Human Relations: Interpersonal, Job-Oriented Skills

CHAPTER 2
UNDERSTANDING INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

Understanding individual differences is a key contributor to developing effective interpersonal relationships in organizations. Individual differences are the variations in how people respond to the same situation based on personal characteristics.

CHAPTER OUTLINE AND LECTURE NOTES

This chapter outlines several major sources of individual differences on the job.

1. PERSONALITY

Individual differences in personality greatly influence interpersonal relationships. Personality refers to those persistent and enduring behaviour patterns that tend to be expressed in a wide variety of situations.

A. Eight Major Personality Factors and Traits

Many psychologists believe that the basic structure of the human personality is represented by five broad factors, described below. Three other factors, self-monitoring of behaviour, risk-taking and thrill-seeking, and optimism have also received much attention. All eight factors have a substantial impact on interpersonal relations and job performance. Recent evidence has emphasized the contribution of genes, and strips of DNA in particular, in forming personality. The genes bias the mind to react to similar experiences in different ways. Environment heavily influences how genes will express themselves. Despite the genetic influence, most people can improve their standing on key personality factors.

1. *Extraversion*. Deals with traits associated with being outgoing, such as gregarious and assertive.

2. *Emotional stability* (or *Neuroticism*). Deals with mental health factors ranging from being calm and secure to being depressed or unstable.

3. *Agreeableness*. Deals with being friendly and cooperative.

4. *Conscientiousness*. Generally implies being dependable.

5. *Openness to experience*. Relates to having a well-developed intellect.

6. *Self-monitoring of behaviour*. Relates to observing and controlling how we appear to others by how we act and what we say.

7. *Risk-taking and thrill-seeking.* Refers to an individual's propensity toward taking risks and pursuing thrills in terms of motivation and need.

8. *Optimism*. Refers to a tendency to experience positive emotional states and typically to believe in positive outcomes of most activities.

Depending on the job, any one of the preceding personality factors can be important for success. An extensive study shows the **Big Five Factors** (factors 1 to 5 on the preceding list) appear to apply to personality structure in different cultures. Personality structure is universal. A combination of personality factors will sometimes be more closely associated with job success than one factor alone. The specific trait of dependability may be the most important contributor to job performance.

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2. COGNITIVE STYLES AND PERSONALITY TYPES

A. Cognitive Styles

Personality also influences a person's cognitive style, which is the mental processes used to perceive and make judgments from information. Some people are more analytic and systematic, while others are more intuitive in solving problems. The information presented in this section is the basis for the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, a tool developed from Carl Jung's analysis of how we gather and evaluate information.

1. *Introverted versus Extroverted*. Based upon whether one is oriented toward the inner world or to the outer world.

2. *Thinking versus Feeling*. Based on whether one bases decisions on logic or on feeling.

3. *Sensing versus Intuiting*. The former focuses on details and the latter on broad issues.

4. *Judging versus Perceiving*. Judging types seek resolution to issues while Perceiving types are more flexible and open to new information.

Figure 2-2 summarizes the highlights of each personality type with some comments about occupational and environmental preferences

B. Guidelines for Dealing with Different Personality Types

To match one's approach to dealing with a given personality type, one must first arrive at an approximate diagnosis of the individual's personality. Fourteen suggestions are presented in the text. Four of these suggestions are as follows: (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; (4) when relating to a conscientious person, grant freedom and do not nag.

3. COGNITIVE ABILITY

Cognitive ability (also referred to as mental ability or intelligence) is one of the major sources of individual differences that affect job performance and behaviour. Intelligence is the capacity to acquire and apply knowledge, including solving problems. 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 acuity*: the ability to handle numbers.

4. *Spatial perception*: 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 limitations of the traditional idea that intelligence mostly involves the ability to solve abstract problems, the concept of the **triarchic theory of intelligence** has been proposed, consisting of three subtypes: *analytical*, *creative*, and *practical*. 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. Figure 2-3 illustrates this theory.

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. People are weak or strong in various areas of intelligence.

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 own feelings, having empathy for others, and regulating one's emotions to one's own benefit. The four key factors of emotional intelligence are

1. *Self-awareness* – the ability to understand your own moods, emotions, and needs as well as their impact on others.

2. *Self-management* – the ability to regulate one's own emotions and consistently act with integrity

3. *Social awareness* – includes having empathy for others, having intuition for work problems as well as having the ability to interpret nonverbal communication.

4. *Relationship management* - includes being able to communicate clearly, disarm conflicts, and build strong personal bonds

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

It is possible to develop intuitively a sense for the mental quickness of people and the types of mental tasks they perform best. Several suggestions are given for relating differently to people of different

types and levels of intelligence. For example, when working with a person, with a high cognitive skill, you may present ideas in more technical depth than you would when working with a person of lower cognitive skill in that area.

