

Personality Diversity

Understanding the fabric of you

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PERSONALITY DIVERSITY

Introduction

Hello and welcome! This module will help you become acquainted with the fascinating topic of personality diversity. You will learn:

- Why personality *matters*
- The meaning of personality
- The five main personality traits according to the “Five Factor Model” of personality
- Nature or Nurture: Does personality change?
- Estimating your own personality trait tendencies
- How to communicate with others whose trait tendencies are different from yours

Why does personality matter?

You operate in a people business. It is virtually impossible to be effective if you don't take the time to understand people. You must understand how people react, what motivates them, and how they behave either in the workplace or anywhere else!

Understanding personality matters in because...

- Human personalities vary greatly. In the book *The Owner's Guide to Personality at Work*, Pierce and Jane Howard (2010) explain that in any given mating, a male and a female could produce 52 trillion different genetic combinations in their offspring. The probability that your client will match your own exact personality trait combinations is minuscule.

- Our personality traits are like our personal *lenses* – we tend to see the world a certain way and react accordingly. These lenses are as unique as we are. Further, our lenses feel so natural to us that we don't see them – we tend to think that the world *is* the way we see it. It's important to become aware of our own *default* tendencies – the way we behave in the absence of conscious thinking or planning.
- Ultimately, your personality could be described as the face you show the world, the you others get to know.*
- People tend to be more influenced by those perceived as similar to them. Sometimes influencing another person requires stretching our behaviors to match his or her preferences.

What is personality?

The word *personality* comes from the Greek *persona* - a type of mask worn by actors in Ancient Rome. These masks were meant to represent the actor's mood: Happy, sad, angry, etc. Pierce and Jane Howard (2010) explain that personality means a *pattern of behaviors*. Others define personality as *a combination of non-physical and non-intellectual characteristics that differentiate a person from another* (Millon and Lerner, 2003). Let us understand these two definitions better:

- ***A pattern of behaviors*** means that our personality is categorized according to the behaviors most often exhibited. It also means that some of these behaviors are correlated: For instance, a sociable person is also likely to smile a lot, talk more, demonstrate *high energy* behaviors, etc.
- ***Non-physical characteristics*** means that you cannot guess someone's personality by observing physical traits such as height, weight, etc. There could be, however, relationships between someone's personality and the way this person chooses to present him or herself to others (dress, general appearance, health concerns, etc.).

- *Non-intellectual characteristics* means that there isn't a strong correlation between personality and cognitive intelligence.

Ultimately, your personality could be described as the face you show the world, the *you* others get to know. Most importantly, personality is not about how you behave once in a while – it's about how you behave most of the time. For instance, if most people perceive you as an extravert, you probably enjoy being around other people. You are likely the kind of person who takes the initiative to organize social or business events. You may enjoy working as a member of a team and could feel frustrated and drained if forced to work alone for too many hours. Thus, personality tendencies help us predict behaviors – For instance, one can reasonably expect an extraverted client to prefer meeting face to face to discuss a business issue (versus, for instance, reviewing a long written document).

That doesn't mean, of course, that you can predict *everything*. We often tell our clients that personality *is a tendency, not an obligation!* In fact, that leads us to an important disclaimer:

The personality information I provide in this manual does not apply to everyone all the time.

That disclaimer is critical as you review the material that follows. Your extraverted colleagues will probably want to be alone from time to time. Your super organized colleague may all of a sudden feel spontaneous. In fact, you will see words such as *may, maybe, possibly, or likely* a lot in this text!

