

3.3: Individual Differences: Values and Personality

Learning Objectives

1. Understand what values are.
2. Describe the link between values and individual behavior.
3. Identify the major personality traits that are relevant to organizational behavior.
4. Explain the link between personality, work behavior, and work attitudes.
5. Explain the potential pitfalls of personality testing.

Values

Values refer to stable life goals that people have, reflecting what is most important to them. Values are established throughout one's life as a result of the accumulating life experiences and tend to be relatively stable (Lusk & Oliver, 1974; Rokeach, 1973). The values that are important to people tend to affect the types of decisions they make, how they perceive their environment, and their actual behaviors. Moreover, people are more likely to accept job offers when the company possesses the values people care about (Judge & Bretz, 1992; Ravlin & Meglino, 1987). Value attainment is one reason why people stay in a company, and when an organization does not help them attain their values, they are more likely to decide to leave if they are dissatisfied with the job itself (George & Jones, 1996).

What are the values people care about? There are many typologies of values. One of the most established surveys to assess individual values is the Rokeach Value Survey (Rokeach, 1973). This survey lists 18 terminal and 18 instrumental values in alphabetical order. **Terminal values** refer to end states people desire in life, such as leading a prosperous life and a world at peace. **Instrumental values** deal with views on acceptable modes of conduct, such as being honest and ethical, and being ambitious.

According to Rokeach, values are arranged in hierarchical fashion. In other words, an accurate way of assessing someone's values is to ask them to rank the 36 values in order of importance. By comparing these values, people develop a sense of which value can be sacrificed to achieve the other, and the individual priority of each value emerges.

Figure 3.2 Sample Items From Rokeach (1973) Value Survey

Terminal Values	Instrumental Values
A world of beauty	Broad minded
An exciting life	Clean
Family security	Forgiving
Inner harmony	Imaginative
Self respect	Obedient

Where do values come from? Research indicates that they are shaped early in life and show stability over the course of a lifetime. Early family experiences are important influences over the dominant values. People who were raised in families with low socioeconomic status and those who experienced restrictive parenting often display conformity values when they are adults, while those who were raised by parents who were cold toward their children would likely value and desire security (Kasser, Koestner, & Lekes, 2002).

Values of a generation also change and evolve in response to the historical context that the generation grows up in. Research comparing the values of different generations resulted in interesting findings. For example, Generation Xers (those born between the mid-1960s and 1980s) are more individualistic and are interested in working toward organizational goals so long as they coincide with their personal goals. This group, compared to the baby boomers (born between the 1940s and 1960s), is also less likely to see work as central to their life and more likely to desire a quick promotion (Smola & Sutton, 2002).



Figure 3.3.3: Values will affect the choices people make. For example, someone who has a strong stimulation orientation may pursue extreme sports and be drawn to risky business ventures with a high potential for payoff. G B – CCK – ‘Gunks’ – CC BY-ND 2.0.

The values a person holds will affect his or her employment. For example, someone who has an orientation toward strong stimulation may pursue extreme sports and select an occupation that involves fast action and high risk, such as fire fighter, police officer, or emergency medical doctor. Someone who has a drive for achievement may more readily act as an entrepreneur. Moreover, whether individuals will be satisfied at a given job may depend on whether the job provides a way to satisfy their dominant values. Therefore, understanding employees at work requires understanding the value orientations of employees.

Personality

Personality encompasses the relatively stable feelings, thoughts, and behavioral patterns a person has. Our personality differentiates us from other people, and understanding someone’s personality gives us clues about how that person is likely to act and feel in a variety of situations. In order to effectively manage organizational behavior, an understanding of different employees’ personalities is helpful. Having this knowledge is also useful for placing people in jobs and organizations.

If personality is stable, does this mean that it does not change? You probably remember how you have changed and evolved as a result of your own life experiences, attention you received in early childhood, the style of parenting you were exposed to, successes

and failures you had in high school, and other life events. In fact, our personality changes over long periods of time. For example, we tend to become more socially dominant, more conscientious (organized and dependable), and more emotionally stable between the ages of 20 and 40, whereas openness to new experiences may begin to decline during this same time (Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006). In other words, even though we treat personality as relatively stable, changes occur. Moreover, even in childhood, our personality shapes who we are and has lasting consequences for us. For example, studies show that part of our career success and job satisfaction later in life can be explained by our childhood personality (Judge & Higgins, 1999; Staw, Bell, & Clausen, 1986).