4.   VALUES AS A SOURCE OF INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

A value refers to the importance a person attaches to something, and values are another source of individual differences. Values are closely tied in with **ethics**, the moral choices a person makes. Value differences often stem from age or generational differences. Table 2-1 lists some values commonly held by specific generations.

A.   Classification of Values

An almost automatic response to classifying values is that people have either good or bad values, with bad values typically meaning values that are not aligned with yours. Table 2-1 shows some links between values and goals.

B.   Generational Differences in Values

Value differences often stem from age or generational differences. Table 2-2 summarizes these stereotypes, but please keep in mind that these are only generalizations and have numerous exceptions.

C.   How Values are Learned

People acquire values in the process of growing up, and many values are learned by the age of four. Family has always been a major influence in shaping values, attitudes, and beliefs; however, media (television and the Internet in particular) now influence children's values more than ever before.

D.   Clarifying Your Values

Value-clarification exercises ask you to compare the relative importance you attach to different objects and activities. Self-Assessment Quiz 2-2 provides insight into value clarification.

E.   The Mesh between Individual and Job Values

When one's individual values are "meshed" or in congruence with those required by the job, job performance is likely to be higher. A person suffers *person-role conflict* when personal values clash with demands made by the organization.

F.   Guidelines for Using Values to Improve 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 CASE QUESTIONS

Interpersonal Relations Case 2-1: Capitalizing on Hidden Talent at Westmont Centre

1. What do you recommend that the board should do in terms of approving Gagnon's plan for hiring about five people with intellectual deficiencies to work at Westmont?

    a) Individual answers will vary, depending in part on the students' personal histories and attitudes towards individuals with intellectual deficiencies. This can be seen as an example of what the Board would have debated in its meeting.

2. Assuming that the workers with mild intellectual deficiencies are hired, what recommendations can you make to the supervisors for their training and supervision?

    a) Direct students to the "Guidelines for Relating to People of Different Levels and Types of Intelligences" if they are having difficulties making recommendations. Sample recommendations may include having step-by-step pictures at the different work stations; expecting that it will take more than one demonstration for the new employee to understand his/her task; using basic vocabulary without being patronizing; ask employees to repeat the instructions, etc.

2) Gagnon mentioned a few potential jobs at the Centre for workers with light intellectual deficiencies. What other tasks would you recommend?

    a) Again, individual answers will vary. Tasks should be designed to meet, not frustrate, the individuals intellectual ability.

Interpersonal Relations Case 2-2: "We've Got to Make Our Numbers"

1) What is the nature of the conflict Bruce Malone is facing?

    a) Malone is facing "person-role conflict" (conflict that occurs when personal values clash with demands made by the organization.)

2) What type of values is Lucille demonstrating?

    a) Students may wish to refer to Table 2-1 (A Classification of Values and Associated Goals) to determine what type of values are being demonstrated by both Bruce and Lucille. (Student responses may include: power, achievement, or security.)

3) What do you recommend Bruce should have done to work his way out of the problem he was facing?

    Direct students to the "Guidelines for Using Values to Improve Interpersonal Relations" if they are having difficulty answering this question

4) Is Bruce too naïve for a career in business?

    a) Individual answers will vary and may be based on students' own values and goals.

ANSWERS TO DISCUSSION AND REVIEW QUESTIONS

Multiple Choice

1. The personality factor of agreeableness is associated with the traits of (b) courteous and cooperative.

2. Individuals who score high in self-monitoring are more likely to (b) adjust their behaviour to gain positive reactions from others.

3. The theory of multiple intelligences proposes that (c) people learn in different ways and thus have different strengths.

4. Which of the following is not a component of emotional intelligence? Answer: (a) introversion

5. Person-role conflict occurs when (a) personal values conflict with the values and demands of an organization.

Short Answer

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

    a. 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.

7. How can knowledge of major personality factors help a person form better interpersonal relations on the job?

    a. Knowledge of key personality factors can help people individualize their approaches 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.

8. 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?

    a. 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.

9. How can you use information about a person's values to help you relate more effectively to him or her?

    a. 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.

10. When you examined your results from the Golden Personality Type Profiler, were you

surprised by the results? In what ways was the assessment very typical of you? If you disagree with the results, how are you different from the profile and assessment?

    a.   Individual answers will vary

COMMENTS ABOUT QUIZZES AND EXERCISES

The Risk-Taking Scale (Self-Assessment Quiz 2-1)

The risk-taking scale helps students to consider a dimension of their personality that may help them to define their comfort zone for risk-taking. Students should remember to answer the questions based on what they believe about themselves right now, not how they wish they could be.

