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. Seven Major Personality Factors and Traits

Many psychologists believe that the basic structure of human personality is represented by five broad factors, known as the Five Factor Model. Two more key personality factors, risk taking and thrill seeking, and self-monitoring of behavior, had received much attention and are also included here. All seven factors have a substantial impact on interpersonal relations and job performance. Recent evidence has emphasized the contributions of genes, and strips of DNA in particular, in forming personality. The gene biases the mind to reach similar experiences in different ways. Despite the 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 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.

Depending on the job, any one of the preceding personality factors can be important for success. Conscientiousness relates to job performance for many different occupations. A recent meta-analysis concludes that high self-monitoring is associated with higher performance appraisals and more growth into management positions. The Five Factor Model (Big Five Factors) appears to apply to personality structures in different cultures.
B. Psychological Types and Cognitive Styles
Personality also influences a person’s cognitive style, or mental processes used to perceive and make judgments from information. The information presented here is the basis for the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.

1. **Gathering information.** Sensation-type individuals prefer routine and order, and search for precise details when gathering information to solve a problem. Intuitive-type individuals prefer an overall perspective, and dislike routine. They would prefer to look for possibilities rather than work with facts.

2. **Evaluating information.** Styles of information evaluation range from an emphasis on feeling to an emphasis on thinking. Feeling-type individuals have a need to conform and adapt to the wishes of others. Thinking-type individuals rely on reason and intellect to deal with problems, and downplay emotion.

C. The Four Cognitive Styles
The two dimensions of information gathering and evaluation are combined to produce a four-way classification of cognitive (or problem-solving) styles: sensation/thinking, intuitive/thinking, sensation/feeling, and intuitive/feeling. Exhibit 2-2 illustrates how the four cognitive styles relate to occupational choice.

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. MENTAL ABILITY
Mental ability is one of the major sources of individual differences that affects job performance and behavior. 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:** 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.

B. **Practical Intelligence**
To overcome the limited idea that intelligence mostly involves the ability to solve abstract problems, the concept of the *triarchic theory of intelligence* has been proposed. The analytical subtype is the traditional intelligence needed for solving difficult problems. The creative subtype is the type of intelligence required for imagination and combining things in novel ways. The practical subtype is the type of intelligence required for adapting to your environment to suit your needs.

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*.

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 five key factors of emotional intelligence are:

1. *Self-awareness*
2. *Self-regulation*
3. *Motivation* (passion for work and resiliency)
4. *Empathy*
5. *Social 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 personal 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. **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.
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. When the demands made by the organization or a superior clash with the basic values of the individual, the person suffers from person-role conflict.

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.

ANSWERS TO DISCUSSION AND REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why is responding to individual differences considered to be the cornerstone of effective interpersonal relations?

   Responding to individual differences is so important because the opposite is to relate to people mechanically and reflexively. When a person adapts to another person's uniqueness, good rapport is the likely result.

2. How can knowledge of personality factors help a person form better interpersonal relationships on the job?

   A knowledge of key personality factors can help people individualize their approach to other people. As a basic example, if a person appears to be introverted, the person sizing him or her up might use a laid-back approach.

3. A coworker of yours who has a high standing on the personality factor openness has an upcoming birthday. What would be an appropriate gift for the group to buy this person?

   Given that the coworker is intellectually oriented and likes new information, why not purchase a book, magazine subscription, or informative CD for him or her?

4. Suppose a high self-monitoring person is attending a company-sponsored social event and that person dislikes such events. How is he or she likely to behave?

   The high self-monitor will act like he or she is having a good time despite some inner discomfort with the situation. Self-monitoring people are tactful enough to put on a good show.

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

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.

6. What kinds of problems would a sensation-type individual prefer to solve?

The sensation-type individual prefers to tackle problems involving routine and order, such as conducting an inventory audit or preparing uncomplicated tax returns.

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. Why is emotional intelligence so important for success in business?

People who are emotionally intelligent are likely to succeed in business because dealing effectively with people is required for business success. For example, being a successful manager requires the ability to understand the motives of others and influence them.

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

Multiple Intelligences in the Office

This case illustrates how a psychological theory might be appealing to a manager, but its application may not be readily apparent.

1. Is Liz Russo being realistic about applying the concept of eight human intelligences to the office setting?

Russo is a forward thinker, and somewhat idealistic, but she is still realistic. A basic principle of workplace behavior is that people perform better when they are engaged in work that suits their capabilities.