Is our behavior in organizations dependent on our personality? To some extent, yes, and to some extent, no. While we will discuss the effects of personality for employee behavior, you must remember that the relationships we describe are modest correlations. For example, having a sociable and outgoing personality may encourage people to seek friends and prefer social situations. This does not mean that their personality will immediately affect their work behavior. At work, we have a job to do and a role to perform. Therefore, our behavior may be more strongly affected by what is expected of us, as opposed to how we want to behave. When people have a lot of freedom at work, their personality will become a stronger influence over their behavior (Barrick & Mount, 1993).

Big Five Personality Traits

How many personality traits are there? How do we even know? In every language, there are many words describing a person's personality. In fact, in the English language, more than 15,000 words describing personality have been identified. When researchers analyzed the terms describing personality characteristics, they realized that there were many words that were pointing to each dimension of personality. When these words were grouped, five dimensions seemed to emerge that explain a lot of the variation in our personalities (Goldberg, 1990). Keep in mind that these five are not necessarily the only traits out there. There are other, specific traits that represent dimensions not captured by the Big Five. Still, understanding the main five traits gives us a good start for describing personality. A summary of the Big Five traits is presented in Figure 3.4 "Big Five Personality Traits".

Figure 3.4 Big Five Personality Traits

Trait	Description
O penness	Being curious, original, intellectual, creative, and open to new ideas.
C onscientiousness	Being organized, systematic, punctual, achievement oriented, and dependable.
E xtraversion	Being outgoing, talkative, sociable, and enjoying social situations.
A greeableness	Being affable, tolerant, sensitive, trusting, kind, and warm.
N euroticism	Being anxious, irritable, temperamental, and moody.

Openness is the degree to which a person is curious, original, intellectual, creative, and open to new ideas. People high in openness seem to thrive in situations that require being flexible and learning new things. They are highly motivated to learn new skills, and they do well in training settings (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Lievens et al., 2003). They also have an advantage when they enter into a new organization. Their open-mindedness leads them to seek a lot of information and feedback about how they are doing and to build relationships, which leads to quicker adjustment to the new job (Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). When supported, they tend to be creative (Baer & Oldham, 2006). Open people are highly adaptable to change, and teams that experience unforeseen changes in their tasks do well if they are populated with people high in openness (LePine, 2003). Compared to people low in openness, they are also more likely to start their own business (Zhao & Seibert, 2006).

Conscientiousness refers to the degree to which a person is organized, systematic, punctual, achievement oriented, and dependable. Conscientiousness is the one personality trait that uniformly predicts how high a person's performance will be, across a variety of occupations and jobs (Barrick & Mount, 1991). In fact, conscientiousness is the trait most desired by recruiters and results in the most success in interviews (Dunn et al., 1995; Tay, Ang, & Van Dyne, 2006). This is not a surprise, because in addition to their

high performance, conscientious people have higher levels of motivation to perform, lower levels of turnover, lower levels of absenteeism, and higher levels of safety performance at work (Judge & Ilies, 2002; Judge, Martocchio, & Thoresen, 1997; Wallace & Chen, 2006; Zimmerman, 2008). One's conscientiousness is related to career success and being satisfied with one's career over time (Judge & Higgins, 1999). Finally, it seems that conscientiousness is a good trait to have for entrepreneurs. Highly conscientious people are more likely to start their own business compared to those who are not conscientious, and their firms have longer survival rates (Certo & Certo, 2005; Zhao & Seibert, 2006).

