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# A Field Study: Managers' Work Behavioral Styles

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## ABSTRACT

*Over the years, personality assessment tests have allowed employers and managers to discover the personal types regarding strengths and weaknesses of their employees and themselves. This includes how they process and organize information, make decisions, and interact with team members and other stakeholders (PMBOK, 2017). The present research study explored the applicable work behavioral styles of experienced managers attending an advanced leadership educational program. Seven hundred and fifty-three experienced managers agreed to reveal their results, and descriptive statistics were conducted to determine their behavioral work styles. The results may provide a better understanding of managers' behavioral work styles, which characterize them when leading team members and other stakeholders. Additionally, the findings may have implications for teaching manager work behavioral styles in a variety of settings to include educational leadership programs.*

**Keywords:** *Work Behavior; Managers, Instrument, Self-reporting, DiSC*

## INTRODUCTION

Abilities to understand, predict, direct, change, and control human behavior are often difficult to acquire. Nonetheless, the more managers understand their work behavior tendencies and the work of their employees/team members and others whom they come in contact, the more it is revealed how decisions are made, interaction with others, process information, etc. (Mulchay, 2018). Among these are self-scoring psychological instruments, which are designed to improve managers' understanding of work behavior tendencies to gain commitment, trust, and communications among team members and other stakeholders (PmBOK, 2017). Although these instruments have a relatively short history of but a few decades, they are used extensively within a business, management, and leadership training, and other sectors to promote success in the work environment (Arora & Baronikian, 2013).

There are three widely used self-scoring instruments that seem to have withstood the rigors of criticism and that have been popular over the last three decades in personnel management and development. The first is the Big Five Personality<sup>®</sup>, which was named by Lewis Goldberg, a researcher at the Oregon Research Institute, and is now generally used in business and psychological research. The second is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI<sup>®</sup>) (Leary, Reilly, & Brown, 2009; McCrae & Costa 2006; Peabody & Goldberg 1989; Hunt, 2000; Lusser & Achua, 2016; Smith, 2015). The third is the Personal Profile System (PPS)<sup>®</sup>. These popular psychological instruments may be characterized best as self-report questionnaires suitable for group administration and capable of immediate scoring by managers with immediate feedback (Groth-Marnat, 2009; Weiner, 2003).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Big Five Personality®**

A manager's personality encompasses the characteristics of how he or she interacts with others (Hunt, 2000; Robbins & Judge, 2007, p. 106). Over the years, there has been much research conducted on the traits that make up a personality. The results of such research have shown there are five general dimensions of personality, referred to as the Big Five Personality® dimensions (Daft, 2017). The Big Five Personality® has been widely used over the years because of its validity and reliability (Bartone, Eid, Johnsen, Laberg & Snook, 2009; Hunt, 2000; Lusser & Achua, 2016). In addition these Big Five Personality® traits have been demonstrated to be valid across different cultures, using different instruments, and through self-reporting (Digman, 1990; Barrick & Mount, 1991; John & Srivastava, 1999). The Big Five Personality® includes the following: surgency (extroversion), agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience (Lusser & Achua, 2016). Individual personalities are different; however, there many common traits that people share (Daft, 2017). These common traits are described as five dimensions and exist on a continuum; for example, a manager may have a combination of each of the five dimensions (Lusser & Achua, 2016).

### **Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®)**

The second most widely used self-scoring personality instrument is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®, which Carl Jung a well-known Swiss psychiatrist, proposed that there were four dimensions or attributes of personality. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) is based on his theory, and it is based on the four dimensions or attributes that combine to yield 16 personality types. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) instrument has 16 types that are typically referred to by an abbreviation of four letters: extraversion (E), sensing (S), thinking (T), and judgment (J) and their opposites; introversion (I), intuition (N), feeling (F), and perception (P). The Myers and Briggs Foundation stresses that the instrument is both valid and reliable (Myers & Briggs, 2014).

In MBTI® research more specific to project managers, a study by Cohen, Ornoy, & Keren, (2013) compared career managers to the general population and deemed project managers to be either INT or IST types. Mullaly & Thomas (2009) also compared career project managers to the general population's MTBI classification and found there is significantly more NT (Intuitive, Thinking) type managers than in the general population. Those who exhibit this type favor making decisions on intuition and analysis ("let's look at the possibilities,") as well as logic-based thinking: ("let's keep this objective"). Gehing (2007), in work dealing with MBTI types and project managers, states that of the ten MBTI types that support project managers, four (specifically INTP, ENTP, ENTJ and INTJ) are NT (Intuitive, Thinking) types that support project management leadership competencies.

