound effects that "chunking" information has on memory. Consequently, if the DiSC model is more memorable, it's going to be more practical and useful. People will be more likely to successfully apply the model in their everyday lives.

APPLICATION LAYERS

DiSC has proven to be very powerful in giving people a language to discuss their differences. The model helps people not only understand those differences, but also value them. In an increasingly sophisticated marketplace, however, companies often want to take DiSC even further. Organizations routinely use *Everything DiSC*® assessments and programs to improve critical people-skills in the areas of management, sales, leadership, communication, and more. With its circular DiSC map, *Everything DiSC* offers application layers for the DiSC model that help participants see the immediate relevance of DiSC to their field or profession.

For instance, the DiSC® circle in Figure 8 is taken from the *Everything DiSC Workplace®
Profile*. The words around the circle describe the priorities of individuals with different
DiSC styles. So, if we have a respondent who tends toward the S style, he probably
places a priority on achieving stability and accomplishing tasks by supporting and
collaborating with others. If he is working with a colleague who tends toward D, he can
quickly see that the other person has priorities that are quite different from his own and
he'll have to adapt his natural style.

Figure 8. S style represented on the Everything DiSC Workplace map
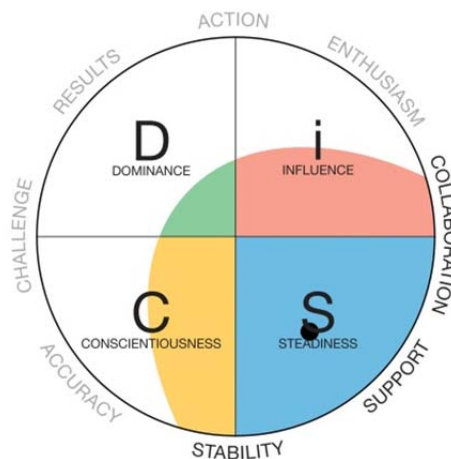
Application layers such as this mean that participants don't have to spend time learning
abstract theories about personality or behavior that aren't relevant to their situation.
Further, these participants don't have to struggle to understand how DiSC® relates to
their goals and developmental needs. It becomes immediately apparent how they can
use this model to connect better with coworkers, improve their workplace, and be more
successful at their jobs.

MEASURING YOUR LOCATION ON THE DISC CIRCLE

In the *DiSC Classic* assessment, participants are shown 28 forced-choice boxes that
contain four words each. Consequently, participants review a total of 112 words. In each
box, they are asked to choose one that is most like them and one that is least like them.
One of the original reasons for using this measurement methodology is because it

greatly reduced the social desirability of responses. That is, a participant can only choose one response as *most* even if they are all desirable and has to choose one as *least* even if all are not very desirable.

In the *Everything DiSC*® assessment, participants are shown a series of statements and asked to indicate, on a five point scale, the degree to which they agree with each of them. This format is illustrated in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Statements from the Everything DiSC assessment

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I can be pretty forceful with my opinions	○	○	○	○	○
I love meeting new people	○	○	○	○	○
People think of me as a really good listener	○	○	○	○	○
Accuracy is a priority for me	○	○	○	○	○
I am bold	○	○	○	○	○

Because the *Everything DiSC* assessment is electronically scored, the computerized scoring algorithm can automatically adjust for the social desirability of responses. Consequently, participants are left with more freedom to answer the questions in a way that truly describes them. That is, they are not forced to select a response that does not feel optimal to them. For this reason, participants generally find it easier to respond to the *Everything DiSC* assessment than to the *DiSC*® *Classic* assessment. And because the *Everything DiSC* assessment uses adaptive testing, an interactive assessment process that tailors questions to the individual respondent, people who respond inconsistently to any given set of items will be asked to respond to more items. This provides for greater precision in selection of DiSC style and dot placement and results in a more personalized, satisfying experience for the participant.

After a participant has finished the assessment, the profile is scored. Each statement is assigned to one of eight DiSC® scales: D, Di, i, iS, S, SC, C, or CD. Although not reported in the actual profile, participants receive scores on each of these eight scales, and a participant's location on the DiSC circle is calculated. Because the *Everything DiSC*® assessment measures people on eight points around the DiSC circle rather than on four points, like the *DiSC Classic* assessment, it provides more precision about a participant's true DiSC style. For instance, instead of simply measuring a person on the S and C scales, the *Everything DiSC* assessment measures a person on S, SC, and C scales. This precision gives us a better idea of where a person is located within the DiSC circle.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CLASSICAL PATTERNS?

Although the *Everything DiSC* profiles do not technically refer to a Classical Pattern, the profiles allow a facilitator to glean the same information from a quick glance at the DiSC circle. For instance, the Inspirational Classical Pattern is assigned to a person who scores high on the D and i scales of the *DiSC Classic* assessment. Research shows that if these same people are plotted as a dot within the DiSC circle, the vast majority end up with a dot at the top of the circle, where the D and i quadrants meet. The majority of people who have a Creative Classical Pattern end up with a dot that tends toward the left side of the DiSC circle, where the C and D quadrants meet.

One of the most common questions about the transition from using Classical Patterns to using the DiSC circle involves the Achiever and Appraiser patterns. These Classical Patterns describe people who are high in two DiSC styles that are theoretically opposite each other. The Achiever pattern is a combination of the D and S styles, and the Appraiser pattern is a combination of the i and C styles.

First, keep in mind that the Achiever and Appraiser patterns are two of the most infrequent patterns. As predicted by the DiSC model, few people will be high on two styles that negatively correlate with each other in such a strong manner. One must also

keep in mind that among those who receive these patterns, some will receive them as a result of measurement error. There are people, however, who have taken the *DiSC®* *Classic* assessment multiple times throughout the years and repeatedly receive one of these opposite-style Classical Patterns. When these people are plotted on the DiSC circle, they usually have a dot that is quite close to the center of the circle. In fact, of all of the Classical Patterns, people with an Achiever or Appraiser pattern have, by far, the shortest average distance from the center of the circle.

So, what will people with an Achiever or Appraiser pattern see on the *Everything DiSC®* circle? The three words around the *Everything DiSC* circle that are closest to a participant's dot are his or her primary priorities, and personalized shading indicates whether participants stretch to include any additional priorities. Participants are still assigned a single DiSC style, but they may receive up to two additional priorities specific to their assessment. For example, a person with an "i" style who prioritizes Action, Enthusiasm and Collaboration, could also receive the "C" priority of Accuracy (see Figure 4).

CONCLUSION

Although the line-graph representation of DiSC used in *DiSC Classic* is still a very powerful tool, the circular representation of DiSC opens up new possibilities for DiSC practitioners. This representation allows participants to quickly understand relationships in the DiSC model and recognize patterns within group dynamics. The *Everything DiSC* assessment also helps people quickly internalize the ways that they might need to stretch in their daily lives and the stress that this may cause. And perhaps most important, the circular representation makes the DiSC model more intuitive and memorable while building on its inherent richness.