Extraversion is the degree to which a person is outgoing, talkative, and sociable, and enjoys being in social situations. One of the established findings is that they tend to be effective in jobs involving sales (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Vinchur et al., 1998). Moreover, they tend to be effective as managers and they demonstrate inspirational leadership behaviors (Bauer et al., 2006; Bono & Judge, 2004). Extraverts do well in social situations, and as a result they tend to be effective in job interviews. Part of their success comes from how they prepare for the job interview, as they are likely to use their social network (Caldwell & Burger, 1998; Tay, Ang, & Van Dyne, 2006). Extraverts have an easier time than introverts when adjusting to a new job. They actively seek information and feedback, and build effective relationships, which helps with their adjustment (Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). Interestingly, extraverts are also found to be happier at work, which may be because of the relationships they build with the people around them and their relative ease in adjusting to a new job (Judge et al., 2002). However, they do not necessarily perform well in all jobs, and jobs depriving them of social interaction may be a poor fit. Moreover, they are not necessarily model employees. For example, they tend to have higher levels of absenteeism at work, potentially because they may miss work to hang out with or attend to the needs of their friends (Judge, Martocchio, & Thoresen, 1997).



Figure 3.3.5: Studies show that there is a relationship between being extraverted and effectiveness as a salesperson. [realtor](#) – CC BY 2.0.

Agreeableness is the degree to which a person is nice, tolerant, sensitive, trusting, kind, and warm. In other words, people who are high in agreeableness are likeable people who get along with others. Not surprisingly, agreeable people help others at work consistently, and this helping behavior is not dependent on being in a good mood (Ilies, Scott, & Judge, 2006). They are also less likely to retaliate when other people treat them unfairly (Skarlicki, Folger, & Tesluk, 1999). This may reflect their ability to show empathy and give people the benefit of the doubt. Agreeable people may be a valuable addition to their teams and may be effective leaders because they create a fair environment when they are in leadership positions (Mayer et al., 2007). At the other end of the spectrum, people low in agreeableness are less likely to show these positive behaviors. Moreover, people who are not agreeable are shown to quit their jobs unexpectedly, perhaps in response to a conflict they engage with a boss or a peer (Zimmerman, 2008). If agreeable people are so nice, does this mean that we should only look for agreeable people when hiring? Some jobs may actually be a better fit for someone with a low level of agreeableness. Think about it: When hiring a lawyer, would you prefer a kind and gentle person, or a pit bull? Also, high agreeableness has a downside: Agreeable people are less likely to engage in constructive and change-oriented communication (LePine & Van Dyne, 2001). Disagreeing with the status quo may create conflict and agreeable people will likely avoid creating such conflict, missing an opportunity for constructive change.

How Accurately Can You Describe Your Big Five Personality Factors?

Go to <http://www.outofservice.com/bigfive/> to see how you score on these factors.

Neuroticism refers to the degree to which a person is anxious, irritable, aggressive, temperamental, and moody. These people have a tendency to have emotional adjustment problems and experience stress and depression on a habitual basis. People very high in neuroticism experience a number of problems at work. For example, they are less likely to be someone people go to for advice and friendship (Klein et al., 2004). In other words, they may experience relationship difficulties. They tend to be habitually unhappy in their jobs and report high intentions to leave, but they do not necessarily actually leave their jobs (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002; Zimmerman, 2008). Being high in neuroticism seems to be harmful to one's career, as they have lower levels of career success (measured with income and occupational status achieved in one's career). Finally, if they achieve managerial jobs, they tend to create an unfair climate at work (Mayer et al., 2007).

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

Aside from the Big Five personality traits, perhaps the most well-known and most often used personality assessment is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). Unlike the Big Five, which assesses traits, MBTI measures types. Assessments of the Big Five do not classify people as neurotic or extravert: It is all a matter of degrees. MBTI on the other hand, classifies people as one of 16 types (Carlyn, 1977; Myers, 1962). In MBTI, people are grouped using four dimensions. Based on how a person is classified on these four dimensions, it is possible to talk about 16 unique personality types, such as ESTJ and ISTP.

MBTI was developed in 1943 by a mother–daughter team, Isabel Myers and Katherine Cook Briggs. Its objective at the time was to aid World War II veterans in identifying the occupation that would suit their personalities. Since that time, MBTI has become immensely popular, and according to one estimate, around 2.5 million people take the test annually. The survey is criticized because it relies on types as opposed to traits, but organizations who use the survey find it very useful for training and team-building purposes. More than 80 of the *Fortune* 100 companies used Myers-Briggs tests in some form. One distinguishing characteristic of this test is that it is explicitly designed for learning, not for employee selection purposes. In fact, the Myers & Briggs Foundation has strict guidelines against the use of the test for employee selection. Instead, the test is used to provide mutual understanding within the team and to gain a better understanding of the working styles of team members (Leonard & Straus, 1997; Shuit, 2003).