2. Suggest at least two ways in which the theory of eight human intelligences could be applied to improving productivity in the office.

The general idea is to match the person’s best intelligences with his or her job responsibilities. Assume that someone is strong in linguistic intelligence and logical-mathematical intelligence. Early in his or her career the person might do well as a systems analyst. Later on the person would be well suited to managing a technical group. Another example would be that if a person had good spatial intelligence, he or she could help design advertising brochures for the student loan division. An assignment such as this could be part-time, in addition to regular responsibilities.

COMMENTS ABOUT QUIZZES AND EXERCISES

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.

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 sensation type individual will be digging for details about the expense account abuses.

Attitudes Toward Numerical Information

Assessing one’s attitudes toward numerical information will probably help confirm what most people already know about themselves whether or not they like to deal with numerical information.
What Is Your Adversity Quotient?

Students are required to do a little Internet digging here to take a useful quiz. Overcoming adversity is such an essential life skill that it is worthy reflecting about.

Adapting to Different Mental Abilities

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.

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.
EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

Multiple Choice

(b) 1. The term individual differences refers to the fact that
   a. members of the same group behave approximately the same.
   b. members of the same group often behave quite differently.
   c. many individuals have personality problems.
   d. many individuals have intellectual problems.

(c) 2. In its scientific meaning, personality refers basically to an individual's
   a. ability to influence others.
   b. attitudes and perceptions.
   c. enduring behavior patterns.
   d. social skills.

(b) 3. Genes influence personality primarily through
   a. determining the number of personality characteristics a person will have.
   b. biasing how different people react to similar experiences.
   c. allowing the traits in the Five Factor Model to develop.
   d. setting a limit to a person's mental ability.

(d) 4. Genes appear to have the biggest impact on personality traits related to
   a. extraversion and introversion.
   b. values and ethics.
   c. occupational choice.
   d. temperament such as impulsiveness and hostility.

(d) 5. Jill scores low on the personality trait of extraversion. She will most likely
   a. be careless about details.
   b. be agreeable and outgoing.
   c. have unpredictable mood swings.
   d. be quiet and reserved in most social settings.

(a) 6. Jason scores high on the personality trait, openness. He most likely is
   a. well developed intellectually.
   b. very conscientious.
   c. agreeable in many situations.
   d. emotionally stable.

(b) 7. Monica has a high standing on self-monitoring. It is likely that she will often
   a. tell other people what they want to hear.
   b. be particularly conscientious about details.
   c. be tactless about expressing her feelings.
   d. become quite temperamental.

(d) 8. Derek has a high standing on risk taking and thrill seeking. He is likely to
   a. enter more traditional occupations.
   b. be highly well organized.
c. become quite temperamental when he loses a bet.
d. pursue novel, intense, and complex sensations.

(a) 9. A cross-cultural study of the Five-Factor Model concluded that personality structure is
a. universal, much like the structure of the human brain or body.
b. unique to each culture like customs.
c. found mostly in developed countries.
d. found mostly in undeveloped countries.

(d) 10. Studies have shown that the traits in the Five Factor Model are related to job performance
a. mostly in the United States and Canada.
b. more in manufacturing than service jobs.
c. more in service than manufacturing jobs.
d. in the European Community as well as in the United States and Canada.

(a) 11. According to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, style of information gathering range from
a. sensation to intuition.
b. feeling to thinking.
c. objectivity to subjectivity.
d. complete to incomplete.

(b) 12. According to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Marie is a feeling-type individual. She most likely has a need to
a. pursue ideas that others have rejected.
b. conform and adapt to the wishes of others.
c. express her emotions freely and openly.
d. rely on reason and intellect to deal with problems.

(a) 13. When dealing with a person who is open to experience, it would be effective for you to
a. appeal to the person’s intellect.
b. stick closely with the facts at hand.
c. deal with the here and now.
d. talk about traditional approaches to solving problems.

(d) 14. Juan has a strong g factor. He is therefore likely to perform well
a. mostly on tasks requiring numerical reasoning.
b. mostly on tasks requiring good verbal ability.
c. in a variety of physical tasks.
d. in a variety of mental tasks.

