

12.8: Personal Values and Personality at Work

Learning Objectives

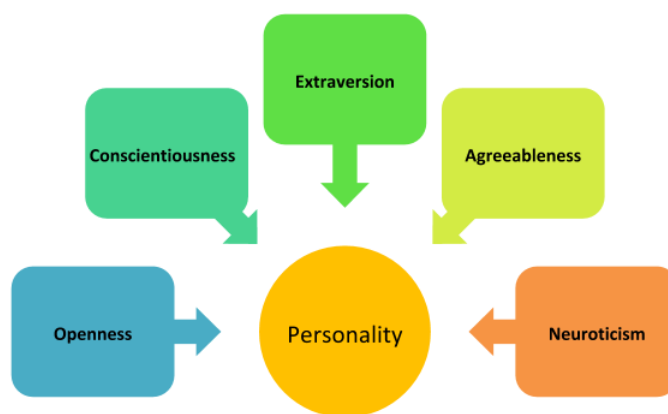
- Describe Goldberg's "Big Five" personality traits.
- Evaluate whether personality tests can predict performance.
- Explain how work expresses individual values.

Personality

Employees are individuals. How does their individuality affect their participation within an organization?

That is a big question, and there are different perspectives on how to answer it. Most answers place at least some emphasis on an individual's personality. Though there are several approaches to defining personality, one commonly accepted formula for this is known as the "Big Five" personality traits, which you can remember using the acronym OCEAN. Personality psychologist Lewis Goldberg popularized the use of the following five traits in describing personality:

- **Openness:** how willing and eager an individual is to try new experiences and consider new ideas
- **Conscientiousness:** how concerned an individual is to be organized, punctual, reliable, and dependable
- **Extraversion:** how eager an individual is to be outgoing and have social interaction
- **Agreeableness:** how desirous an individual is to please others and be friendly, sensitive, and kind
- **Neuroticism:** how negative, moody, and emotionally unstable an individual is



Goldberg's Big Five personality traits

Many studies have been undertaken in an attempt to measure the relationship between personality traits and job performance. Though these studies are far from definitive, each trait seems to show connections with certain tendencies, as shown in the following table.

Personality Traits and Employee Tendencies

Personality Trait	Employee Tendencies
Openness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • excel when flexibility is required • do well in training • adapt well to unexpected changes • can become bored with routine jobs
Conscientiousness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high levels of effort and motivation • low levels of absenteeism and turnover • only personality trait that is consistently linked to career success over time • can become consumed with details and miss the big picture

Extraversion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can be successful managers who motivate employees • often successful in jobs involving sales • can be poor fits for jobs that do not provide sufficient social interaction
Agreeableness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • often display high willingness to help others at work and display good organizational citizenship behaviors • create fair environments when in management positions • work well in team settings • might be hesitant to engage in constructive criticism and encourage change, even when it is needed
Neuroticism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • excitable, often very dynamic • tendency to analyze self and world more realistically and critically^[1] • high tendencies towards job dissatisfaction and intention to leave their jobs • tend to create unfair environments when in leadership positions

Though the “Big Five” list is a commonly used summary of personality traits, other aspects of an individual’s personality are often identified as significant in relation to job performance. These include self-esteem (how positive an individual feels about himself), self-efficacy (how confident an individual is in his own abilities), tendency to be proactive, and the ability to monitor oneself. These are obviously significant features of an individual’s makeup and character, though it is questionable whether they should be classified as true personality traits.

?? Practice Question

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Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) relies on the psychological theories of Carl Jung and works on the basic assumption that individuals fall into fairly distinct classes, or types, of personalities. Those types are created by combining personality categorizations along four distinct axes. Individuals are classified as characterized by either:

- Extraversion (E) or Introversion (I)
- Sensing (S) or Intuition (N)
- Thinking (T) or Feeling (F)
- Judging (J) or Perceiving (P)

A person’s classifications within each of these four categories are then combined to create 16 unique personality types identified by the MBTI. Four-letter acronyms are used to name these personality types, with the letters representing the corresponding trait within each category. For example, a person who exhibits characteristics of extraversion, intuition, thinking, and judging would be classified as ENTJ.

The MBTI has been popular with businesses for decades. Despite many studies, the MBTI lacks scientific evidence showing reliability in identifying personality types and, crucially, in predicting job performance.

Another potential weakness of the tool is that it divides individuals into completely distinct classes for each category, not indicating how strong an individual’s preference is toward that end of the spectrum. What that means is that if someone is just slightly more introverted than extraverted, he or she receives the same classification as someone who is intensely introverted. The distinction between the two individuals is not represented.

Another significant factor in evaluating the MBTI is the question of stability and reliability. Critics point to data that shows that as much as 50 percent of an individual’s MBTI classification will change from test to test with as little as only four or five weeks between tests.^[2] However, proponents question the validity of this argument, pointing to data that shows between 75 and 90 percent

of subjects receive the same classification in at least three of the four categories on repeat tests.^[3] They suggest that this is a very favorable level of consistency when compared to other personality testing tools.