Understanding Personality: The Five Factor Model

Now that you understand what personality means, you need a model to organize the personality traits that you perceive around you (and *in* you!). The *Five Factor Model* or *FFM* is one such model. The FFM organizes personality traits around five main clusters or factors¹. These factors are:

- **Need for Stability (N)** has to do with tolerance for stress, optimism, and the ability to recover when upset or frustrated. Those who are low in Need for Stability may crave less stability in their lives. As a result, they tend to be more resilient – when trouble hits them, they are more likely to be *bounce back*. Further, they seem to succumb less often to anger or extreme worry. On the other hand, those who are high in Need for Stability may be better at detecting problems before they occur – their “nervous edge” could lead them to “sound the alarm” when something does not quite seem right.
- **Extraversion (E)** is connected to sociability, gregariousness, and a general interest in being with others. Extraverts tend to feel comfortable amidst bustle, noise, and considerable levels of sensory stimulation. Introverts, on the other hand, tend to prefer quieter and less populated areas. Extraverts deal well with situations characterized by high energy, where people interactions matter. Introverts, on the other hand, may be better listeners and work well independently.
- **Originality (O)** governs our imagination, our “tolerance to newness and change,” and our interest in the “untried and untested.” Some of us are highly creative and imaginative, “breaking” what isn’t broken, and rebuilding what does not need to be rebuilt. Others are highly efficient and by nature more conservative – they enjoy finishing rather than starting, making things work rather than reworking things.

¹ Various terms are used to define the five factors. The terms chosen for this module are more appropriate for workplace applications. They were taken from the WorkPlace Big Five Profile 4.0 (2012), a Big Five instrument written by Pierce and Jane Howard and are here included with their permission.

- **Accommodation (A)** is a general measure of one's tolerance to the views and positions of others. People high in Accommodation tend to have higher service orientation and are generally more concerned with others' needs. People low in Accommodation, on the other hand, may find it easier to challenge the status quo when needed.
- **Consolidation (C)** relates to one's levels of methodicalness, perfectionism, and concentration. Those high in Consolidation are good at reaching pre-established goals. Those lower in Consolidation, on the other hand, are better multitaskers and are typically seen as more flexible.

Personality is a relative concept. What matters most is not how you are but how you are in relation to others.

As you may have noticed in the above definitions, the five main personality traits are defined along a continuum. For instance: Rather than saying *Joe is an extravert* it may be more appropriate to say that *Joe is more extraverted than 60% of the population*. Sally could be even more extraverted than Joe... and from Sally's perspective, Joe is introverted!

Interestingly, each position along a personality trait continuum brings its own advantages and disadvantages, strengths and weaknesses. For instance, perfectionistic and organized individuals (i.e., those high in Consolidation) are often seen as desirable employees. They are focused and determined, methodically follow their objectives, and are thus more likely to reach whatever they established as their primal goal. These same employees, however, may have difficulties "switching gears" or ignoring a previous path that no longer works. Indeed, personality expert Pierce Howard (2010) suggests that those lower in Consolidation may be better equipped to deal with customer service positions – especially when such positions require constant interruptions to help a client in need.

In summary, most experts agree that personality traits are neither *good* nor *bad*. Instead, each trait brings seeds of greatness and failure, insight and *blind spots*.

Further, it is not appropriate to say, for instance, that *Jane has a lot of personality* or *Susie has no personality*. Everyone has a personality tendency – and that tendency provides that person with unique gifts!

Nature or Nurture: Does Personality Change?

One important debate amongst personality psychologists has to do with the *origins* of personality. Are we *born* with a specific personality tendency? Does our personality change as we get older? What is the impact of our social environment on personality?

This debate *matters* for two main reasons. If personality changes:

- One could *choose* his or her own personality – maybe with a little extra effort. One could, for instance, decide to *become more extraverted* or *become calmer*.
- We could decide which personality tendencies are best for specific jobs – and then *train* people to exhibit them.

As you read these options, you are probably shaking your head and thinking “that’s unreasonable.” Indeed, expecting someone to *choose* his or her personality is as illogical as wanting a tall person to become short. Perhaps a useful metaphor is hair color: A person can die his or her hair a different color but the original color will come back fast enough. Further one’s facial features will likely remind anyone of the *original* hair color.