Figure 3.6 Summary of MBTI Types

Dimension		Explanation
EI	Extraversion: Those who derive their energy from other people and objects.	Introversion: Those who derive their energy from inside.
SN	Sensing: Those who rely on their five senses to perceive the external environment.	Intuition: Those who rely on their intuition and hunches to perceive the external environment.
TF	Thinking: Those who use their logic to arrive at solutions.	Feeling: Those who use their values and ideas about what is right and wrong to arrive at solutions.
JP	Judgment: Those who are organized, systematic, and would like to have clarity and closure.	Perception: Those who are curious, open minded, and prefer to have some ambiguity.

Positive and Negative Affectivity

You may have noticed that behavior is also a function of moods. When people are in a good mood, they may be more cooperative, smile more, and act friendly. When these same people are in a bad mood, they may have a tendency to be picky, irritable, and less tolerant of different opinions. Yet, some people seem to be in a good mood most of the time, and others seem to be in a bad mood most of the time regardless of what is actually going on in their lives. This distinction is manifested by positive and negative affectivity traits. **Positive affective people** experience positive moods more frequently, whereas **negative affective people** experience negative moods with greater frequency. Negative affective people focus on the “glass half empty” and experience more anxiety and nervousness (Watson & Clark, 1984). Positive affective people tend to be happier at work (Ilies & Judge, 2003), and their happiness spreads to the rest of the work environment. As may be expected, this personality trait sets the tone in the work atmosphere. When a team comprises mostly negative affective people, there tend to be fewer instances of helping and cooperation. Teams dominated by positive affective people experience lower levels of absenteeism (George, 1989). When people with a lot of power are also high in positive affectivity, the work environment is affected in a positive manner and can lead to greater levels of cooperation and finding mutually agreeable solutions to problems (Anderson & Thompson, 2004).

OB Toolbox: Help, I work with a negative person!

Employees who have high levels of neuroticism or high levels of negative affectivity may act overly negative at work, criticize others, complain about trivial things, or create an overall negative work environment. Here are some tips for how to work with them effectively.

- *Understand that you are unlikely to change someone else’s personality.* Personality is relatively stable and criticizing someone’s personality will not bring about change. If the behavior is truly disruptive, focus on behavior, not personality.

- *Keep an open mind.* Just because a person is constantly negative does not mean that they are not sometimes right. Listen to the feedback they are giving you.
- *Set a time limit.* If you are dealing with someone who constantly complains about things, you may want to limit these conversations to prevent them from consuming your time at work.
- *You may also empower them to act on the negatives they mention.* The next time an overly negative individual complains about something, ask that person to think of ways to change the situation and get back to you.
- *Ask for specifics.* If someone has a negative tone in general, you may want to ask for specific examples for what the problem is.

Sources: Adapted from ideas in Ferguson, J. (2006, October 31). Expert's view...on managing office moaners. *Personnel Today*, 29; Karcher, C. (2003, September), Working with difficult people. *National Public Accountant*, 39–40; Mudore, C. F. (2001, February/March). Working with difficult people. *Career World*, 29(5), 16–18; How to manage difficult people. (2000, May). *Leadership for the Front Lines*, 3–4.

Self-Monitoring

Self-monitoring refers to the extent to which a person is capable of monitoring his or her actions and appearance in social situations. In other words, people who are social monitors are social chameleons who understand what the situation demands and act accordingly, while low social monitors tend to act the way they feel (Snyder, 1974; Snyder, 1987). High social monitors are sensitive to the types of behaviors the social environment expects from them. Their greater ability to modify their behavior according to the demands of the situation and to manage their impressions effectively is a great advantage for them (Turnley & Bolino, 2001). In general, they tend to be more successful in their careers. They are more likely to get cross-company promotions, and even when they stay with one company, they are more likely to advance (Day & Schleicher; Kilduff & Day, 1994). Social monitors also become the “go to” person in their company and they enjoy central positions in their social networks (Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 2001). They are rated as higher performers, and emerge as leaders (Day et al., 2002). While they are effective in influencing other people and get things done by managing their impressions, this personality trait has some challenges that need to be addressed. First, when evaluating the performance of other employees, they tend to be less accurate. It seems that while trying to manage their impressions, they may avoid giving accurate feedback to their subordinates to avoid confrontations (Jawahar, 2001). This tendency may create problems for them if they are managers. Second, high social monitors tend to experience higher levels of stress, probably caused by behaving in ways that conflict with their true feelings. In situations that demand positive emotions, they may act happy although they are not feeling happy, which puts an emotional burden on them. Finally, high social monitors tend to be less committed to their companies. They may see their jobs as a stepping-stone for greater things, which may prevent them from forming strong attachments and loyalty to their current employer (Day et al., 2002).