Clarifying Your Values (Self-Assessment Quiz 2-2)

This self-assessment quiz provides an excellent opportunity for both introspection and class discussion. It contributes an immediate example of individual value differences.

Personality Role Plays (Skill Building Exercise 2-1)

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 how to behave when one has high standing on a particular personality trait such as openness to experience. For example, the sensation-type individual will be digging for details about the expense account abuses.

Adapting to People of Different Mental Abilities (Skill-Building Exercise 2-2)
Helping an Intellectually Challenged Worker Get Started (Skill-Building Exercise 2-3)

A potential contribution of these two exercises is that they may sensitize students to the importance of reacting to one of the major dimensions of behaviour—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 (Skill-Building Exercise 2-4)

A high level of diplomacy is required to deal with the person-role conflict of being asked to make unfavourable 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.

Understanding Individual Differences

Human Relations
Interpersonal, Job-Oriented Skills

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Chapter 2

Individual Differences

- Variations in how people respond to the same situation based on personal characteristics

- Exert a profound effect on job performance and behaviour.

Personality

- Refers to those persistent and enduring behaviour patterns that tend to be expressed in a wide variety of situations.

- Your walk, talk, appearance, speech, inner values and conflicts all contribute to your personality.

Eight Major Personality Factors Related to Interpersonal Skills

- Figure 2-1

Eight Major Personality Factors and Traits

1. *Extraversion* – traits include being social, gregarious, assertive, talkative, and active.

2. *Emotional stability or Neuroticism* – traits include being calm, relaxed, and secure.

3. *Agreeableness* – traits include being flexible, trusting, cooperative, and tolerant.

Eight Major Personality Factors and Traits (continued)

4. *Conscientiousness* – traits include being careful, responsible, organized, and honest.

5. *Openness to experience* – traits include being imaginative, curious, broad-minded, intelligent, and artistically sensitive.

Eight Major Personality Factors and Traits (continued)

6. *Self-monitoring of behaviour* – the process of observing and controlling how we are perceived by others.

7. *Risk-taking and thrill seeking* – sensation seekers who pursue novel, intense and complex sensations.

8. *Optimism* – a tendency to experience positive emotional states and to expect positive outcomes.

Cognitive Styles

- Modes of problem solving are referred to as cognitive styles. Your personality traits strongly influence how you approach problems.

Cognitive Styles Classification Methods

- According to Carl Jung, how people gather and evaluate information determines their cognitive style. He reasoned that there are four dimensions of psychological functioning.

- Myers-Briggs Type Indicator – most well-known classification method

- Golden Personality Type Profiler

The Four Cognitive Styles

1. Extraversion vs. introversion (energy flow)
2. Sensation vs. intuition (information gathering)
3. Thinking vs. feeling (decision making)
4. Judging vs. perceiving (lifestyle orientation)

Cognitive Ability

- Also known as mental ability or intelligence
- The capacity to acquire and apply knowledge, including solving problems.
- Understanding the nature of intelligence contributes to effective interpersonal relations in organizations.

Traditional Intelligence

- Evidence suggests that intelligence consists of a **g** (general) factor and **s** (specific) factors that contribute to problem-solving ability.

Practical Intelligence

Triarchic Theory of Intelligence

- Intelligence is composed of three subtypes:
    1. Analytical – problem-solving
    2. Creative – imagination; new combinations
    3. Practical – adapting environment to suit your needs

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Theory of Multiple Intelligences

Individuals possess the following eight intelligences (faculties) in varying degrees:

1. Linguistic
2. Logical-mathematical
3. Musical
4. Spatial

5. Bodily/kinesthetic
6. Intrapersonal
7. Interpersonal
8. Naturalist

Emotional Intelligence

- Refers to qualities such as understanding one's own feelings, having empathy for others, and regulating one's emotions to one's own benefit.

- Four key factors: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management

Values
As A Source of Individual Differences

- A value refers to the importance a person attaches to something.

- Values are tied to the enduring belief that some modes of conduct are better than others.

Values As A Source of Individual Differences (continued)

- Values are closely related to ethics.
- Ethics are the moral choices a person makes.
- A person's values influence which kinds of behaviours he or she believes are ethical.

How Values Are Learned

- One important way we acquire values is through observing others or modelling.

- Models can be parents, teachers, friends, siblings, and even public figures.

- Increased influence by television and Internet

The Mesh Between Individual and Job Values

- Under the best circumstances, the values of employees mesh with those required by the job. When this doesn't happen….

Person-role conflict – when the demands made by the organization or a superior clash with the basic values of the individual.

Guidelines For Using Values To Improve Interpersonal Relations

1. Establish the values that you will use in your relationships with others on the job and then use those values as guidelines in working with others.

2. Establish the values that will guide you as an employee and when your values are compromised, express that to your manager.