Expecting someone to change his or her personality is unreasonable for two main reasons:

- Personality has a strong *genetic* component. Conservative estimates (Howard, 2012) suggest that at least 60% of one's trait tendencies are innate. Some trait tendencies (for instance, one's tendency towards anxiety or nervousness) could be 80 to 90% genetic!
- It is true that personality has an *environmental* component. However, personality traits are likely to develop slowly over time – and much of the changes occur early in life. Indeed, one can already see traces of the adult personality in very young children!
- More significant personality changes occur in early adulthood (between ages 20 and 30). However, these changes are not huge – a 20-year old extravert is not likely to become introverted at age 30.

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How do we know that personality has a strong genetic component? Mostly we know that because of extensive studies conducted with identical twins separated at birth. Twin studies can, if well designed, help clarify the "nature" vs. "nurture" debate in personality development because:

- Given that two identical twins have the same genetic code, any personality differences observed between them are likely to result from environmental differences.
- These studies analyzed identical twins who were separated at birth and raised by different families, often in different states and under different economic conditions.
- The researchers identified surprising personality similarities among twins studied and used these findings as evidence of the genetic components of personality (Millon & Lerner, 2003).²

² Read more about the Minnesota Twin Studies in this New York Times article:

<http://tinyurl.com/inthenews1>

Here is an important caveat: The idea that personality tendencies are not likely to change does not imply that *nothing* changes in the *face one shows to the world*. One's basic *traits* (Need for Stability, Extraversion, Originality, Accommodation, and Consolidation) are unlikely to change. However, one's *values* and *motivations* change throughout life – and those values and motivations do impact a person's behaviors! Think about it:

- A person whose Accommodation scores are naturally low (called a *Challenger*) may be deeply committed to helping others – even if his/her *basic tendency* is to pursue his/her own goals.
- A naturally disorganized and *big picture* person may pay special attention to the details of a policy – not because he or she *likes* details but because he or she considers the policy particularly important.

Remember this first key lesson about personality:

KEY LESSON # 1: Personality is a tendency, not an obligation!

The good news: The fact that your personality is mostly genetic simply means that your *tendencies* are unlikely to change. It *does not* mean that you can't change your behaviors or make those behaviors match – albeit temporarily – the preferences of others. This temporary change in behaviors to meet others' needs is called *stretching*. Stretching can be a very beneficial skill – learn it!

KEY LESSON # 2: Learn to Stretch!

A Unique Portrait of YOU: Estimating your Five Traits

Now that you understand the basic *elements* of personality it is useful to estimate your own traits. A caveat: What you'll do now is *estimate* your personality traits. That is a good start... but may be somewhat inaccurate, especially if:

- You feel a strong pressure to *be a certain way*... Maybe, for instance, you are really introverted but think it's *better* to be extraverted.
- You haven't spent some time in the past thinking about your personality tendencies.

Two antidotes for the problems above:

- Remember that personality is a *neutral* concept. It simply provides you with certain tendencies. These tendencies do not determine your performance or make you a good or bad employee.
- Talk to people who know you well. Ask them the questions included under each personality trait section. That may give you further insight on the *face you show the world most often*... especially when there aren't significant constraints leading you in a certain direction.

Important Note: An accurate estimate of your Big Five traits requires the completion of a normed and valid Big Five instrument. The questions below are not meant to substitute such an instrument – for starters, they have not been *normed* or applied to a reasonably sized sample. Nevertheless, we thought that these questions would be useful to help you better understand each of the traits and, thus, apply the content of this module to improve your relationships with your HR clients.

What is your Need for Stability?

Need for Stability (N) has to do with your reactions to stress. Some people are highly reactive and emotional, others are very calm and resilient - still others are somewhere in between. Basically your N score indicates the extent of a problem before it is perceived by you as a considerable stressor.³

- People who are **Resilient** (low N) are calm and rational, able to move into problem solving mode rapidly. This helps them stabilize a group under stressful situations. Resilients, however, may be perceived as cold and uncaring by others who are higher in that trait.
- People who are **Reactive** (high N) are emotional and prone to higher levels of stress. One of their strengths is the willingness to take responsibility to solve all sorts of problems - even others' problems. Empathy for others' problems may also come easily to reactives. On the other hand, reactives may be perceived as unreliable during crisis situations.
- **Responsive** (middle N) people are somewhere in the middle between Reactivity and Resilience. Their response to stress may be more situational, or they may exhibit moderate signs of emotional distress under stressful circumstances.

