

Theories of Personality

Personality refers to the relatively enduring characteristics that differentiate one person from another and that lead people to act in a consistent and predictable manner, both in different situations and over extended periods of time.

1. Psychoanalytical Theory

Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytical theory of personality has been based primarily on his concept of unconscious nature of personality. It is based on the notion that man is motivated more by unseen forces than by conscious and rational thoughts. It was a clinical finding which led him to conclude that the major force which motivates a human being is his unconscious framework. This framework includes three conflicting psychoanalytic concepts **the Id, the ego and the super ego**.

Their brief description is as follows:

(i) The ID:

ID is the foundation of the unconscious behavior and seeks immediate satisfaction of biological or instinctual needs. These needs include hunger, aggression, sexual pleasure and other biological pleasures. It demands immediate pleasure at whatever cost. As an individual matures he learns to control the Id, but even then it remains a driving force throughout life and an important source of thinking and behavior.

(ii) The EGO:

The Ego is associated with the realities of life. Just as the Id is the unconscious part of human personality. Ego is the conscious and logical part because it is concerned about the realities of external environment. The ego of a person keeps the Id in check whenever it demands immediate pleasure. With its logic and intellect, ego controls the Id so that the pleasures unconsciously demanded by the human beings are granted at an appropriate time and place and in an appropriate manner.

(iii) The Super EGO:

The Super Ego is the higher level force to restrain the Id and is described as the conscious of a person. The super ego represents the norms of the individual, his family and the society and is an ethical constraint on the behavior. The conscious of a person is continuously telling him what is right and what is wrong. A person may not be aware of the working of the super ego, because conscious is developed by the cultural values inculcated in a person by the norms of society.

All these three elements are interrelated. In order to create a normal personality, there must be a proper balance in the relationship among these forces. For example, if the super ego is overdeveloped, a man will become very impractical and irrational. He will feel guilty over trivial matters. Such a person cannot exist in the modern life.

On the other hand, an underdeveloped super ego would let the Id urges loose, which would make a man highly immoral or with very few morals. Then there will not be much difference between the man and the animals. Therefore, there must be a proper balance between these three forces.

2. Erikson Stages

Freud's theory emphasized the sexual and biological factors in developing the personality. But Erikson criticized this heavy emphasis because he was of the view that more importance should be given to social factors. Erikson describes eight developmental stages as we grow from childhood to adulthood and the trauma of resolving certain critical conflicts we face at each of these stages. Till we resolve the particular conflicts of a particular stage, we cannot move to the next stage.

For many of us these issues are never completely resolved and we struggle with them throughout life even beyond the stage of our adolescence. These problems carry over to the work place as well. The eight developmental stages, the problems encountered at each stage and the impact of these stages on organization behavior are discussed below.

Stage 1: Infancy/Trust vs. Mistrust:

During the first year of life, a child has a great need for dependency. Feeling of Trust vs. Mistrust is developed in this state and these feelings depend upon the behavior of the parents. If the parents care for the infant in a very affectionate way, the child learns to trust other people. Lack of love and affection on the part of the parents results in mistrust. This stage makes a serious impact on a child that influences his behavior throughout his life.

In the early stages of organizational life when a person knows very little about the job and is dependent on others for guidance, he develops the feelings of trust or mistrust towards others in the organization depending upon how the other people respond to his needs and help him to find his place in the system.

Stage 2: Early Childhood Autonomy Vs. Shame and Doubt:

In the second and third years of life a child begins to assert independence and experiences a great need to operate on his own. If the child is allowed to control those aspects of life that the child is

capable of controlling, a sense of autonomy will develop. If he encounters constant disapproval by parents or elders a sense of self doubt and shame is likely to develop.

Likewise, in the organization life, a person wants to operate independently after the initial training. If he is allowed to do so, a sense of autonomy will develop. But if he is criticized and disapproved by the others for making mistakes, he will tend to have self doubts about his competency and experience a sense of shame for not doing the things right.

Stage 3: Play Age/Initiative Vs. Guilt:

When a child is four and five years old he tries to discover how much he can do. If the parents and other members of the family encourage the child to experiment and to achieve reasonable goals, he will develop a sense of initiative. But if on the other hand, he is blocked at every stage and made to feel incapable, he will develop a sense of guilt and lack of self confidence. In the same way organizational members try to use their creative and acquired talents as they settle down in their jobs. But if things go wrong, other people make him feel guilty that he has wasted the resources of the organization. But if the things go according to his planning, he will develop a sense of initiative.

Stage 4: School Age/Industry Vs. Inferiority:

From ages 6 to 12, as a child grows up but before reaching the stage of puberty, he learns many new skills and develops social abilities. If the child experiences real progress at a rate compatible with his abilities he or she will develop a sense of industry. If the situation is the reverse of it, he will develop a sense of inferiority. Likewise, in our organizational life, we try to work hard to make a position for ourselves. If we are not successful in our efforts, we will develop a sense of inferiority and low esteem otherwise we will develop a sense of industry.