(c) 15. The ability to discover principles from facts is called
a. symbolic reasoning.
b. word fluency.
c. inductive reasoning.
d. visualization.
(a) 16. The triarchic theory of intelligence explains that intelligence is exhibited
a. in mental activities of various kinds.
b. mostly in solving mechanical problems.
c. only by people of average intelligence.
d. only after accumulating experience.

(b) 17. According to the triarchic theory of intelligence, a person with good street
smarts would be strong in the ____________ subtype of intelligence.
a. analytical
b. practical
c. creative
d. multiple

(b) 18. According to the triarchic theory of intelligence, a person with good analytical
intelligence would be strong at
a. adapting the environment to fit his or her needs.
b. solving difficult problems.
c. performing tasks requiring imagination.
d. tasks requiring common sense and street smarts.

(c) 19. The theory of multiple intelligences contends that people possess
a. various ways of multiplying their intelligences.
b. two different types of intelligences, or faculties, in different degrees.
c. eight different intelligences, or faculties, in different degrees.
d. an almost unlimited number of intelligences.

(d) 20. An important part of emotional intelligence is
a. adding figures under pressure.
b. having an above-average IQ.
c. keeping emotions out of problem solving.
d. having empathy for others.

(a) 21. A person with a high degree of self-regulation can readily
a. react with appropriate anger to situations.
b. develop passion about the work he or she is performing.
c. respond to the unspoken feelings of others.
d. understand his or her own moods.

(b) 22. Resiliency, or the ability to bounce back from adversity, is part of which
aspect of emotional intelligence?
a. self-awareness
b. motivation
c. empathy
d. social skill

(b) 23. Values are frequently learned through
a. modeling.
b. trial and error.
c. behavior shaping.
d. acquiring reflexes.

(d) 24. Values formed early in life are directly related to
   a. extraversion versus introversion in adult life.
   b. abstract reasoning ability.
   c. the levels of people's intelligence.
   d. the quality of relationships formed by people.

(b) 25. Person-role conflict occurs when an individual
   a. enters into conflict with a coworker.
   b. is asked to perform a task that clashes with his or her values.
   c. is asked to perform a task outside his or her specialty area.
   d. is expected to perform two different activities at the same time.

True/False

(T) 1. Professional basketball players range in height from 5'3" to 7'6" thus
   illustrating the concept of individual differences.

(F) 2. The concept of personality is based on the fact that the behavior of people
   is unpredictable from one situation to another.

(T) 3. A person's character helps control personality traits, such as being able to
   control impulsiveness.

(F) 4. The environment in which a person is raised has an almost negligible influence
   on their personality.

(F) 5. The personality trait of openness relates primarily to how eagerly a person enters
   into relationships with other people.

(T) 6. A high self-monitoring person has a strong tendency to tell other people what they
   want to hear.

(T) 7. The willingness to take risks and pursue thrills on the job is a personality
   trait that has grown in importance in the high technology era.

(F) 8. The five-factor structure of the American personality is found almost exclusively in
   the United States and Germany.

(T) 9. The personality trait most consistently related to job success is conscientiousness.

(F) 10. Research suggests that the combination of conscientiousness with low agreeableness
   has a strong relationship to job success.

(T) 11. Intuitive—type individuals typically gather information by gaining an overall
   perspective.
(F) 12. Thinking-type individuals are hesitant to express their true opinion for fear of hurting the feelings of others.

(T) 13. A person's cognitive style influences the type of work he or she can perform well.

(T) 14. Traditional intelligence consists of both general and specific factors.

(F) 15. A key point of the triarchic theory of intelligence is that the creative and practical subtypes of intelligence are inferior to the analytical type.

(T) 16. A person with high practical intelligence would have good common sense and wisdom.

(T) 17. According to the theory of multiple intelligences, people learn in different ways.

(F) 18. According to the theory of multiple intelligences, a person's intelligence multiplies every five years up through middle age.

(T) 19. Emotional intelligence refers to the idea that how effectively people use their emotions influences their success.

(F) 20. An emotionally intelligent individual keeps tight control over emotions to avoid allowing feelings to show when dealing with people.

(F) 21. The self-awareness aspect of emotional intelligence refers to a passion to work for reasons in addition to money or status.

(T) 22. Having good social skills is part of being emotionally intelligent.

(F) 23. Values and ethics influence people in opposite directions.

(T) 24. Job performance is likely to be higher when a person's job values fit those required on the job.

(F) 25. A person-role conflict occurs when a person has much more intelligence than his or her job requires.