³ A stressor is something that comes between you and your goals. Because people's goals and the challenges they perceive to these goals vary, stressors differ from person to person.

If you want to estimate your N scores, consider answering the following questions⁴:

	Never	Almost never	Neutral	Often	Almost always
1. I get irritated easily.					
2. I often feel blue.					
3. I change my mood a lot.					
4. I tend to get upset easily.					
5. I find it hard to relax.					
6. I tend to worry.					
7. I tend to feel angry (whether or not I demonstrate it).					
8. I tend to see problems before they occur.					
9. When I'm upset it takes me a while to recuperate.					

Take note of each *often* or *almost always* answer you provide – the more of those, the more likely you are to be *reactive*. Of course, the opposite is true – the more you disagree with the statements (or indicate that you *never* or *almost never* feel that way) the more likely you are to be resilient.

An interesting point: Personality is distributed normally. That means that most people are going to find themselves somewhere in the middle. In other words, most of us get worried *sometimes*, get angry *sometimes*, take *some time* to recuperate depending on the stressor.

Regardless of where you find yourself, remember:

⁴ Questions 1-5 are taken from Goldberg, 1999. Questions 6-9 are written by the author of this module and are related to Howard & Howard's (2012) scales in the Workplace Big Five Profile 4.0, a research-based Big Five instrument.

KEY LESSON # 3: Personality is a neutral concept!

This means that it's not *better*, for instance, to be resilient. Yes, resiliency can be helpful in high stress environments. Yes, resilient people are often better suited for jobs in Emergency Rooms or for situations in which panic would be a major problem.

Reactivity, however, can be very useful in cases in which *one cannot be too cautious...*

For instance, you would want reactive people in an audit team, or a team trying to identify possible bugs in a product before it is launched. Trust a person who is naturally pessimistic when you need all bases to be covered!

What is your Extraversion?

Extraversion (E) has to do with tolerance to sensory stimulation. Some people have a high tolerance and even a desire for as much sensory stimulation as possible. This includes not only people but also noise, music, colors, etc. Others may be uncomfortable with too much stimulation for longer periods of time.

- **Extraverts** (high E) welcome sensory stimulation. These are the people who are likely to go out for dinner after a long day at a busy conference. They relax by meeting others and may prefer lively and energetic environments.
- **Introverts** (low E) welcome calm and quiet. They may be comfortable around other people for briefer periods of time, and then need to recharge their batteries. Introverts do better in peaceful surroundings and can comfortably handle tasks that require long hours doing lonely work.
- **Ambiverts** (middle E) find themselves somewhere in between Extraverts and Introverts. They may enjoy some sensory stimulation, after which they'll need to rest and refill their "peace and quiet" batteries again. Those are the colleagues who can handle a busy conference day well, but will later prefer to rest in their hotel rooms on their own.

In order to estimate your extraversion, answer the following questions (Goldberg, 1999):

	Never	Almost never	Neutral	Often	Almost always
1. I feel comfortable around people.					
2. I start conversations.					
3. I talk to a lot of different people at parties.					
4. I don't mind being the center of attention.					
5. I am the life of the party.					
6. I seem to have a lot to say.					
7. I make friends easily.					
8. I naturally take charge.					
9. I am skilled at handling social situations.					

The more *always* or *almost always* answers you provide, the more extraverted you probably are.

Extraversion is a well-known personality trait – so you are likely to be able to estimate your extraversion fairly well. Keep in mind that most people – by definition – are neither extraverted nor introverted. Instead, they are *ambiverted*, comfortable with social stimulation in moderation and for a certain period of time. Read the vignette below for an example.

