

CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

A key contributor to developing effective interpersonal relationships in organizations is understanding **individual differences**—the variations in how people respond to the same situation based on personal characteristics.

CHAPTER OUTLINE AND LECTURE NOTES

I. PERSONALITY

Individual differences in personality greatly influence interpersonal relationships.

Personality refers to those persistent and enduring behavior patterns that tend to be expressed in a wide variety of situations.

A. Eight Major Personality Factors and Traits

Many psychologists believe that the basic structure of human personality is represented by five broad factors, known as the Big Five. Three more key personality factors, risk taking and thrill seeking, self-monitoring of behavior, and optimism, have received much attention and are also included here. All eight factors have a substantial impact on interpersonal relations and job performance. Despite a genetic influence, most people can improve their standing on key personality factors.

1. *Neuroticism* refers to emotional instability and identifies people prone to psychological distress and coping with problems in unproductive ways.
2. *Extraversion* reflects the quantity or intensity of social interactions, the need for social stimulation, self-confidence, and competition.
3. *Openness* (openness to experience) reflects the proactive seeking of experience for its own sake.
4. *Agreeableness* reflects the quality of one's interpersonal orientation.
5. *Conscientiousness* reflects organization, self-restraint, persistence, and motivation toward attaining goals.
6. *Self-monitoring* of behavior refers to the process of observing and controlling how we are perceived by others.
7. *Risk taking and thrill seeking* refers to the propensity to take risks and pursue thrills.
8. *Optimism* refers to a tendency to experience positive emotional states, and to typically believe that positive outcomes will be forthcoming from most activities. The other end of the scale is *pessimism*—a tendency to experience

negative emotional states and to typically believe that negative outcomes will be forthcoming from most activities.

A high standing on a given trait is not always an advantage, and a low standing is not always a disadvantage. For example, extraverts might spend neglect analytical work because of so much time spent talking to people.

B. The Eight Factors and Traits and Job Performance

Depending on the job, any one of the preceding personality factors can be important for success. Research on the Big Five factors is based on both personality tests and trait ratings by others. Conscientiousness relates to job performance for many different occupations, with the *dependability* aspect (or sub-trait) being the most important contributor.

1. *Extraversion*. Extraversion is associated with success for managers and salespersons. In more complicated types of selling, extraversion is less important.
2. *Self-monitoring*. High self-monitors tend to receive higher performance evaluations, and are more likely to emerge as leaders and work their way into top management positions.
3. *Organizational Citizenship Behavior*. The willingness to go beyond one's job description without a specific apparent reward is referred to as **organizational citizenship behavior**. Two components or sub-behaviors are *affiliation-oriented* and *challenge-oriented* citizenship behaviors. An analysis of studies based on a total of over 50,000 employees found that being a good organizational citizen leads to better performance ratings, higher salary increase, and less turnover and absenteeism. Organizational citizenship behavior also contributes to higher productivity, reduced costs, and better customer satisfaction. A worker with a high standing on organizational citizenship behavior will often make a short-term sacrifice that leads to long-term benefits to the organization.
4. *Turnover and Personality*. Employees who are emotionally stable are less likely to plan to quit, or to actually quit. Conscientious and agreeable employees are less likely to leave voluntarily. Notable also is that workers who are low on agreeableness and high on openness to experiences are likely to quit spontaneously.
5. *Optimism and Pessimism*. Optimism can be helpful when attempting such tasks as selling a product or service or motivating a group of people. Pessimism can sometimes enhance job performance by such means as preparing to prevent botches and bad luck.
6. *Combination of Standing on Several Personality Traits*. A combination of

personality factors will sometimes be more closely associated with job success than one factor alone, such as being conscientious and agreeable. A study with diverse occupational groups found that conscientious workers who were also agreeable, performed better than conscientious workers who were less agreeable.

C. Psychological Types and Cognitive Styles

Personality also influences a person's **cognitive style**, or modes of problem solving. Jung's analysis of cognitive style became the basis for the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). Another leading measure of measuring types is the Golden Personality Type profiler. Four separate dichotomies direct the typical use of perception and judgment by an individual: (1) Energy flow: extraversion versus introversion, (2) Information gathering: sensation versus intuition, (3) Decision making: thinking versus feeling, and (4) Lifestyle orientation: judging versus perceiving.