Stage 5: Adolescence/Identity Vs Role Diffusion:

As a child reaches puberty and almost to the end of his adolescence (teenage years) he experiences conflict due to the socially imposed requirements that he should become an independent and effective adult. In this period he has to gain a sense of identity rather than to become confused about who he is. The autonomy, initiative and enterprise developed in the earlier stages are very important in helping the teenager to successfully resolve this crisis and prepare for adulthood.

In the organizational setup also every employee has to make contributions to the institution and establish himself as a high performing member. If he does it, he is identified in the eyes of the management but if fails to establish himself he becomes just another employee in the eyes of the management whose identity is diffused.

Stage 6: Early Adulthood/Intimacy Vs. Isolation:

Adult during the twenties, need is felt to develop intimate relations with others. The sense of identity developed during the teenage years allows the young adult to begin developing deep and lasting relationships. However, if he feels it awkward to develop such relationships, he will feel isolated. In the organizational life also, people may desire to develop close contracts with others who are significant and important in the system. Those who can do it, have a sense of intimacy. For those others who find it difficult to do it, experience a sense of isolation in the system.

Stage 7: Adulthood/Generatively Vs. Stagnation:

This is the stage of middle adulthood. If a person becomes absorbed in his own career advancement and maintenance and he does not care for the development and growth of his children, which is a socially imposed demand on him, he will have a feeling of stagnation or self absorption in his life. On the other hand, a person who sees the world as bigger than himself and fulfills his social obligations will be generative and have a feeling of generatively.

Likewise in the organization, as a person reaches his mid career, there is an expectation and need to mentor others in the system and help them to develop and grow in the organization. If a person does not do this effectively, he senses a feeling of stagnation in the system.

Stage 8: Mature Adulthood/Ego Integrity Vs Despair:

In this stage, a person is developed as a highly mature person. He has gained a sense of wisdom and perspective that can really guide the younger generations. This stage lasts from middle adulthood to death. In this stage conflict is experienced by individuals as their social and biological roles get diminished due to the ageing process and they experience a sense of uselessness. If they resolve the issue, they can experience happiness by looking at their consolidated lifelong achievement. If they fail to do so, they will have a sense of despair.

Assessment Criticism:

Likewise in the organizational life, a person can have a feeling of ego integrity after retirement by looking at his stock of accomplishments or he can leave the organization with a sense of purposelessness and despair. All the stages are inter-linked. If one conflict is not resolved in one stage, it will be carried forward to the subsequent developmental stage. Managers can play a very important role in identifying the unresolved conflicts and try to help the employees in dealing with them.

3. Self Theory

If we stop thinking about other people's behavior, we become conscious of ourselves like our feelings and our attitudes and perhaps of feeling or responsibility of our actions in relation to oneself and others. This phenomenon has led to "Self Theory".

Self, according to Clifford T. Morgan, has two distinct sets of meanings:

- (i) People's attitude about themselves, their traits and abilities, the impact they could make on others, their plus and minus points. This includes what may be stated as self concept or self image. Self concept or self image relates definitely to one's attitudes, feelings, perceptions and evaluation of self.
- (ii) The other relates to psychological processes through which an individual thinks, remembers, perceives, manages and plans.

In the light of the above description, self has been described in two ways:

- (i) Self as object and
- (ii) Self as a process.

The most important contribution in self theory comes from Carl Rogers. He has defined the self or self concept as an organized, consistent, conceptual gestalt composed of perceptions of 'I' or 'Me'. The relationship of 'I' or 'Me' with others and to various aspects of life has been analyzed by Rogers.

There are four factors of self concept:

(i) Self Image:

Self image is the way one sees oneself. Every person has certain beliefs about who or what he is, taken together, these beliefs are a person's self image or identity.

(ii) Ideal Self:

The ideal self denotes the way one would like to be. Thus, self image is the reality whereas ideal self is the perception. There may be a gap between these two images because self image indicates the reality of a person as perceived by him and ideal self indicates the ideal position as perceived by him.

(iii) Looking Glass Self:

Looking glass self is the perception of other's perception. It is the way one thinks people perceive about him and the way people actually see him.

(iv) Real Self:

The real self is what one really is. The first three aspects of self concept are the perceptions and they may be same or different, as the real self.

In analyzing organizational behavior, self concept plays a very significant role. A person perceives a situation depending upon his self concept which has a direct influence on his behavior. This implies that a person with a different self concept needs different types of managerial practices.

(1) The psychological, and

(2) The sociological.

Although there is also a third approach, the biological approach, but the biological definition of personality which comprehends only the bio-physical characteristics of the individual organism is inadequate. The psychological approach considers personality as a certain style peculiar to the individual. This style is determined by the characteristic organization of mental trends, complexes, emotions and sentiments.

The psychological approach enables us to understand the phenomena of personality disorganization and the role of wishes, of mental conflict, and of repression and sublimation in the growth of personality. The sociological approach considers personality in terms of the status of the individual in the group, in terms of his own conception of his role in the group of which he is a member. What others think of us plays a large part in the formation of our personality.

Thus personality is the sum of the ideas, attitudes and values of a person which determine his role in society and form an integral part of his character. Personality is acquired by the individual as a result of his participation in group life. As a member of the group he learns certain behavior systems and symbolic skills which determine his ideas, attitudes and social values.

Applications of Personality