Jillian is a highly extraverted professor who enjoys networking, presenting, and generally working with others. One of Jillian's favorite activities is to join a large national conference – she loves the interaction and the general energy of a large conference hall.

The hardest part of a conference day for Jillian is the evening. She hates being alone in her hotel room, even after a whole day of activities. In order to avoid that, Jillian often networks with conference attendees and looks for fellow extraverts who wish to do something after hours... dinner meetings, karaoke outings, or even round table chats at the hotel bar. She also gladly agrees to share her room with fellow conference attendees or co-workers. This time, she is sharing a room with her best friend Susie.

As an ambivert, Susie is sociable and friendly during the day and enjoys the conference interactions. By the end of the day, however, she has had enough and is clearly "dragging tail." She turns off the TV and opens her favorite novel – anything to keep the place quiet! She smiles as Jillian leaves the room to go out yet again with perfect strangers... but is secretly happy to have the room for herself!

What is your Originality?

Originality is the factor that relates to your interest in the new, the "untried" and the "untrue." Some people have the natural tendency to constantly be on the look for innovative or revolutionary ideas. Others prefer the efficiency that comes with practice and reinforcement. Still others are somewhere in between.

- **Explorers** (high O) are imaginative and visionary "idea machines." They typically accept change with gusto and are probably on the forefront of innovation.
- **Preservers** (low O) prefer to be known as experts in a particular field. They are the doers in the organization, the ones who implement plans with efficiency and often have a keen eye for detail.

- Finally, **Moderates** (middle O) are somewhere in between those two extremes, accepting innovation when they feel innovation is warranted, or perhaps inviting moderate amounts of change.

A successful work team might profit from the balance between those who do and those who plan, those who preserve, and those who innovate. Thus, being an Explorer is not better than being a Preserver or vice versa... both sides of the originality aisle are critical for success. Can you imagine a team solely composed of Explorers? Good luck getting anything accomplished!

In order to estimate your scores in Originality, answer the following questions (questions 1-8 are from Goldberg, 1999):

	Never	Almost never	Neutral	Often	Almost always
1. I love to think up new ways of doing things.					
2. I am good at many different things.					
3. I can handle a lot of information at a time.					
4. I am full of ideas.					
5. I am naturally imaginative.					
6. I spend time reflecting on things.					
7. I try to avoid complex people.					
8. I avoid reading complex material.					
9. I prefer to implement projects others created.					

Questions 1-6 are positive – The more *always* or *almost always* answers you provide, the higher your Originality is likely to be. Questions 7-9 are negative – Explorers are likely to answer *never* or *almost never* to them.

The items on *complexity* (items 7 and 8) deserve an explanation. In general, Explorers are tolerant of complexity – in fact, they may even embrace it! Complexity makes the world interesting for Explorers. Preservers, on the other hand, tend to prefer clear-cut and simple models. “If you know it, keep it simple” a Preserver might say.

Of course, the complexity of a model does not make it good or bad – one can have a simple yet beautifully elegant model, after all. The point is that Explorers are often happy to cut through complicated pieces to find their gold. They also enjoy making odd connections between seemingly disparate pieces. Preservers, on the other hand, prefer to have materials *dissected* by someone else before they tackle them!

As with other traits, most people are neither Explorers nor Preservers – they are Moderates, somewhere in the middle of the curve. In other words: Most of us can kick our imagination into gear when there is need for creativity but do not consider ourselves to be *idea machines*. Likewise, most of us can handle *some* complexity but get confused with people who go into too many tangents. The question, therefore, is not *whether* you can handle original tasks but... *how many of them* you can take in a stride! A true Explorer would say “Keep’em coming!”

What is your Accommodation?

Accommodation has to do with someone's willingness to let go of control. Challengers are reluctant to accept others' directions or suggestions when those go against their own. Adapters, on the other hand, prioritize harmony and are typically quite willing to adapt their wishes to the needs of others. Negotiators are somewhere in between.