Combining the four types with each other results in 16 personality types, such as the ESPF, or "The Entertainer." Figure 2-2 presents four of the sixteen personality types along with the implications for each one with respect to cognitive style. Far too many people interpret personality types as being definitive indicators of an individual's personality, and therefore pigeon hole that person.

D. Guidelines for Dealing with Different Personality Types

To match one's approach to dealing with a given personality type, a person must first arrive at an approximate diagnosis of the individual's personality. Fourteen suggestions are presented in the text, yet they must be regarded tentatively. Four of these suggestions are: (1) When relating to an extraverted individual, emphasize friendliness and warmth; (2) when relating to an introverted individual, move slowly, and tolerate silence; (3) when relating to a disagreeable person, be patient and tolerant; and (4) when relating to a conscientious person, grant freedom and do not nag.

II. COGNITIVE INTELLIGENCE

Cognitive ability (also referred to as mental ability or intelligence) is one of the major sources of individual differences that affects job performance and behavior. **Cognitive intelligence** is the capacity to acquire and apply knowledge. Abstract problems can best be solved by intelligent workers. Understanding the intelligence of others can improve one's ability to relate to them.

A. Components of Traditional Intelligence

Intelligence consists of a **g (general) factor** along with **s (special) factors** that contribute to problem-solving ability. The *g* factor helps explain why some people perform so well in so many different mental tasks. The following seven mental ability factors have been consistently identified:

1. *Verbal comprehension*: understanding the meaning of words and information.
2. *Word fluency*: the ability to use words quickly and easily.
3. *Numerical acuity*: the ability to handle numbers.
4. *Spatial*: the ability to visualize forms and objects in three dimensions.
5. *Memory*: having a good rote memory.
6. *Perceptual speed*: the ability to perform tasks requiring visual perception.
7. *Inductive reasoning*: the ability to discover a rule or principle and apply it to a problem.

Attempts to improve cognitive skills, or intelligence, have become an entire industry, including both brain-stimulating exercises and food supplements. Brain-imaging studies support the idea that mental workouts help preserve **cognitive fitness**, a state of optimized ability to remember, learn, plan, and adapt to changing circumstances. Memory training appears to be effective. The contribution of food supplements to enhancing or maintaining cognitive ability is debatable, yet a healthy diet contributes to the proper functioning of the brain.

B. Practical Intelligence

The practical type of intelligence required for adapting to your environment to suit your needs. **Practical intelligence** is an accumulation of skills, dispositions and knowledge plus the ability to apply knowledge to solve every day problems. Included in practical intelligence is **intuition**, an experience-based way of knowing or reasoning in which the weighing and balancing of evidence are done automatically. Experience usually improves practical intelligence.

C. Multiple Intelligences

According to the theory of **multiple intelligences**, people know and understand the world in distinctly different ways, and learn in different ways. The eight intelligences, or faculties, are as follows: (1) *linguistic*, (2) *logical-mathematical*, (3) *musical*, (4) *spatial*, (5) *bodily/kinesthetic*, (6) *intrapersonal*, (7) *interpersonal*, and (8) *naturalist*.

The importance of natural abilities has been recently challenged. Malcolm Gladwell contends that no one gets to the top without 10,000 of practice in a field. Guided practice does help, but basic talent is still needed to attain high-level success in such fields as finance, foreign languages, and sports.

Cognitive, practical, and multiple intelligence all contribute to but do not guarantee our ability to think critically. Critical thinking is the process of evaluating evidence, and then based on this evaluation, making judgments and decisions. Personality factors contribute heavily to whether we choose to use the various types of intelligence. Two such factors are openness to experience and conscientiousness.

D. Emotional Intelligence

How effectively people use their emotions has a major impact on their success. **Emotional intelligence** refers to qualities such as understanding one's feelings, empathy for others, and the regulation of emotion to enhance living. The four key factors of emotional intelligence are:

1. *Self-awareness* (self-knowledge)
2. *Self-management* (control of one's emotions)
3. *Social awareness* (empathy for others and intuition about work problems)
4. *Relationship management* (interpersonal skills)

Emotional intelligence incorporates many of the skills and attitudes necessary to achieve effective interpersonal relations in organizations.

E. Guidelines for Relating to People of Different Levels and Types of Intelligence

Several suggestions are given for relating differently to people of different types and levels of intelligence. For example, when people are brighter, present ideas in more technical depth, use more difficult words, and ask challenging questions; do the opposite with a mentally slow question.