Proactive Personality

Proactive personality refers to a person's inclination to fix what is perceived as wrong, change the status quo, and use initiative to solve problems. Instead of waiting to be told what to do, proactive people take action to initiate meaningful change and remove the obstacles they face along the way. In general, having a proactive personality has a number of advantages for these people. For example, they tend to be more successful in their job searches (Brown et al., 2006). They are also more successful over the course of their careers, because they use initiative and acquire greater understanding of the politics within the organization (Seibert, 1999; Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001). Proactive people are valuable assets to their companies because they may have higher levels of performance (Crant, 1995). They adjust to their new jobs quickly because they understand the political environment better and often make friends more quickly (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Thompson, 2005). Proactive people are eager to learn and engage in many developmental activities to improve their skills (Major, Turner, & Fletcher, 2006). Despite all their potential, under some circumstances a proactive personality may be a liability for an individual or an organization. Imagine a person who is proactive but is perceived as being too pushy, trying to change things other people are not willing to let go, or using their initiative to make decisions that do not serve a company's best interests. Research shows that the success of proactive people depends on their understanding of a company's core values, their ability and skills to perform their jobs, and their ability to assess situational demands correctly (Chan, 2006; Erdogan & Bauer, 2005).

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is the degree to which a person has overall positive feelings about his or herself. People with high self-esteem view themselves in a positive light, are confident, and respect themselves. On the other hand, people with low self-esteem experience

high levels of self-doubt and question their self-worth. High self-esteem is related to higher levels of satisfaction with one's job and higher levels of performance on the job (Judge & Bono, 2001). People with low self-esteem are attracted to situations in which they will be relatively invisible, such as large companies (Turban & Keon, 1993). Managing employees with low self-esteem may be challenging at times, because negative feedback given with the intention to improve performance may be viewed as a judgment on their worth as an employee. Therefore, effectively managing employees with relatively low self-esteem requires tact and providing lots of positive feedback when discussing performance incidents.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a belief that one can perform a specific task successfully. Research shows that the belief that we can do something is a good predictor of whether we can actually do it. Self-efficacy is different from other personality traits in that it is job specific. You may have high self-efficacy in being successful academically, but low self-efficacy in relation to your ability to fix your car. At the same time, people have a certain level of generalized self-efficacy and they have the belief that whatever task or hobby they tackle, they are likely to be successful in it.

Research shows that self-efficacy at work is related to job performance (Bauer et al., 2007; Judge et al., 2007; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). This relationship is probably a result of people with high self-efficacy setting higher goals for themselves and being more committed to these goals, whereas people with low self-efficacy tend to procrastinate (Phillips & Gully, 1997; Steel, 2007; Wofford, Goodwin, & Premack, 1992). Academic self-efficacy is a good predictor of your GPA, whether you persist in your studies, or drop out of college (Robbins et al., 2004).

Is there a way of increasing employees' self-efficacy? Hiring people who are capable of performing their tasks and training people to increase their self-efficacy may be effective. Some people may also respond well to verbal encouragement. By showing that you believe they can be successful and effectively playing the role of a cheerleader, you may be able to increase self-efficacy. Giving people opportunities to test their skills so that they can see what they are capable of doing (or empowering them) is also a good way of increasing self-efficacy (Ahearne, Mathieu, & Rapp, 2005).

OB Toolbox: Ways to Build Your Self-Confidence

Having high self-efficacy and self-esteem are boons to your career. People who have an overall positive view of themselves and those who have positive attitudes toward their abilities project an aura of confidence. How do you achieve higher self-confidence?

