

Employees enter the organization with fairly well-established personalities. And their personalities have a strong influence on their behavior at work. In this chapter, we introduce several models for classifying personalities and show the importance of matching personality with jobs to increase employee performance. Then we move to the topic of emotions. While long overlooked in discussions of organizational behavior, we'll show how emotions play a key role in helping to explain and predict employee behavior.

PERSONALITY

Some people are quiet and passive; others are loud and aggressive. When we describe people in terms of characteristics such as quiet, passive, loud, aggressive, ambitious, loyal, or sociable, we're categorizing them in terms of personality traits. An individual's **personality**, therefore, is the combination of psychological traits we use to classify that person.

... providing career guidance. But because MBTI results tend to be unrelated to job performance, it probably should not be used as a selection test for choosing among job candidates.

The Big-Five Model

Whereas the MBTI lacks valid supporting evidence, that can't be said for the five-factor model of personality—more typically called the “Big Five.”⁵

In recent years, an impressive body of research supports that five basic personality dimensions underlie all others. Factors in the **Big-Five Model** are:

Extraversion: This dimension captures one's comfort level with relationships. Extroverts tend to be gregarious, assertive, and sociable. Introverts tend to be reserved, timid, and quiet.

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Agreeableness: This dimension refers to an individual's propensity to defer to others. Highly agreeable people are cooperative, warm, and trusting. People who score low on agreeableness are cold, disagreeable, and antagonistic.

Conscientiousness: This dimension is a measure of reliability. A highly conscientious person is responsible, organized, dependable, and persistent. Those who score low on this dimension are easily distracted, disorganized, and unreliable.

Emotional stability: This dimension taps a person's ability to withstand stress. People with positive emotional stability tend to be calm, self-confident, and secure. Those with highly negative scores tend to be nervous, anxious, depressed, and insecure.

Openness to experience: The final dimension addresses an individual's range of interests and fascination with novelty. Extremely open people are creative, curious, and artistically sensitive. Those at the other end of the openness category are conventional and find comfort in the familiar.

In addition to providing a unifying personality framework, research on the Big Five also has found important relationships between these personality dimensions and job performance.⁶ A broad spectrum of occupations were examined: professionals (including engineers, architects, accountants, attorneys), police, managers, salespeople, and semiskilled and skilled employees. Job performance was defined in terms of performance ratings, proficiency during training programs, and personnel data such as salary level. The results showed that conscientiousness predicted job performance for all occupational groups.

For the other personality dimensions, predictability depended on both the performance criterion and the occupational group. For instance, extroversion predicted performance in managerial and sales positions. This result makes sense because these occupations involve high social interaction. Similarly, openness to experience was found to be important in predicting training proficiency; which, too, seems logical. What wasn't so clear was why emotional stability wasn't related to job performance. Intuitively, it would seem that people who are calm and secure would do better on almost all jobs than people who are anxious and insecure. The researchers suggested that the answer might be that only people who score fairly high on emotional stability retain their jobs. If that is true, then the range among those people studied, all of whom were employed, would tend to be quite small.

Other Key Personality Attributes

Six additional personality attributes have been identified that appear to have more direct relevance for explaining and predicting behavior in organizations. They are locus of control, Machiavellianism, self-esteem, self-monitoring, risk propensity, and Type A personality.

Some people believe they are masters of their own fate. Other people see themselves as pawns of fate, believing that what happens to them is due to luck or chance. **Locus of control** in the first case is internal; these people believe they control their destiny. Those who see their life as being controlled by outsiders are externals. The evidence shows that employees who rate high in externality are less satisfied with their jobs, more alienated from the work setting, and less involved in their jobs than are internals.

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A manager might also expect to find that externals blame a poor performance evaluation on their boss's prejudice, their coworkers, or other events outside their control. Internals would probably explain the same evaluation in terms of their own actions.

The personality characteristic of **Machiavellianism (Mach)** is named after Niccolo Machiavelli, who wrote in the sixteenth century on how to gain and use power. An individual exhibiting strong Machiavellian tendencies is manipulative, maintains emotional distance, and believes that ends can justify means. "If it works, use it" is consistent with a high Mach perspective. Not surprisingly, high Machs are more likely to engage in behavior that is ethically questionable than are low Machs. Do high Machs make good employees? That answer depends on the type of job and whether you consider ethical implications in evaluating performance. In jobs that require bargaining skills (such as labor negotiator) or where there are substantial rewards for winning (as in commissioned sales), high Machs will be productive. But if the ends can't justify the means or if there are no absolute standards of performance, our ability to predict a high Mach's performance will be severely curtailed.