### **The Personal Profile System (DiSC)®**

The third widely used self-scoring personality self-scoring instrument is the Personal Profile System (DiSC) developed by John G. Geier, Ph.D., which is based on the research of Dr. William M. Marston (1977); (Geier, 1977). The Personal Profile System (DiSC)® is a very popular personality model that is easier than some other models to grasp, which allows managers to learn about the differences in human behavior fostering maximum productivity in the work environment to take occur. The Personal Profile System® consists of four types of behaviors, which include: 1) 'D' type managers who exhibit 'Dominance' behavior tendencies to include being outgoing and task-oriented by focusing on task

completion; 2) 'I' type managers who exhibit Influencing behavior tendencies are outgoing and people-oriented focusing on interpersonal relations among the team members; 'S' type managers who exhibit 'Steadiness' behavior tendencies are reserved and people-oriented supportive managers, which are socio-emotionally oriented; and 4) C-type manager who exhibits 'Counselors' behavior tendencies are reserved and task-oriented exhibiting high compliance and caution tendencies (Geier, 1977).

The Personal Profile System (DiSC)<sup>®</sup>, which is a self-administered, self-reporting device, requires managers to select from 24 panels made up of four choices each, one descriptive adjective that is "most" and another that is "least" like themselves performing leadership duties in the work environment (Geier, 1977). The "least like" selection of the manager is hypothesized to reflect the manager as he or she is best revealed to be when under pressure. The composite of "most" and "least" is a summary of the "most like" and "least like" choices and is interpreted as the manager's self-perception of his or her work behavior when managing resources to include personnel. The following are the patterns describing the work behavior tendency of the manager from the choices of adjectives selected by the manager (Geier, 1977).

- a. conduct to be expected under pressure
- b. emotion
- c. fear
- d. goals
- e. method of judging others
- f. method of influencing others
- g. means whereby one might increase personal effectiveness
- h. overuse of behaviors, manner, and attitude
- i. value to organization

## **PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY**

The intent of the present research is to bring awareness to the importance of managers knowing and understanding the importance of behavior work styles concerning the workplace environment. With this in mind, the present study aims to determine the behavioral work classifications reported by managers using the Personality Profile System (DiSC)<sup>®</sup>. Value-added understanding of their behavior work styles how to build more effective relationships will act as an aid in managing personnel and stakeholders for achieving the organization's strategy, goals, and objectives (PmBok, 2017).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

We begin with the following research question:

1. What do experienced managers attending an advanced management educational program report as their Personality Profile System DiSC<sup>®</sup> work behavioral pattern?

In order to find the answer to this question, a comprehensive literature review was completed followed by a descriptive statistics analysis, and the results were documented in this paper.

### **Data Collection**

Over a two-year period, seven hundred and fifty-three experienced managers attending a U.S. government advanced leadership academic program completed the Personal Profile System DiSC<sup>®</sup> self-assessment and volunteered their results for this study. Their results were collected and the responses

were tabulated to determine the managers' work behavior classification. Respondents' privacy and confidentiality were strictly protected.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

The following section displays the top four and the least frequently observed work behavior patterns reported by the managers participating in the Personal Profile System (DiSC)<sup>®</sup> self-assessment instrument.

### **The Creative Pattern D/C Pattern**

The greatest number, 106, of the managers, reported having both the 'Dominance' and 'Conscientiousness' behavior types. Both of these types of behavior are task-oriented. Conversely, the 'Dominance' behavior type is outgoing; and the Conscientiousness behavior type is reserved. The result is managers having a desire to achieve challenging, and tangible accomplishments offset by an equal strive for perfection and quality with their work. Likewise, their 'Dominance' behavior and aggressiveness extrovert behavior is tempered by their 'Conscientiousness' type reserved behavior when leading and managing employees and team members. Moreover, the quickness of their decision reaction time is restrained by the desire to explore the root cause, to analyze and find possible solutions, before making a decision. Therefore, they display confidence in their decision-making Geier, 1977; Rohm, 2014. These managers exhibit a lot of foresight and are able to focus on work-related projects to bring about change, which is the purpose of projects (PmBOK, 2017).

### **Objective Thinker Pattern C Pattern**

The results showed, that seventy-seven managers fell into the 'Objective Thinker' behavior, which means that are reserved but also task oriented. Since their scores are high when it comes to the 'Conscientiousness' behavior, they display highly-developed managerial critical thinking abilities, which emphasizes the importance of drawing conclusions and basing actions on factual data before making a decision. They will often combine a sixth sense intuitive ability with facts, to better ensure that they are managing resources in the most efficient and effective way. When preparing an action plan, they will meticulously prepare and immerse themselves in researching all the available information that may support their position; however, this may slow down their decision-making ability (Geier, 1977; Rohm, 2014). Since they tend to be creative and critical thinkers, they strive to improve their knowledge of the job (Lussier & Achua, 2016).

### **Counselors Pattern I/S Pattern**

Sixty-eight of the managers selected an 'Influencing' behavior with a secondary behavior of 'Steadiness', which means that they are people-oriented rather than task-oriented. They come across to others as displaying warmth, empathy, and understanding. These managers prefer to deal with people on an intimate basis of a long-standing relationship, and their approach is most effective in low-key work situations. They tend to be good listeners, and thus their employees and team members don't hesitate to approach them with problems or issues. These managers firmly believe that people are important and if they treat them right, the people will accomplish the job properly (Daft, 2017). These managers may not be very good at accepting criticism of their work; but then again they do respond favorably to compliments for well-done work accomplishments (Geier, 1977; Rohm, 2014).