- *Take a self-inventory.* What are the areas in which you lack confidence? Then consciously tackle these areas. Take part in training programs; seek opportunities to practice these skills. Confront your fears head-on.
- *Set manageable goals.* Success in challenging goals will breed self-confidence, but do not make your goals impossible to reach. If a task seems daunting, break it apart and set mini goals.
- *Find a mentor.* A mentor can point out areas in need of improvement, provide accurate feedback, and point to ways of improving yourself.
- *Don't judge yourself by your failures.* Everyone fails, and the most successful people have more failures in life. Instead of assessing your self-worth by your failures, learn from mistakes and move on.
- *Until you can feel confident, be sure to act confident.* Acting confident will influence how others treat you, which will boost your confidence level. Pay attention to how you talk and behave, and act like someone who has high confidence.
- *Know when to ignore negative advice.* If you receive negative feedback from someone who is usually negative, try to ignore it. Surrounding yourself with naysayers is not good for your self-esteem. This does not mean that you should ignore all negative feedback, but be sure to look at a person's overall attitude before making serious judgments based on that feedback.

Sources: Adapted from information in Beagrie, S. (2006, September 26). How to...build up self confidence. *Personnel Today*, p. 31; Beste, F. J., III. (2007, November–December). Are you an entrepreneur? *In Business*, 29(6), 22; Goldsmith, B. (2006, October). Building self confidence. *PA Times, Education Supplement*, p. 30; Kennett, M. (2006, October). The scale of confidence. *Management Today*, p. 40–45; Parachin, V. M. (March 2003, October). Developing dynamic self-confidence. *Supervision*, 64(3), 13–15.

Locus of Control

Locus of control deals with the degree to which people feel accountable for their own behaviors. Individuals with high [internal locus of control](#) believe that they control their own destiny and what happens to them is their own doing, while those with high [external locus of control](#) feel that things happen to them because of other people, luck, or a powerful being. Internals feel greater control over their own lives and therefore they act in ways that will increase their chances of success. For example, they take the initiative to start mentor-protégé relationships. They are more involved with their jobs. They demonstrate higher levels of motivation and have more positive experiences at work (Ng, Soresen, & Eby, 2006; Reitz & Jewell, 1979; Turban & Dougherty, 1994). Interestingly, internal locus is also related to one's subjective well-being and happiness in life, while being high in external locus is related to a higher rate of depression (Benassi, Sweeney, & Dufour, 1988; DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). The connection between internal locus of control and health is interesting, but perhaps not surprising. In fact, one study showed that having internal locus of control at the age of 10 was related to a number of health outcomes, such as lower obesity and lower blood pressure later in life (Gale, Batty, & Deary, 2008). It is possible that internals take more responsibility for their health and adopt healthier habits, while externals may see less of a connection between how they live and their health. Internals thrive in contexts in which they have the ability to influence their own behavior. Successful entrepreneurs tend to have high levels of internal locus of control (Certo & Certo, 2005).

Understand Your Locus of Control by Taking a Survey at the Following Web Site:

discoveryhealth.queendom.com/...c_short_1.html

Personality Testing in Employee Selection

Personality is a potentially important predictor of work behavior. Matching people to jobs matters, because when people do not fit with their jobs or the company, they are more likely to leave, costing companies as much as a person's annual salary to replace them. In job interviews, companies try to assess a candidate's personality and the potential for a good match, but interviews are only as good as the people conducting them. In fact, interviewers are not particularly good at detecting the best trait that predicts performance: conscientiousness (Barrick, Patton, & Haugland, 2000). One method some companies use to improve this match and detect the people who are potentially good job candidates is personality testing. Companies such as Kronos and Hogan Assessment Systems conduct preemployment personality tests. Companies using them believe that these tests improve the effectiveness of their selection and reduce turnover. For example, Overnight Transportation in Atlanta found that using such tests reduced their on-the-job delinquency by 50%–100% (Emmet, 2004; Gale, 2002).

