

Improving Association Chapter Board Dynamics Using The DiSC Behavioral Assessment



Strong, effective collaboration between board members is critical to a board and the long-term success of its chapter. But that level of collaboration isn't always easy or natural. Some people are more direct, for example, while others are reserved and still others can be highly analytical while the people they need to engage focused more on relationships than numbers.



These dynamics can drive how well board members communicate with each other, whether they're in sync or more likely to work against each other. If you've experienced this friction in your own association chapter board, you're probably spending more time intervening and less time accomplishing tasks.

Did you know there are tools available to improve this sort of uneven communication?

The DiSC behavioral assessment is one of those tools; it categorizes human behavior into four styles. Organizations of all types use it to improve communication, work productivity, decision-making and collaboration, because it helps people understand their own communication tendencies and their interactions with others.

We wanted to provide an overview of DiSC and share how it works and how it can help chapter boards.

We'll also share insights from a communications consultant who uses DiSC with some of his clients, Dan Kaplan.

Let's start with a conversation around communication styles and how different styles show up in board meetings. According to DiSC, most people have a blend of four communication styles, with one or two more being predominant:

- Dominance (D) is characterized by being results-oriented and decisive
- Influence (I) shows up as enthusiasm and a focus on relationships
- Steadiness (S) is defined by a supportive and collaborative nature
- Conscientiousness (C) is distinguished by analytical thinking and attention to detail.

What is the DiSC framework?

DiSC is a behavioral assessment tool that identifies and measures a person's primary communication style, typically through a short questionnaire. The profile it provides reflects a person's natural communication, needs and decision-making tendencies. These results can be used to better understand oneself and each other and drive the stronger framing of messages to more effectively influence, diffuse tension, gain buy-in, etc.

How do different communication styles surface in board meetings?

The dominance-focused communicator wants results and to move quickly — they're great at driving initiatives but often at the peril of important details or overlooking other's input and emotions. The influence-focused communicator has a lot of energy and enthusiasm. They're great at keeping people engaged, but they sometimes drift off topic or hog the limelight. The steadiness-focused communicator is your board's diplomat, a good listener who encourages collaboration and harmony, who may hesitate to challenge an idea even when they have reservations. And finally, but by no means last, conscientiousness-focused communicators keep the board grounded with details, structure and accuracy. They have strong planning, risk instincts and awareness, though being this thorough can sometimes slow down decision-making.

How can DiSC help chapter boards?

When you understand and approach these different styles appropriately, they make for a well-rounded, effective board. But sadly, things don't always work the way we hope.

Chapter boards volunteers are from different backgrounds and roles and have varied levels of leadership. You adore these volunteers, most of the time, but these differences in background,



communication and decision-making styles can lead to misunderstandings or friction. But when board members understand how their colleagues think, communicate and operate — and get a better picture of how they do this themselves — they can be more intentional in how they speak and work, decreasing potential confrontations and bottlenecks.

What are some ways to share DiSC profiles with a board?

This information can only help chapter boards be more collaborative when they understand the results and use what they learn. Here are a few ways to share DiSC profiles among board members:

- **Share when a new board member joins.** When a new board member comes onboard, or when your whole board transitions, complete the DiSC framework for the new member(s). Then, review the different communication styles for the entire board as part of onboarding.
- **Discuss communication preferences together.** Decide as a board how to give each style more of what they need to be an effective part of the team. D communicators may want a quick meeting summary with clear action items, while I communicators want dialogue and time for discussion. Your S's need collaboration and low pressure, and your C communicators benefit most from receiving detailed agendas and data in advance.
- **Assign roles based on natural strengths.** DiSC isn't an aptitude test; any style can fit into any board role. But when you intentionally match roles to strengths, board members are naturally more engaged, confident and effective. D's make great leaders for roles requiring decision-making and strategy — think board chair, committee lead and initiative owners. I's shine in roles focused on people and visibility, where they use their energy and communication skills, like membership engagement, sponsorship outreach and event promotion. S styles are ideal for roles that require consistency, follow through and connection, such as volunteer coordination, onboarding and committee liaison. C's are a natural fit for roles requiring precision and structure, including treasurer and program planning, where they use their understanding of and interest in data, compliance and process management.
- **Encourage equal contribution from all styles.** Being a DiSC-aware board lets you structure discussions that allow everyone to contribute meaningfully and not have conversations dominated by the loudest or most assertive voices. Understanding this dynamic can require your board to adjust, like:



- Giving C styles time to be more prepared by providing materials in advance
- Creating ways for S styles to share input without pushing their ways in to a conversation
- Keeping D styles focused by setting time boundaries
- Channeling the enthusiasm and productivity of an I by defining roles in a discussion, like asking them to capture ideas.

The three most useful important things boards should know about DiSC, from a facilitator

We spoke with Dan Kaplan, founder of Confident Communicators, LLC, for a better understanding of how DiSC can help boards. He works with organizations to, according to his website, “increase productivity, engagement, and contentment at work, while reducing turnover, misunderstanding, and frustrations — all through better interpersonal and leadership communication.” Kaplan, whose company is an authorized DiSC provider, has been implementing DiSC for more than five years, with clients including the Gates Foundation, Google and the state of Maryland, as well as nonprofits like Chimes International and the Chimes Board of Directors.

Once Dan understood, by using DiSC himself, that there are “four different ways of communicating and of interpreting,” his stress decreased and he became much better at helping people meet their needs; he also felt he “could be more influential.”

DiSC, Dan says, can have the same impact on board members. “Not only does this help board members understand each other and collaborate in more effective and efficient ways,” he explains, “but it’s an incredible way for the person running the board meeting and the board, to be the point person and steer others in the right direction or get them to make a decision.”

He says there are three big benefits for boards using DiSC. First, “it can help a board member get grounded and centered so they can speak intentionally rather than reactionarily, as people can become more self-aware of who they are and what they need.” Second, it can help you better understand the people you’re talking with. When you know a person’s communication style, he explains, you know what motivates them, what drives them and how they need to hear a message for it to resonate. DiSC also allows you to understand, “why a person is the way they are.”

“You can be more persuasive,” Dan explains, “if you know who they are, how they process information, how they receive information, what they have, what’s going on, whether or not they ate breakfast, etc.”



And using this information, Dan says, is the third thing board members should know. DiSC allows you to “frame your message so that you get through. So that you convince, you persuade, you inform. You get somebody to make a decision. If a person can’t get past your framing,” he says, “they are never going to hear your message. And different styles need to hear things in different ways.”

“Unlike the direct style communicator, for example,” he says, “who is facts oriented, the I style is more people focused, empathetic, warm, agreeable. Those are the ones who “want to chit-chat before getting down to business, because they’re driven by relationships.”

This is also,” he adds, “the person who won’t read the agenda in advance. They want to bounce ideas off each other, talk about it and figure it out, which is very different from a D style communicator, “ who, he says, “arrives at a decision using root cause analysis.”

Dan says DiSC can be “a secret decoder ring to understanding human behavior and influencing others. When we can be more influential, when we can speak our truth, when we can be heard, persuade, convince, inform, our stress goes down.”

And, he says, ultimately, more, and better, work gets done.

Use DiSC to run better board meetings and improve connection and collaboration

Intentional, planned facilitation — like a quick, round robin check-in, anonymous input before a vote or deliberately inviting quieter members to weigh in — can have a positive impact on every communication style. When every style feels seen, through actions like structured agendas and encouraging respectful communication or simply being aware of different communication approaches, boards make better decisions, because they’re drawing on the full range of board strengths and not just the most vocal members.

When used thoughtfully and intentionally, DiSC can transform differences and dysfunction into a more cohesive leadership team.