- **Adapters** (high A) can be cordial, agreeable, and modest, willing to adjust to the needs and requirements of others.
- **Challengers** (low A) are more likely to challenge the status quo and attempt to impose their will.
- Finally, **Negotiators** (middle A) are normally in a good place to reach a middle ground between those two groups.

Read the vignette that follows for an example.

During a Big Five workshop, the presenter proposes the following scenario:

Imagine that you are having a meeting with your supervisor to discuss your ideas for a key project. Your participation in this project is an important part of your performance evaluation. Bob is a member of your team. During a meeting with the supervisor, Bob happily shares an excellent idea – and the supervisor loves it. There is just one problem: Bob did not come up with that idea in the first place... you did! Tell me what you're feeling as this happens... and what you plan to do about it.

The workshop participants divide into three groups – Challengers, Negotiators, and Adapters.

Challengers are quick to take action against Bob. For instance, Molly says “I would say something right away – it's not right for Bob to steal my idea!”

Negotiators are annoyed but suggest that diplomacy is the best course of action. Peter says: “I wouldn't say something then, but I would definitely talk to Bob afterwards and ask him to clarify the matter with the Supervisor.

Adapters are rather bewildered by all the fuss. Mel's statement perfectly illustrates this group's position: “Who knows whose idea it was... and who cares! After all, ideas can emerge from brainstorming and it's impossible to determine who the author is. Regardless of the author, the idea will benefit the team... and that's what matters!”

In order to estimate your Accommodation, answer the questions that follow (Goldberg, 1999):

	Never	Almost never	Neutral	Often	Almost always
1. I am interested in other people's problems.					
2. I sympathize with other people's feelings.					
3. I make people feel at ease.					
4. I inquire about others' well-being.					
5. I know how to comfort others.					
6. I love to help others.					
7. I easily show my gratitude.					
8. Others call me a great team player.					
9. I have a good word for everyone.					

The more *always* or *almost always* answers you provide, the higher your Accommodation is likely to be.

Accommodation is an interesting trait – a clear example that “there’s no good place to be.” Most of us enjoy being around Adapters – who doesn’t like to be helped and supported? Not surprisingly, Adapters are often successful in customer service positions. Further, Adapters can be popular team members and are, indeed, essential for the success of a team.

A whole team of Adapters, however, may have a difficult time *fighting the good fights*. Indeed, Adapters are more likely to agree with than to challenge others – even when the *others* in question are *wrong*. While Challengers may be, well... *challenging*... they may also be useful when battles need to be fought or when the team needs to be defended against external forces.

What is your Consolidation?

The last factor - Consolidation - has to do with a person's focus on specific, pre-determined goals. Some people clearly know what their goals are and move towards them in a methodical and determined fashion. Others are more spontaneous and flexible.

- **Focused** individuals (high C) are often disciplined, organized, and methodical. They may also be quite ambitious and determined to be "number one."
- **Flexible** people (low C) may be more spontaneous and easy going, able to quickly switch gears and move from one direction to the other.
- Finally, **Balanced** (middle C) individuals are somewhere in between. They may find it easier to balance work and family life and may naturally be able to concentrate on specific goals when appropriate.

In order to estimate your Consolidation scores, answer the following questions (questions 1-8 are from Goldberg, 1999):

	Never	Almost never	Neutral	Often	Almost always
1. I like to tidy things up.					
2. I love order and regularity.					
3. I am always prepared.					
4. I get my chores done right away.					
5. I put things in their proper place.					
6. I am exacting in my work.					
7. I do things according to a plan.					
8. I continue until everything is perfect.					
9. I prefer to do one thing at a time.					

The more *always* or *almost always* answers you provide, the higher your Consolidation is likely to be.

The last question is particularly important. Focused people prefer to concentrate on one task at a time. As a result, they may not be comfortable with multitasking or with rapidly shifting priorities. Also, focused people tend to be better at following procedures. Flexible people, on the other hand, may be energized by fast paced and rapidly changing work situations.