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People differ in the degree to which they like or dislike themselves. This trait is called **self-esteem**. Research finds that self-esteem is directly related to expectations for success. People with high self-esteem, for instance, believe that they possess the ability they need in order to succeed at work. Self-esteem (SE) has also been found to affect susceptibility to outside influences. People with low SE are more susceptible to external influences than are high SEs. Low SEs depend on the receipt of positive evaluations from others; and as a result, they are more likely to seek approval from others and more prone to conform to the beliefs and behaviors of those they respect than are high SEs. In managerial positions, low SEs will tend to be concerned with pleasing others and, therefore, are less likely to take unpopular stands than are high SEs. In terms of job satisfaction, the evidence indicates that high SEs are more satisfied with their jobs than are low SEs.

Did you ever notice that some people are much better than others at adjusting their behavior to changing situations? This is because they score high in **self-monitoring**. High self-monitors are sensitive to external cues and can behave differently in different situations. They're chameleons—able to change to fit the situation and to hide their true selves. On the other hand, low self-monitors are consistent. They display their true dispositions and attitudes in every situation. The evidence suggests that high self-monitors tend to pay closer attention to the behavior of others and are more capable of conforming than low self-monitors. High self-monitors also tend to be better at playing organizational politics because they're sensitive to cues and can put on different "faces" for different audiences.

People differ in their willingness to take chances. Individuals with a high **risk propensity** make more rapid decisions and use less information in making their choices than individuals with low risk propensity. Managers might use this information to align employee risk-taking propensity with specific job demands. For instance, a high risk-taking propensity may lead to more effective performance for a stock trader in a brokerage firm. This type of job demands rapid decision making. On the other hand, this personality characteristic might prove to be a major obstacle to an accountant who performs auditing activities. This latter job might be better filled by someone with a low risk-taking propensity.

Do you know any people who are excessively competitive and always seem to be experiencing a chronic sense of time urgency? If you do, it's a good bet that those people have a **Type A personality**. Type A's are characterized by an incessant struggle to achieve more and more in less and less time. They're impatient, cope poorly with leisure time, and create a life of self-imposed deadlines. In the North American culture, such characteristics tend to be highly prized and positively associated with ambition and the successful acquisition of material goods. In terms of work behavior, Type A's are fast workers. They emphasize quantity over quality. In managerial positions, Type A's demonstrate their competitiveness by working long hours and, not infrequently, making poor decisions because they make them too fast. Type A's are also rarely creative. Because of their concern with quantity and speed, they rely on past experiences when faced with problems. They will not allocate the time that is necessary to develop unique solutions to new problems. It appears that the Type A personality is more likely to lead to high performance in jobs such as sales than it does in senior executive positions.

Personality and National Culture

Do personality frameworks, like the Big-Five model, transfer across cultures? Are dimensions like locus of control and the Type A personality relevant in all cultures? Let's try to answer these questions.

The five personality factors identified in the Big-Five model appear in almost all cross-cultural studies. This includes a wide variety of diverse cultures—such as China, Israel, Germany, Japan, Spain, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, and the United States. Differences tend to surface by the emphasis on dimensions. Chinese, for example, use the category of conscientiousness more often and use the category of agreeableness less often than do Americans. But there is a surprisingly high amount of agreement, especially among individuals from developed countries. As a case in point, a comprehensive review of studies covering people from the 15-nation European Community found that conscientiousness was a valid predictor of performance across jobs and occupational groups.⁷ This is exactly what U.S. studies have found.

There are no common personality types for a given country. You can, for instance, find high and low risk-takers in almost any culture. Yet a country's culture influences the dominant personality characteristics of its population. We can see this by looking at locus of control and the Type A personality.

There is evidence that cultures differ in terms of people's relationship to their environment.⁸ In some cultures, such as those in North America, people believe that they can dominate their environment. People in other societies, such as Middle Eastern countries, believe that life is essentially preordained. Notice the close parallel to internal and external locus of control. We should expect, therefore, a larger proportion of internals in the American and Canadian workforce than in the Saudi Arabian or Iranian workforce.

The prevalence of Type A personalities will be somewhat influenced by the culture in which a person grows up. There are Type A's in every country, but there will be more in capitalistic countries, where achievement and material success are highly valued. For instance, it is estimated that about 50 percent of the North American population is Type A.⁹ This percentage shouldn't be surprising. The United States and

Canada both stress accomplishments as Sweden a proportion

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