

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the psychological differences of individuals and the development of their personality which is formed due to several factors.

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Individual differences are the ways in which people differ from each other. Every member of an organization has its own way of behavior. It is crucial for managers to understand individual differences because they influence the feelings, thoughts, and behavior of employees. According to statistics, there are no two individuals who are the same, they differ from each other in some way or the other. That is why the job of the psychologist is to identify and understand this uniqueness in individuals. Such a similarity or difference between persons shows individual differences. It can be seen in our day-to-day life when we see people around us. For instance, when we think about their physical appearance, we often ask ourselves why some people have dark or fair complexion, why some people are tall and some are short, why some are thin and why some are overweight. When it comes to psychological characteristics, we often come across people who are very talkative or less talkative, some laugh too much while others take much time even to smile, some are very friendly whereas some prefer to be alone. In psychology, these are called individual differences referring to the extent and kind of variations or similarities among people on some of the important psychological aspects such as intelligence, personality, interest, and aptitude.

Moreover, in psychology differences among individuals are seen in their personalities which is partly biologically determined (nature). There are no specific genes that determine personality, but twin research shows that approximately 50% of personality can be explained by hereditary factors.

The other half can be explained by life experience (nurture). Personality can change through experience but not in the short term. As the definition makes clear, it is after all relatively stable traits. For example, managers should therefore not set themselves the goal of changing the personality of employees, but personality can be used to understand behavior. Furthermore, a large amount of research shows that personality is a good predictive and explanatory factor for the thinking, feeling, and behavior of employees in the workplace. Personality, for example, influences work-related attitudes and behavior, such as career satisfaction and coping with work-related stress.

In addition to personality, however, the situation also affects attitudes and behavior. If the situational pressure is strong, personality has less influence on work-related behavior. Employees are not free in varying behavior in such situations and so personality is not decisive. Both personality and situation factors can, therefore, influence behavior. Eventually, cognition, affect, and behavior are determined by the interaction between personality and situation. Effective managers understand this interaction and use it to help employees perform optimally.

According to scientific researches, there are two main the differences in psychological characteristics which are often consistent and form a stable pattern. 'Consistent' implies that people tend to show regularity in their behavior and their patterns of behavior do not change very frequently. This consistency and stability in behavior is considered as a unique character for every person. People develop their unique traits/characteristics and patterns of behavior due to their genetic makeup and the environment in which they are grown up. Individual differences occur due to interaction of genetic and environmental factors.

Genetic factor is that we inherit certain characteristics from our parents through genetic codes. The phenotype or the expressed forms of our characteristics depend on contributions of the socio-cultural environment. This is the reason why we are not exactly like our parents and our parents not exactly like our grandparents. We do share similarities with our parents in respect of many physical attributes like height, color of eyes, shape of nose and etc. Moreover, we inherit certain cognitive, emotional and other characteristics from our parents like intellectual competence, love for sport, creativity etc. However, our own characteristics develop largely by the support from the environment which we inhabit.

The environment is responsible as how we are reared, the kind of atmosphere at house, whether it is liberal or strict, the type of education that we get, what we learn from people, around us,



books, cultural practices, peers, teachers and media All these aspects refer to 'environment' which can develop our potentials. Environment not only provides models and other opportunities but also helps us develop many traits and skills. Biological structures and functions develop also under the influence of environmental factors, including the physical environment (nutrition, temperature, etc.) as well as the social (upbringing, learning, social interactions, etc.). Our inheritance alone cannot decide what we become but our environment also contributes. It is clear that our genetic codes vary. At the same time, surrounding environment also differs from person to person. It sets limits or defines a range by offering different opportunities. That is why the pattern of development of each of us is different from others. It makes us think why we are similar in certain ways and different in others.

According to scientists' researches, there is the Big Five Personality Model which consists of 5 personality traits (extraversion, neuroticism, altruism, conscientiousness, and openness) that in turn consist of specific sub-traits. These personality traits are at the top of the trait hierarchy. People can be placed on a continuum for each trait.

Extraversion is the tendency to experience positive affect and to feel good about the self and the world. Introversion - the other side of the continuum - is associated with less positive feelings and less social interaction. Extraversion is associated with more career satisfaction in the workplace.

Neuroticism means that there is a tendency to experience negative feelings about the self and the world. People with strong neurotic traits experience stress more quickly and are critical of themselves. This can be a vulnerability but also a force. Because of their critical attitude, they are driven to improve their performance and are able to reflect critically during group discussions. So it is not just a negative trait.

Altruism (agreeableness) refers to the property to be able to get along well with others. Low scorers on this personality trait are antagonistic and suspicious. In some cases, this property may be useful, for example in debt collecting where social skills are greatly needed.

Conscientiousness refers to care and perseverance. This is accompanied by orderliness and self-discipline. Conscientiousness is a good predictor for career success. It must be accompanied by the right skills for work and social competence.

Openness is the extent to which an individual is open to new experiences and risks, has broad interests and is original. This is an advantage in companies in which creativity and innovation are desired.



Similarly, individuals of different nations show differences in respect of their personality, character and mental abilities. These are the outcome of their geographical, social and cultural environment. Many studies have shown the existence of differences between Americans and Negroes, Chinese and Japanese, English and Indian individuals. Development of boys and girls exhibits differences due to difference in sex. The physical development of the girl takes place a year or two earlier than the boys. Between the age of 11 and 14, girls are taller and heavier than the boys. After 15, boys start winning the race. Girls are kind, affectionate, sympathetic and tender while the boys are brave, hard, choleric, efficient and competent. Hence, physical, intellectual and emotional development is caused by the growth in age. Many individuals differ because of the differences in intelligence. Individuals who are below the average in intelligence and mental age find much difficulty in learning and the average intelligent persons can learn quickly. And some people are by temperament active and quick, while others are passive and slow, some humorous and others short tempered. Emotional stability of the individual is differently affected by physical, mental and environmental factors. Differences in emotional stability cause individual differences.

Moreover, individual differences are caused by economic condition of the parents and the education of the children. It is not possible for the children of two economic classes to have a similarity and equality. Also, one of the important objectives of modern education is the complete development of the individual. Individuals have different goals, different interests, different emotional problems and different abilities. We cannot afford to ignore these individual differences in imparting education to children. Since school work is planned on group basis it presents a formidable challenge to all teachers.

In conclusion, the psychology of individual differences is mainly the study of group differences. Individuals are classified by age, traits, sex, race, social class and so on, and observes the differences within and between those groups in this study. Physical, mental, social and cultural differences etc. are being studied, under individual differences. Individual differences stand for the variation or deviations among individuals in regard to a single characteristic or number of characteristics. It is stand for those differences which in their totality distinguish one individual from another.



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