In the end, proponents of the MBTI stress that the usefulness of the tool depends largely on how it is used. They warn against its use for the purposes of hiring or promoting employees—after all, any system can be gamed. Thus, these types of tests are best used in conjunction with other measures.

Instead, the MBTI is intended as a learning tool. It is meant to be taken for the sake of self-analysis with the goal of better understanding oneself and providing insight into how people can best use their personal traits and how they might be able to grow and improve on weaknesses. Administration of the MBTI is strictly controlled by the MBTI Foundation. It requires extensive training before anyone is allowed to administer it. In 2017, training cost \$1,800.^[4] The foundation and the trained administrators have strong incentives to defend it.

? ? Practice Question

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Values

Personality traits are one large aspect of an individual's makeup, but personal values introduce another vital area of interest and importance. Values are described as the stable, enduring goals that one has for life, the things that are counted as most important to the individual.

As with personality traits, many systems have been proposed for analyzing the values of individuals. One widely accepted system was developed by Shalom H. Schwartz and is known as the Schwartz theory of basic values. It identifies 10 such basic values:

- Power
- Achievement
- Hedonism
- Stimulation
- Self-direction
- Universalism
- Benevolence
- Tradition
- Conformity
- Security

Another important value analysis system, the Rokeach Value Survey, analyzes an individual's values within a framework of 18 “terminal values” and 18 “instrumental values.” Terminal values are those end goals that people hope to reach in life, such as having a life that is comfortable and secure or reaching a place of self-respect. Instrumental values are the modes of conduct that are considered appropriate and right, such as honesty, integrity, and even ambition. Simply put, terminal values are the goals we want to reach, and instrumental values are the proper ways to act in order to reach those goals.

Most theories assert that the creation of personal value systems is strongly influenced by early life experiences. Those values tend to remain relatively stable, though they are certainly still influenced by the accumulation of further experiences throughout life.

? ? Practice Question

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When we recognize and consider an individual's personality and values, we can more clearly predict how that person will behave. Though a word of caution should be added to remind us that behavior is influenced by many factors and that every situation is unique, personality and values still remain helpful predictors.

Businesses (and individuals) use these attributes to identify the best fit for employees and potential future employees. Will a certain candidate for a job be a good fit for that position? Do the requirements and expectations of the position match both the person's personality preferences and his or her value system? If not, the likelihood for poor performance or poor attitude increase, as does the likelihood that the employee will eventually leave the company in search of a better fit.

A wise business practice is to try to match individuals with the optimum role in light of their personality and values. If a business identifies an employee to be high in openness, that person should try to find a role that involves new and diverse activities rather than unchanging routine. Likewise, some roles are more suited for introverts than extraverts. Placing individuals in the role where they are most likely to succeed will certainly benefit the business as a result. The following table shows how individuals with certain values might excel in particular roles.

Values and Role Application

Value	Example of Role Application
Universalism	An individual with a strong commitment to universalism might make a good fit for a role as a cultural analyst and advisor for a company expanding its activities into new and foreign markets.
Benevolence	An individual who places much emphasis on benevolence would potentially be effective in a role focused on organizing activities giving back to a company's local community.
Security	An individual who places high value on security might be considered for a role in risk analysis and contingency planning.



Working from a home office is becoming a more common part of business.

Beyond the consideration of job fitting, companies are increasingly aware of the importance of looking for employees whose individual values match those of the organization. This is particularly visible in organizations that are charitable in nature, whose existence revolves around a particular humanitarian cause. However, each business organization has its own particular set of values, and many businesses strongly promote those values. For example, if creative innovation is a large part of a company's focus, it will likely look for employees who also share that focus personally.

People and jobs are complex, so a simple test is not the final answer. Businesses recognize that flexibility in some environmental aspects may make room for more diversity. For example, more and more companies are allowing employees freedom to work flexible hours and in convenient locations. This may cater to an employee's value of family focus, autonomy, or freedom of expression. Employees whose values are met in their work environment are more likely to be satisfied and productive.

1. Susan Krauss Whitbourne, "The Neuroticism Paradox," Psychology Today, October 19, 2010, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201010/the-neuroticism-paradox>. ↵
2. David J. Pittenger, "Measuring the MBTI... And Coming Up Short," Journal of Career Planning & Placement, Fall 1993, <http://www.indiana.edu/~jobtalk/HRMWebsite/hrm/articles/develop/mbti.pdf>. ↵
3. "Reliability and Validity," The Meyers & Briggs Foundation, accessed August 14, 2017, from <http://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/reliability-and-validity.htm?bhcp=1>. ↵
4. "Myers-Briggs Training Schedule & Registration," The Meyers & Briggs Foundation, accessed August 14, 2017, <https://mbtitraininginstitute.myersbriggs.org/mbti-training/schedule/?clear>. ↵

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