### **Specialist Pattern S/C Pattern**

Sixty-one of the managers reported the ‘Steadiness’ behavior with a secondary of a ‘Conscientiousness’ behavior. These managers are reserved rather than outgoing. Their ‘Steadiness’ type shows them as being people oriented. These managers work well with others and therefore make good team members, this will assist in building a high-performance team. Conversely, their ‘Conscientiousness’ type shows they also can be task-oriented when needed (Geier, 1977; Rohm, 2014), and thus can use more directive behavior such as being decisive, directing, forceful, and structuring, which works well at the beginning cycle of a project (Mulcahy, 2018).

Conversely, the behavioral pattern reported least by the managers in this study was as follows:

### **The Promoter Pattern I Pattern**

Only 15 fifteen of the managers of the 753 managers were reported to be of the ‘Promoter’ behavior, which means that they are outgoing, and people oriented. These managers are excellent at networking, which provides an active foundation for doing business. They are also are aware that effective communications are needed for business success, and thus they understand the need to tailor their communications to fit the demands of diverse stakeholders and situations (Arora & Baronikion, 2013). Since these managers are very outgoing, they tend to excel in communication and non-verbal communication (which make up about two-thirds of all communication among employees) (Hogan & Stubbs, 2003). Conversely, this low number of managers that were reported to be of the ‘Promoter’ behavior may be because of the challenges that they face in managing their time effectively, the need to be emotional intelligence, and the need to follow-up on assigned tasks, which are all ‘musts’ for a manager to be successful (Geier, 1977).

## **SUMMARY**

This present research study was designed as an exploratory measure. The Personality Profile System PPS<sup>®</sup> instrument was used to gather from the 753 managers attending and an advanced leadership educational program that spanned two years. The results of the Personal Profile System DiSC<sup>®</sup> survey revealed that the leadership behavioral patterns that were most often used by managers represented all four of the PPS dimensions (DiSC)<sup>®</sup>. The ‘Creative’ pattern (D) was selected by 14.06% of the respondents; the ‘Objective’ pattern (C) by 9.90%; the ‘Counselor’ pattern (I) by 9.18 %; and the ‘Specialist’ pattern (S) by 8.64 %. The results would indicate that there is not one "best" or "ideal" behavior pattern used. Rather, there are patterns that are successfully used from all four of the different dimensions (DISC) (Geier, 1977; Rohm, 2014). However, it is noteworthy that of the four patterns used most often by managers, three patterns (Creative, Objective Thinker, and Specialist) indicate a high degree of the Compliance (C) dimension (Geier, 1977. This would suggest an emphasis by these managers to be both reserved and task-oriented. They work to promote quality in producing products or providing a service by the organization (Geier, 1977; Rohm, 2014).

The importance of manager to an organization is well established. Managers are responsible for making effective and efficient use of people to complete work successfully (PmBOK, 2017). “Every manager must motivate and encourage employees, somehow reconciling their individual needs with the goals of the organization” (Mintzberg, 1990). Since no two individuals are alike, a manager must understand people as individuals and how to arouse their response (Santornino & Villa, 2017). Whenever there are people working together, there are bound to be conflicts with the schedule, resources,

administrative procedures, budget, grievances, jealousies, and even personalities (PmBOK, 2017; Rohm, 2014). The managers, who know more about each employee and recognize and understand their work behaviors, strengths, and weaknesses, have the best chance of getting the employees working together as a team. Hence, personality self-assessments can give a manager the insight to provide needed positive leadership that inspires confidence, responsibility, and mutual understanding when leading team members and interacting with other stakeholders (PmBOK, 2017).

For many organizations, the most expected practice is to promote an outstanding technician with a good reputation for producing work on-time and with quality, to the position of manager. This is generally referred to as the “Halo Effect” (PmBOK, 2017). The problem with such a promotion practice is that just because a technician is excellent at producing work-related tasks, it does not always mean that he or she will also be good at managing. Perhaps such accidental promotion can be avoided by first training and educating technicians in the art and science of managing and leading before promoting them to managers. Such training and educational courses can be enhanced by providing the concepts of personality and individual behavior, (PmBOK, 2018).

Ideally, the results of this present study will assist managers to take a positive approach to understand their behavioral work classifications. Additionally, educational institutions may use the results of this study when developing and teaching project management courses. Though leveraging the combined work of the research presented in the literature review, it is the hope that the results of this present research study will add to the literature in terms of managers understanding the importance of knowing and understanding their work behavior personality styles and those of others as well.

Physiological self-administered instruments such as the Personality Profile System (DiSC)<sup>®</sup> may not be a cure-all; however, if organizations administer them properly, it will be what the great football coach Vince Lombardi, termed as “The achievement of an organization is the result of the combined effort of each individual” (Kovach, 1987).

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