One could think that the focused *side* of the Consolidation continuum is *better* – after all, traits such as organization and perfectionism may be valued in certain jobs. However, keep in mind that not *all* jobs demand perfectionism. In fact, perfectionism might actually hinder one's productivity under certain conditions! Also, excessive concerns with perfectionism and organization may somewhat curb creativity. Not surprisingly, artistic or creative positions are often supported by lower scores in Consolidation.

Another interesting point: Focused people tend to dislike interruptions. Read the vignette that follows for an example:

John and Mariah are organizational development professionals at a large organization. This month, they are working on a new leadership development program – and there is a strict deadline for program completion.

Organized and methodical, John enjoys focusing on each piece of the project at a time. He has a clear plan of action and follows it to a “t.” As a result, he is never behind schedule. He would like Mariah to stick to her side of the plan as well – and is annoyed at her inability to respect deadlines.

Mariah has a totally different style. She feels constrained by John’s deadlines which she finds unnecessary. “We do have a big deadline at the end and that’s enough!” she says. Further, she would love to be able to bounce ideas with John as needed. She hates that John keeps a “closed door” and wants to schedule every meeting. “John, why can’t you just go with the flow!” she protests. “I can’t create in a box... and you’re putting me in one!”

Finally, John and Mariah sit down to create a reasonable plan of action. John agrees to leave two afternoons a week open for “free flowing collaboration.” Mariah agrees to stick to some critical pieces of the plan.

COMMUNICATING WITH OTHERS

The last vignette illustrates the “relative” aspect of personality. Both John and Mariah are perfectly capable of producing outstanding results. Before they can work together, however, they must take the time to understand one another’s tendencies.

Remember: Personality is a set of lenses. Those lenses are invisible to the user. Thus, we tend to see *our way* of doing things as *the only way*. Anyone exhibiting a different style is, well... wrong!

Under some conditions, our style may, indeed, be the best one. For instance, John’s organization and methodicalness may make it easier for him to meet the deadline in the

first place! Mariah's free flowing mind, however, may offer a better support for the creativity needed to design a training program. Thus, *both* Mariah and John can be useful. The issue is: How can they best work together?

The following are important tips as you plan your interactions with others:

- **Know yourself.** Before you can assess the impact of your own personal lenses on others, you need to become aware of these lenses in the first place!
- **Observe.** When you first meet someone, avoid reacting too fast (this can be a challenge for those of us who are Reactive!). Instead, pay attention to physical and non-physical clues. How loudly does the person speak? How eagerly does he or she seem to express her opinions? Does he/she appear thoughtful? Does he/she appear to be somewhat skeptical? See Table 1 for some "clues" as to someone's personality preferences.
- **Ask.** Do not assume that you *know* what the other person wants. For instance, just because *you* prefer to meet people face to face doesn't mean everyone else does. Remember that personality is neutral. There is no *right* or *wrong* way to be!

Table 1 includes some possible clues as to others' personalities. A caveat: This table provides some tips but it is far from perfect! You may not be able to identify someone's personality tendencies during casual contact. Some traits – for instance, Extraversion – are easier to detect. Others (Need for Stability, Originality) may be harder to identify.

Table 1: Personality Clues

Trait	Consider...	
Need for Stability	Sense of Urgency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reactive people tend to see more urgency... they may seem upset if something takes long to be completed (even if that <i>something</i> may seem less than important to you!)
	Expression of Emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's harder to <i>read</i> the emotions of a resilient person. Resilients tend to show their emotions less – they tend to appear calm and collected even when problems occur. Reactives often appear to be more “passionate” or “emotional.”
Extraversion	Communication style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extraverts are often louder, speak more often, and may smile more as they speak. • Introverts may be quieter and appear to be more reflexive.
	Social events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An introvert may “stick to” the same small group of people throughout a social event. An extravert may move around more. Further, extraverts may look happier and more comfortable during larger gatherings. •
Originality	Detail orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explorers may be impatient of too much detail – they often prefer to “fill in the blanks” on their own. Pay attention to people’s reactions as you provide instruction or information. • Preservers may probe for <i>more</i> details, especially when asked to perform a task
	Focus on policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explorers may seem uninterested in the exact contents of a policy. Preservers are more likely to value policies and procedures and to follow them closely.