Yet, are these methods good ways of selecting employees? Experts have not yet reached an agreement on this subject and the topic is highly controversial. Some experts believe, based on data, that personality tests predict performance and other important criteria such as job satisfaction. However, we must understand that how a personality test is used influences its validity. Imagine filling out a personality test in class. You may be more likely to fill it out as honestly as you can. Then, if your instructor correlates your personality scores with your class performance, we could say that the correlation is meaningful. In employee selection, one complicating factor is that people filling out the survey do not have a strong incentive to be honest. In fact, they have a greater incentive to guess what the job requires and answer the questions to match what they think the company is looking for. As a result, the rankings of the candidates who take the test may be affected by their ability to fake. Some experts believe that this is a serious problem (Morgeson et al., 2007; Morgeson et al., 2007). Others point out that even with [faking](#), the tests remain valid—the scores are still related to job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1996; Ones et al., 2007; Ones, Viswesvaran, & Reiss, 1996; Tell & Christiansen, 2007). It is even possible that the ability to fake is related to a personality trait that increases success at work, such as social monitoring. This issue raises potential questions regarding whether personality tests are the most effective way of measuring candidate personality.

Scores are not only distorted because of some candidates faking better than others. Do we even know our own personality? Are we the best person to ask this question? How supervisors, coworkers, and customers see our personality matters more than how we see ourselves. Therefore, using self-report measures of performance may not be the best way of measuring someone's personality (Mount, Barrick, & Strauss, 1994). We all have blind areas. We may also give “aspirational” answers. If you are asked if you are honest, you may think, “Yes, I always have the intention to be honest.” This response says nothing about your actual level of honesty.

There is another problem with using these tests: How good a predictor of performance is personality anyway? Based on research, not a particularly strong one. According to one estimate, personality only explains about 10%–15% of variation in job performance.

Our performance at work depends on so many factors, and personality does not seem to be the key factor for performance. In fact, cognitive ability (your overall mental intelligence) is a much more powerful influence on job performance, and instead of personality tests, cognitive ability tests may do a better job of predicting who will be good performers. Personality is a better predictor of job satisfaction and other attitudes, but screening people out on the assumption that they may be unhappy at work is a challenging argument to make in the context of employee selection.

In any case, if you decide to use these tests for selection, you need to be aware of their limitations. Relying only on personality tests for selection of an employee is a bad idea, but if they are used together with other tests such as tests of cognitive abilities, better decisions may be made. The company should ensure that the test fits the job and actually predicts performance. This process is called validating the test. Before giving the test to applicants, the company could give it to existing employees to find out the traits that are most important for success in the particular company and job. Then, in the selection context, the company can pay particular attention to those traits. The company should also make sure that the test does not discriminate against people on the basis of sex, race, age, disabilities, and other legally protected characteristics. Rent-A-Center experienced legal difficulties when the test they used was found to be a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The test they used for selection, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, was developed to diagnose severe mental illnesses and included items such as “I see things or people around me others do not see.” In effect, the test served the purpose of a clinical evaluation and was discriminating against people with mental illnesses, which is a protected category under ADA (Heller, 2005).

Key Takeaways

Values and personality traits are two dimensions on which people differ. Values are stable life goals. When seeking jobs, employees are more likely to accept a job that provides opportunities for value attainment, and they are more likely to remain in situations that satisfy their values. Personality comprises the stable feelings, thoughts, and behavioral patterns people have. The Big Five personality traits (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) are important traits that seem to be stable and can be generalized to other cultures. Other important traits for work behavior include self-efficacy, self-esteem, social monitoring, proactive personality, positive and negative affectivity, and locus of control. It is important to remember that a person's behavior depends on the match between the person and the situation. While personality is a strong influence on job attitudes, its relation to job performance is weaker. Some companies use personality testing to screen out candidates. This method has certain limitations, and companies using personality tests are advised to validate their tests and use them as a supplement to other techniques that have greater validity.

Exercises

1. Think about the personality traits covered in this section. Can you think of jobs or occupations that seem particularly suited to each trait? Which traits would be universally desirable across all jobs?
2. What are the unique challenges of managing employees who have low self-efficacy and low self-esteem? How would you deal with this situation?
3. What are some methods that companies can use to assess employee personality?
4. Have you ever held a job where your personality did not match the demands of the job? How did you react to this situation? How were your attitudes and behaviors affected?
5. Can you think of any limitations of developing an “ideal employee” profile and looking for employees who fit that profile while hiring?

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