III. VALUES AS A SOURCE OF INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

A **value** refers to the importance a person attaches to something, and values are another source of individual differences. Values are closely tied in with **ethics**, the moral choices a person makes. Differences in values among people often stem from age, or generational differences. Table 2-1 presents stereotypes about Baby Boomers versus members of Generation X and Generation Y.

A. Classification of Values

Value classification goes beyond regarding values as good or bad. Table 2-1 presents a method of classifying values that points to how we establish goals to fit our values. For example, people who value power are likely to set the goals of attaining power, strength, and control.

B. Generational Differences in Values

Differences in values among people often stem from age, or generational, differences. These age differences in values have often been seen as a clash between Baby Boomers and members of Generation X and Generation Y. Generation Jones are the younger Boomers born between 1954 and 1964. According to the stereotype, Boomers see members of Generation X and Generation Y as disrespectful of rules, not willing to pay their dues, and being disloyal. Members of Generation X and Generation Y see Boomers as worshipping hierarchy, being overcautious, and wanting to preserve the status quo. Table 2-2 summarizes these massive group stereotypes that are only partially accurate.

C. How Values are Learned

One important way in which we learn values is through observing others, or modeling. Models can be parents, teachers, friends, brothers, sisters, and even public figures. Another way in which values are learned is through the communication of attitudes. Values continue to be shaped by events later in life. The media, including the dissemination of information about popular culture, influences the values of many people throughout their lives. Changes in technology can also change our values, such many people valuing a *digital lifestyle*, as the normal way of life.

B. Clarifying Your Values

Value-clarification exercises ask you to compare the relative importance you attach to different objects and activities. Self-Assessment Quiz 2-3 provides insight into value clarification.

C. The Mesh Between Individual and Job Values

When individual and job values are congruent, job performance is likely to be higher. The major factor creating positive outcomes from value congruence appears to be employees trusting managers based on the congruence. When communication is regular, open, and consistent, trust is enhanced.

When the demands made by the organization or a superior clash with the basic values of the individual, he or she suffers from **person-role conflict**. The individual wants to obey orders, but does not want to perform an act that seems inconsistent with his or her values.

D. Guidelines for Using Values to Enhance Interpersonal Relations

Values are an important driver of interpersonal effectiveness. One approach would be to establish the values a person will use in relationships with others on the job, and then use those values as a firm guideline in working with others. Also, express your concern to employers when you believe that your values are being compromised.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REVIEW

1. Provide an example of how you have successfully taken into account individual differences in dealing with people. In what way did your approach make a difference in the outcome of the interaction with that person?

Thinking through an answer to this question helps the student better understand what individual differences means in practice. An illustrative answer here is that a student who worked as a supervisor gave clearer, slower, and more precise instructions to a group member with modest learning ability. As a result the group member in question performed better.

2. Suppose you found out from a reliable source that a coworker of yours is a high

self-monitor. What precautions (if any) would you take in dealing with that person?

A major precaution to take with a high self-monitoring coworker would be a little skeptical of compliments, as well as other attempts to please you. For example, a compliment about a report you wrote might not be based on the merits of the report, but instead the compliment is designed to please.

3. Identify three job situations (or entire jobs) in which being optimistic might be an asset.

Almost all forms of sales require optimism because the sales representative or sales associate needs to believe that some consumers will become their customers. People who start their own businesses need to be highly optimistic that they will garner enough business to prosper and survive. Optimism is particularly important because such a higher percentage of startups fail. Optimism is also quite helpful for technical support specialists because they need to have an optimistic attitude that the problem at hand can be solved. If the problem is not solved, an angry customer results who might want a refund or who threatens to sue the company.

4. Identify three job situations (or entire jobs) in which being a pessimist might be an asset.

Pessimistic workers at all job-levels have a propensity to visualize what might go wrong by taking a particular course of action, thereby often preventing problems. A tax accountant might help a client by cautioning against a deduction that might be rejected by the Internal Revenue Service, thereby creating possible fraud charges. A health-care professional might see a small potential symptom of a big problem, such as a lump in the throat, and urge that the patient visit a specialist. A pessimist on an automobile design team might point to features on a new vehicle that could possibly result in recall problems, and encourage a change in design.