Accommodation	Helpfulness Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapters may be more likely to volunteer and offer their help – especially when such help is <i>not</i> required. For instance, an adapter may be more likely to answer a survey. • Challengers may express their opinions more readily – they may, in fact, appear quite comfortable when they <i>disagree</i> with someone else during a conversation.
Consolidation	Interruptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible people may <i>welcome</i> interruptions – and they may seem eager to switch gears (especially if they are both flexible <i>and</i> explorers) • Focused people may demonstrate displeasure when interrupted – even if the interruption is slight! Interruptions may be particularly upsetting to people who are <i>both</i> focused <i>and</i> reactive.

Notice that the last clues – the ones provided for flexible and focused people – include references to *other* traits. Here is why: Traits do not impact our behaviors *in isolation*. Instead, multiple traits act together to make us who we are.

For instance: Imagine that one of your colleagues – let’s call him “Jim” – reacts strongly to a new policy with which he disagrees. For the third time that day, Jim comes into your office and says:

“I am furious! What is Director Smith thinking? This policy makes no sense! It’s not like we don’t have enough policies already – and all those rules are impacting our ability to meet our quota! I’m fully planning to bring this up at the staff meeting tomorrow – and I could care less that Director Smith is present! Besides, here’s what I plan to say: Policies are not mandates – they are just the result of a bunch of people thinking stuff up!”

What personality trait could be involved in your colleague's reactions?

Of course this is a tricky question – clearly, more than one trait is involved! The fact that Jim is so upset with a policy could suggest that he is high in Originality (an Explorer), low in Consolidation (Flexible) or both. Indeed, a possible clue to Jim's "Flexible" tendencies is the fact that he keeps interrupting you. However, Jim's strong reaction and anger could indicate high Need for Stability as well. A resilient and flexible person might ignore the new policy but not be "angry" at it. Further, Jim is probably a challenger. After all, adapters would probably not "bring this up" at a full staff meeting or challenge a director.

As you can tell, this is fairly complicated. The good news: As with anything else in life, practice makes perfect! Remember to sharpen your "SAW"!

Study: Personality is a worthwhile topic! Even a quick "google" search will connect you with hundreds of articles and other resources on the Big Five model.

Ask: Show your colleagues or family members the questions included in this module. How would they rate you? You might be surprised at their answers. Also ask *others* questions that can help you estimate their personality tendencies.

Wait: Treat each new person as a book you haven't yet read. Take the time to pay attention. Ask questions. Never assume that the other person sees the world the same way you do.

So what?

In this module, you have learned about personality, explored the five main personality factors, estimated your own personality traits, and reviewed communication tips. Now what? Here are a few tips for further learning:

- Copy the table provided on page 28 of this module. Then use it to estimate your own personality preferences and those of people with whom you interact. *Remember, however, that these are just possible clues – the best way to find out about someone's preferences is to ask him/her!*
- Visit the page www.thebigfiveplace.com for more information on the Big Five Model.
- Contact the author for information on how you can complete a valid and reliable Big Five instrument – and thus confirm or disprove your own personality estimates.

- Read Pierce and Jane Howard’s book “The Owner’s Manual for Personality at Work.”

Action Plan

I will...

For information on the Workplace Big Five Profile, 4.0, a robust Big Five personality assessment specially designed for the workplace, please contact:

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Personality is Relative!

- Use the table below to estimate relative personality tendencies as follows:
- Use X to indicate your own estimated personality tendencies.
- Use O to indicate a colleague or team member's personality tendencies.
- What relationship concerns or successes could this table help explain?

Need for Stability		
LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH

Extraversion		
LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH

Originality		
LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH

Accommodation		
LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH

Consolidation		
LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH

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