EXPLAINING PERSONALITY: THE BIG FIVE

"INVENTORIES THAT MEASURE THE BIG FIVE ARE A GREAT FIRST STEP IN UNDERSTANDING PERSONALITY DIFFERENCES IN PEOPLE AT WORK."

~ ART MARKMAN, PHD PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY AT UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS
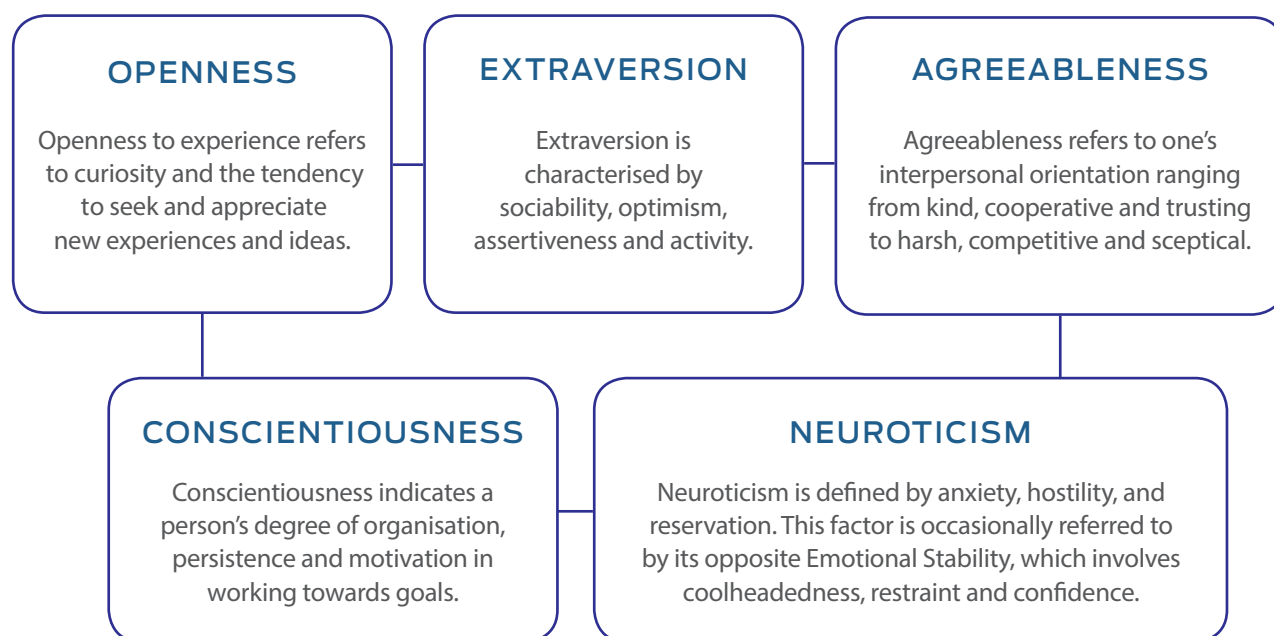
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WHAT ARE PERSONALITY ASSESSMENTS

Personality assessments measure an individual's unique combination of personal characteristics, traits and qualities. In an occupational setting, personality assessments are typically used to make predictions about future work performance, and to assess leadership and management potential.

- Personality assessments are an essential tool for talent management as they have been well researched over decades, and there is strong scientific basis to support the use of personality assessments in the workplace.

- Personality factors have been linked to job performance, academic results, leadership potential and career choice.

- Personality measures add value in predicting outcomes above and beyond cognitive ability measures alone.

- Combinations of both personality assessments and cognitive tests produce superior predictions of job performance compared to utilising only one measure.

THE FIVE FACTOR MODEL

The Five Factor Model of personality is a well researched and widely accepted comprehensive framework that represents the dominant model of personality in current scientific literature. It consists of five broad personality factors sometimes referred to as "the Big Five" or "OCEAN", and these five factors have been determined to encompass all facets of personality.

OPENNESS

Openness to experience refers to curiosity and the tendency to seek and appreciate new experiences and ideas.

EXTRAVERSION

Extraversion is characterised by sociability, optimism, assertiveness and activity.

AGREEABLENESS

Agreeableness refers to one's interpersonal orientation ranging from kind, cooperative and trusting to harsh, competitive and sceptical.

CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

Conscientiousness indicates a person's degree of organisation, persistence and motivation in working towards goals.

NEUROTICISM

Neuroticism is defined by anxiety, hostility, and reservation. This factor is occasionally referred to by its opposite Emotional Stability, which involves coolheadedness, restraint and confidence.

The Big Five personality factors have been found to be consistent across different societies, cultures and age groups. Personality assessments based on the Five Factor Model are favoured due to the extensive amount of scientific research supporting the framework. Key findings regarding the relationship between the Big Five, Job Performance, Leadership Ability and Career Choice are described below.

PERSONALITY & JOB PERFORMANCE

Conscientiousness
is the most powerful overall predictor of job performance among the Big Five.

The other **personality factors** are strongly associated with performance in specific types of jobs, and should not be overlooked.