5. Identify two business occupations for which a high propensity for risk taking and thrill seeking would be an asset. Also, identify two business occupations for which risk taking and thrill seeking might be a liability.

Business occupations where a high propensity for risk would be valuable include a broker for investments such as stock futures and commodity trading, a specialist in repossessing expensive goods, a commission-only sales person, and a venture capitalist. A high propensity for risk taking and thrill seeking might be a liability for professions and occupations that focus on the customer safety. Managers of credit unions would fit this category. A food and drug inspector is another specialty where risk taking and thrill seeking could be a liability.

6. Imagine yourself going about your job in your field, or intended field. Give an example of how you might use the five primary senses of touch, sight, sound, smell, and taste to gather information.

Students will have to think imaginatively to answer this question. To illustrate, we might take the occupation of a person who values (places a value on) businesses such as a restaurant, manufacturing plant, or retail store. Today Jack, an appraiser is visiting a restaurant to estimate its value. Jack first touches the furnishings to get a feel for whether they are fine wood or plastic. Jack then uses sight to gather a general impression of the value of the restaurant. He listens to customers in an attempt to sense whether he hears signs of contentment or discontentment. Jack then observes whether the restaurant has a pleasant scent—a very important property of a restaurant. Having common sense, Jack also tastes a few items on the menu to help him in his valuation of the restaurant.

7. Which of the seven components of traditional intelligence represents your best mental aptitude? What is your evidence?

Reflecting on past experience helps answer this question. An easy source of information would be school grades. A person might also reflect about work experiences and everyday experiences. Someone might be good at understanding maps and following them, suggesting good spatial intelligence as his strongest aptitude.

8. How could you use the concept of *multiple intelligences* to raise the self-esteem of people who did not consider themselves to be very smart?

People who do not consider themselves to be very smart typically use scholastic achievement and abstract problem solving as their frame of reference for judging intelligence. A person with such a self-evaluation might be reminded that he or she has great aptitude for dancing (or something else), this indicating high *bodily/kinesthetic intelligence* (or another of the multiple intelligences). Receiving recognition for genuine accomplishment tends to bolster self-esteem.

9. Which aspect of personality, cognitive ability, or values would best help explain why so many actors, actresses, sports figures, politicians, and business executives damage their careers through such means a drunk driving, shoplifting, sexually harassment, or physically assaulting others?

A major explanation for such self-defeating behavior is that the person has low emotional intelligence in terms of self-managing negative impulses. Pure cognitive intelligence provides fewer clues. For example how can someone smart enough to become the mayor of a major city be stupid enough to sexually harass a large number of women over a long period of time? The trait of high risk-taking and thrill seeking also provides clues to aberrant behavior, such as the thrill associated with shoplifting for pleasure rather than financial need.

10. How can you use information about a person's values to help you relate more effectively to him or her?

Knowledge of a person's values can enhance establishing rapport with the individual by making an appeal to those values. If you know, for example, that the person has strong professional values, you can emphasize career and work in casual conversations with him or her.

ANSWERS TO CASE QUESTIONS

The Big Stakes Repo Men at International Recovery

Repo men, so well-known in popular culture, are make an excellent case study in risk taking and thrill seeking.

1. Which personality traits does Cage, as well as his coworkers, most likely demonstrate?

Repo men evidently score high on risk taking and thrill seeking based on their high-risk pursuits. A high degree of optimism might also be present, because a person needs an optimistic outlook to think that repossessing luxury goods can be accomplished without serious physical conflict.

2. How much cognitive skill is probably required to be a repossession specialist at International Recovery Group?

All the plotting and scheming, and detective work involved in repossessions most likely requires above-average intelligence. For example, figuring out where a particular boat or airplane might be hidden would require heavy thinking.

3. How might practical intelligence contribute to success as a high-end repo specialist?

Practical intelligence would contribute to success as a high-end repo specialist because he or she would have to figure out how to avoid danger, and how to approach people to get the needed information about the location of the boat, car, or airplane. Practical intelligence would also be required to figure out how to avoid substantial physical harm while conducting a repossession.

4. How might being a former professional wrestler be a contributing factor to success in this type of work?

The imposing physical presence of a former professional wrestler would help discourage the owners of the repossessed object from attacking the repo specialist. The physical strength of the wrestler would also be useful in repo tasks such as pushing a boat away from a dock. The former wrestler's propensity not to fear physical danger would also be a distinct asset for this type of work. (My hunch is that students will offer some fabulous responses to this question, particularly because professional wrestling has a following among people of all ages.)

