Appendix A: DiSC® History

The DISC model of behavior was first proposed in 1928 by William Moulton Marston, a physiological psychologist, in a book entitled *Emotions of Normal People.* Like many psychologists of his time, Marston made a deliberate decision to focus only on psychological phenomena that were directly observable and measurable through objective means. His primary interest was in theories of emotions and the physical manifestations of emotional states. From his research, Marston theorized that the behavioral expression of emotions could be categorized into four primary types, stemming from the person's perceptions of self in relationship to his or her environment. These four types were labeled by Marston as Dominance (D), Inducement (I), Submission (S), and Compliance (C). He created a model that integrated these four types of emotional expression into a two-dimensional, two-axis space.

Marston himself had little interest in theoretical concepts of personality or temperament. Thus, he never created a psychological instrument to measure his model. The contemporary understanding of DiSC® maintains some of the core principles advanced by Marston, but the current presentation of the model also incorporates many additions and changes that are informed by advances in psychological measurement and theory.

The history of DISC measurement begins in the 1940s with an industrial psychologist by the name of Walter V. Clarke. Clarke (1956) built a test for use in personnel selection called the Activity Vector Analysis (AVA). He didn't intentionally set out to build an instrument based on the DiSC theory, as his approach was almost purely empirical (i.e., letting the data speak for itself) rather than theoretical (i.e., looking for something specific in the data). Following the "lexical approach" that was popular at that time, Clarke identified a list of adjectives that were commonly used in describing others. He collected information on the adjectives using a checklist format, on which people are asked to check the specific words that describe them. After collecting and analyzing the data on this instrument, he discovered that the four factors produced from the data (aggressive, sociable, stable, and avoidant) sounded a lot like DISC. Clarke concluded that the data could be best explained by Marston's model of human behavior.

He scored the instrument in the following manner. He asked participants to complete the checklist twice, the first time responding by checking "any words I have heard others use to describe me" and the second time responding by checking "any words that I feel honestly describe me." The scores on the four scales, measured twice, were integrated into a single score for each scale ("composite self"), then ipsatized and plotted as a profile. The distance between the highest and

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lowest plotting points was divided into nine equal intervals regardless of the actual distance between the points. A segment number from 1 to 9 was assigned to each scale. The four segment scores (one for each of the four styles) were then plotted as clusters in three-dimensional space, where distance between the clusters represented a measure of similarity. The clusters that came closest to each other were grouped into a mega-cluster (or pattern). Fifteen such mega-clusters (or patterns) emerged. It was these 15 basic patterns that formed the basis for interpretation of scores.

About 10 years later, a staff member of Walter Clarke Associates developed a version of this assessment for John Cleaver, which they called Self D*i*scription. It began like the AVA as an adjective checklist, but evolved into a 24 tetrad (i.e., four choices), forced-choice instrument. Presumably, the forced choice aspect of the instrument was introduced to minimize the influence of socially desirable responding. Factor analyses of the Self D*i*scription produced two factors that closely approximated the underlying axes of Marston's model, lending considerable empirical support not only to the structure of the model he proposed, but to Clarke's earlier claim that a DISC-based instrument could be created.

In the 1970s, John Geier, a faculty member in the University of Minnesota's Department of Health Sciences, used Self D*i*scription to create the original *Personal Profile System*® (PPS). He formed a company called Performax (which subsequently became Carlson Learning Company, then Inscape Publishing, and is now part of Wiley) that was the first publisher of a DiSC assessment. Geier collected pattern descriptions through clinical interviews with hundreds of people, and by extracting behavioral information from those interviews, he provided richer descriptions of these 15 patterns that had come to be known as the Classical Profile Patterns. In 1994, the items and norms on the PPS were revisited and an updated version of the assessment was created. This assessment contained 28 tetrads and is today called *DiSC® Classic.*

In the early 2000s, researchers associated with Inscape Publishing (now Wiley) began experimenting with ways to represent DiSC with a circumplex model instead of with a line graph model. Here, a person's DiSC style was represented with a dot within the DiSC map. The advantage of this representation was ease of interpretation and application. For instance, users could much more easily see the relationship among the four styles and could plot two people on the same circle. Researchers discovered that this circumplex approach to measuring and presenting DiSC shared substantial overlap with the Interpersonal Circumplex theory (Leary, 1957) in academic psychological research. Drawing on this research and theory, the *Everything DiSC®* series of reports was developed as it exists today.

From Marston up to the present, the understanding of the DiSC model has continued to evolve. In each decade since Marston, new knowledge has been gained about what DiSC represents, and, along the way, new advances are continually applied to the model.

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