OVERALL JOB PERFORMANCE

Conscientiousness has been found to be a consistent predictor of job performance across all criteria and all occupations, and has the strongest overall relationship with job performance out of all the Big Five Factors. This is because traits associated with high Conscientiousness such as being hardworking, achievement-oriented, responsible, persistent, and organised are key contributors to success in most jobs.

SPECIFIC JOBS

Although Conscientiousness is the most powerful predictor of overall job performance, other personality factors are strongly associated with performance in specific types of jobs.

In jobs requiring a high amount of interpersonal interaction such as in sales or management, Agreeableness and Extraversion stand out as key predictors of performance. For Agreeableness, being friendly and cooperative helps improve relationships with customers, co-workers and business partners. For Extraversion, being sociable and assertive is important in enhancing sales performance and making strong connections with people.

In addition, for skilled or semi-skilled work, having low Neuroticism (or high Emotional Stability) influences job performance. Being calm and secure, and not hostile, temperamental or prone to stress, has a positive impact on performance in a range of job roles and positions.

TRAINING OUTCOMES

The personality factors of Openness to experience and Extraversion have been linked to increased training proficiency across all occupations.

Openness to experience is associated with being more broad-minded and having more positive attitudes towards learning experiences. People high in Openness are more likely to take personal responsibility for the learning process and voluntarily engage in learning experiences, such as by contributing to discussions and engaging in self-assessment.

Individuals high in Extraversion are more likely to be active during training sessions, asking questions and taking control of learning, leading to better training outcomes.

With this in mind, organisations might want to consider having individuals who are high on both Openness to experience and Extraversion get more involved in planning and leading training initiatives.

PERSONALITY & LEADERSHIP ABILITY

Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Openness and Neuroticism are all key personality factors **linked to leadership.**

LEADERSHIP PERFORMANCE

The characteristics of Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, Extraversion and Openness have been found to be consistently linked to leadership performance.

Conscientiousness traits such as achievement orientation, dependability, as well as organisation are highly conducive to an individual taking up and excelling in leadership roles.

As Extraverts are optimistic, ambitious, and influential, they are likely to generate confidence and enthusiasm among followers, making them highly effective leaders.

Individuals high on Neuroticism tend to experience emotional distressand have low self-esteem, which makes it difficult for them to lead others. They are therefore less likely to attempt to lead and involve themselves in their subordinates' efforts, avoiding leadership responsibilities.

Research suggests that facets of Openness to experience such as originality and creativity have a strong relationship with leadership. Openness to new ideas has also been found to be beneficial for leaders working with multinational teams. Openness makes leaders more accepting of helpful alternative perspectives and local know-how that could translate into better performance and profits.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Transformational Leadership refers to leaders who strive to impart purpose and meaning into work, inspiring their followers to embrace and fight for change and improvement. Transformational Leadership has been linked to many positive workplace outcomes such as improved performance and job satisfaction.

Extraverts tend to seek out and enjoy change, and may thus be particularly suited to transformational leadership.

Agreeableness has a mixed relationship with transformational leadership. In a stable work environment, Agreeableness can inspire followers to perform above expectations through acting dutifully and following the rules. However, in a work environment that is dynamic and changing, highly agreeable leaders may be too compliant and may prefer to stick to prevailing practices rather than make use of new opportunities, leading to poorer leadership outcomes.

Therefore, certain personality factors may be more helpful for leaders in some work environments over others. It is important for organisations to take these into account when using personality instruments to evaluate potential leaders.

PERSONALITY CAREER CHOICE

Personality assessments can **help determine** which jobs a candidate may find more interesting and suitable given their personality.

Studies have found that high scores on certain Big Five personality factors may indicate different job interests based on Holland's RIASEC occupational types, a well-established personality theory about vocational choice. The RIASEC theory classifies all occupations according to six different types - Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional, and posits that a person's job preference depends on how well their personality "matches" these types.

The relationship between four of the six RIASEC types and their corresponding Big Five personality factor is described below:

ARTISTIC JOBS

Artistic jobs involve creativity and innovation, and generally exclude highly structured or repetitive activities. Examples of such jobs include performers, architects and reporters. People high in Openness have a strong curiosity and appreciation for new ideas, which make them prefer jobs involving creativity and innovation.

SOCIAL JOBS

Social jobs are occupations that involve teaching and helping others. This may include positions in human resources, counselling or medicine. People who are high in Agreeableness tend to be more cooperative and generous, which may draw them towards more service-oriented roles.

ENTERPRISING JOBS

Enterprising jobs involve persuading others, improving reputation and accumulating status and power. These may include sales managers, politicians and travel guides. Extraverted individuals tend to be more persuasive, energetic and sociable, meaning they are more likely to enjoy jobs where they can influence and interact with others.

CONVENTIONAL JOBS

Conventional jobs are occupations that are more structured, orderly and regulated. This may include positions in administration, finance or engineering. People who are high in Conscientiousness tend to be more organised and self-disciplined, which may lead to a preference for jobs that are more systematic and methodical.

CONCLUSION

In summary, personality assessments based on the Big Five personality framework can provide useful insights to guide decisions involving talent recruitment, people development as well as leadership selection. There is substantial scientific research to support the Five Factor Model as a powerful tool for predicting outcomes in domains such as job performance, leadership effectiveness and career choice.

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