A Values Clash at the Hearing Center

This case provides a concrete illustration of how personal values can contribute to a difference of opinion as to which method of communication is the most effective in a work setting.

1. In what way does this case represent a problem of differences in generational values?

The generational differences in values suggested here is that Jessica representing the younger generation has a preference for one style of communication (more texting and e-mailing) whereas the Brandon's representing an older generation, prefer another style of communication (more telephoning). However, the Brandons did rely heavily on e-mails in the past.

2. Why might excluding e-mails and text messages to and from patients lower productivity at the Brandon Hearing Center?

Responding to and making continual phone calls might take more time than dealing with text messages and e-mails. Perhaps one more receptionist might have to be hired, thereby lower the productivity of the office. The counterargument is that patients were sending such a flood of e-mails and text messages that the process consumed too much time, thereby lowering office productivity.

3. What do you think Jessica should do to change the opinions of the Brandons in relation to the communication mode? Or, do you think Jessica should just drop the issue and try to understand the Brandon's point of view?

Jessica is best advised to drop the issue because the Brandons had seen in the past how dysfunctional communicating with patients through e-mail and texting can be. What Jessica could do, however, would be to propose other approaches to enhancing office productivity.

COMMENTS ABOUT QUIZZES AND EXERCISES

Self-Assessment Quiz 2-1: The Self-Monitoring Scale

Self-monitoring is a major personality trait so it is useful for students to think about their tendencies toward self-monitoring. The significance of extreme scores is useful to ponder. Would a very low self-monitor be insensitive to people, such as telling coworkers that their children are dull-witted or ugly? Would a very high self-monitor be an inveterate office politician?

Self-Assessment Quiz 2-2: The Risk-Taking Scale

Even people in the same demographic group vary considerably in risk-taking propensity, so class members should vary in their scores. Ask for volunteers who scored very high or very low on the quiz to compare their scores to their self-evaluation. It is helpful for the volunteers to document how they are high- or low-risk takers.

Self-Assessment Quiz 2-3: My Tendencies toward Organizational Citizenship Behavior

This 25-statement quiz is designed to provide the student insight into many of the specific behaviors reflective of organizational citizenship behavior. Being a good organizational citizen provides many benefits to the individual and the organization, so low scorers on this scale might think of ways to elevate their organizational citizenship behavior.

Skill-Building Exercise 2-1: Personality Role Plays

To perform these role-plays well, students will have to carefully study the guidelines for dealing with different personality types. Studying the guidelines will also give useful clues about how to behave when one has high standing on a particular personality trait such as openness. For example, the individual with high standing on organizational citizenship behavior will reach out to help a coworker in a constructive way. .

Skill-Building Exercise 2-2: Adapting to People of Different Mental Ability

A potential contribution of this exercise is that it sensitizes students to the importance of reacting to one of the major dimensions of behavior—mental ability. Many people have not stopped to think of the importance of dealing with people differently based on their mental abilities.

Skill-Building Exercise 2-3: Helping an Intellectually Challenged Worker Get Started

This role play works wonders with humanistic students who also understand the concept of individual differences. The effective role player will be encouraging toward Jimmy, and give him clear instructions without presenting too many tasks during the first meeting. At the same time the student who plays the supervisor must pull this off without appearing to be patronizing. After the role play is completed, Jimmy might be asked if he felt patronized.

Self-Assessment Quiz 2-3: Clarifying Your Values

Thinking through the priorities one attaches to his or her values is inherently enjoyable. A point of class discussion is how some of the values are interrelated. One cannot satisfy some values without satisfying others. For example having good health contributes to having an above-average income, and being in good physical condition.

Skill-Building Exercise 2-4: The Value Conflict Role-Play

A high level of diplomacy is required to deal with the person-role conflict of being asked to make unfavorable judgments about workers to justify laying them off. This role-play might demonstrate how difficult it is for some people to cling to their values when their job might be at stake.

Interpersonal Relations Role Play (for Case 2-2)

An important feature of this role play is that helps develop awareness as to how far to push one's values or opinions with the person in charge. Values may drive Jessica's behavior but she has to decide if her stand on the best method of communicating with patients is worth becoming a pest.