Personality Traits & Leadership Styles

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The term "Personality" has always fascinated the general public and is used in various senses. An individual's personality is assessed by the effectiveness with which he or she is able to elicit positive reaction from a variety of persons under different circumstances. The assessment is also done by the impression that a person creates in others. One may be said to have an "Aggressive Personality " or a "Submissive Personality" or a "Beautiful Personality". The observer selects a quality that is highly typical of that a person and that is an important part of the overall impression created in others and the person's personality is identified by this term. There is an element of evaluation. Personalities as commonly described are good and bad.

The terms personality is derived from Latin word 'PERSONA' meaning mask – especially worn by actors to hide their real identity on the stage. This was subsequently adopted by Romans. For Romans, the word persona refers to as one appears to others, and not as he actually is .

Several definitions have been given by various psychologists to define personality but there is no agreement with regard to any precise definition of personality. The most appropriate definition however is that given by Allport (1937). To quote him 'Personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those Psycho-physical systems that determine his unique adjustment to the environment.

Thus, it is clear that the concept of personality refers to the sum total of ways in which an individual reacts and interacts with others in the environment.

Approaches to Personality

The nature of personality is very complex. That is why different explanations, descriptions and ways of observing one's personality have evolved in course of time and thus there are different approaches to view personality. Some of such theories or approaches are as follows :
  i. The Psychoanalytic – Freud
  ii. The Trait approach - Cattell
  iii. The Type approach –Jung, Kretshmer & Sheldon.

i)   Psychoanalytic approach :

This approach was developed by Sigmund Freud. He believed that the personality is made up of three major systems: **the Id, the Ego and the Superego**. Behavior is nearly always the product interaction of these three systems. The **Id** is based on the pleasure principle and is present at the time of birth. Whereas the **Ego** is based on the reality principle and does the balancing job between the ego and the **Superego**. The Superego is the moral arm of personality. It persuades the **Id** to inhibit the impulses of the **Id** particularly those of sexual or aggressive nature. It is socially conditioned and functions like a judge. The **Id** is the store house of biologically based libidinal energies. If left to itself it would tend to satisfy the fundamental motives without any regard to morals, values or norms of any kind. The **Superego** being socially conditioned permits satisfaction of only such motives that are in tune with the reality principles and inhibit those which are socially inacceptable. The **Ego** mediates & resolves the conflict between the **Id** & the **Superego** without any damage to the 'self'. The development of personality goes through series of conflicts and resolutions which ultimately results in UNIQUE PERSONALITY !

While describing his ideas about personality, Freud divided mind into three segments – the Conscious , the Sub-conscious and Unconscious. These are the major concepts of personality dynamics. The conscious state consists of everything we are aware of at the moment. The preconscious or the sub-conscious consists of thoughts that are easily made conscious and the unconscious contains of memories which we cannot easily tap. There are several different ways in which memories may be repressed. These are known as defense mechanism. The unconscious consists of all memories, desires, impulses and urges which have been pushed into it from our consciousness. Such memories remain deep seated and heavily guarded by conscious forces. These can not be easily tapped.

ii)   Trait approach – Traits are those aspects of personality that are characteristic, consistent and distinctive. Allport had identified 18000 adjectives which describe how people think act, perceive feel and behave. He short listed to 170. Traits are useful means of characterizing a person e.g. humility, sociality honesty etc. later on Allport expressed trait names in pairs e.g. assertive – submissive, easy going-painstaking, cheerful depressive.

Cattell (1950) selected 35 trails clusters which he further divided into 12 primary traits e.g. dominance – submissiveness, sophistication – simplicity etc. These are known as Cattels bi-polar dimensions of primary traits.

iii)   The Type approach :
Personality is a unique possession of an individual. Thus, it is difficult to give any definite typological list of personality. However, attempts have been made to divide personality into several types on the basis of constructions temperament and similar other traits.

Kretschmer (1925), a German Psychiatrist identified three typologies of personality based on body construction these are Pyknic type (type (short & flatten), Athletic (strong and aggressive) and Aesthenic (thin and lonely). Sheldon's works emphaze body build as the main basis. Sheldon proposed three body types – the Endomorphic, Mesomorphic and the Ectomorphic. The Endomorphic are flat, soft and round. They are relaxed and sociable by temperament. The Mesomorphic have strong muscles, are rectangular and strong in body built. They are energetic and courageous. The Ectomorphic are thin, long and fragile in body built.

Jung grouped people into introverts and extroverts. The introverts withdraw into themselves however the extroverts are outgoing and mixing.

Typologies are simple & appealing. However, human behavior is complex and quite variable. It is therefore very difficult to assign people to a particular type.

Leadership

Leadership is a two-way affair. The leader influences the behavior of others more than their thoughts and behavior affect him. According to Lindgren (1973) a leader is a group member who influences other members to behave in ways he prefers more than they influence him. Leader must be perceived by followers as "one of us, most of us and better than most of us" Kretch, Crutchfield & Ballachey 1963.

The leaders have some common traits or attributes. In the beginning it was believed that leaders have three physical qualities –

height, weight, good health and energy – but later on it was clear that it was not a rule.

Other than this, they studied that they also possessed certain traits which were also known as psychological traits such as intelligence, self confidence, verbosity, dominance, sociability, adjustment, imaginative foresighted, will power & charisma.

Dimensions or style of leadership

Leadership style refers to the way in which the leader influence followers.

The precursory attempt to delineate the dichotomy of leadership behavior was made by Kurt lewin, Lippitt and White in 1938. They labeled two distinctively discrete, non overlalpping leadership types as Authoritarian and Democratic along with Laissez-faire style

The Authoritarian leader makes all the decisions himself and allows the subordinate no influence in decision making process. These leaders are often indifferent to the personal needs of the subordinates. He is one man orchestra.

The Democratic or participative leader on the other hand, consults with his subordinates on appropriate matters. Such leaders allow their subordinate some influence in the decision making process. Members are allowed to choose their work companions and division of task. This type of leader does not give punishment and treat his subordinates with dignity and kindness.

The Laissez-faire or free reign leaders allow their groups to have complete autonomy. They rarely supervise directly so the group makes many on the job decisions itself.

A stream of researcher have followed the endeavours of Lippitt & White. Many investigators have proposed their dichotomies of leadership. Studies have been conducted to find out that which type of leadership is more effective. The various dichotomies have been reduced to two broad categories task oriented and people oriented.

In Indian context also, many studies have been conducted to correlate between the personality types and leadership skills. In a

comparative study of authoritarian & democratic leaders in northern India, it was found that morale productivity and quality of work was better under authoritarian leadership than under democratic leadership style. In another study it was found that Indian subordinates were least satisfied with a participative supervisor. The participative leaders were found to be less influential than persuasive leaders.

Brown and Patcher (1970) have found that participative leader can be effective only when the subordinates feel loyal, committed and attracted to the organization and its values. They should not be high on need for power, sense of insecurity and anxiety. They should have the will towards growth and independence and strong work values. Until these conditions do not exist in a group, people oriented leadership is ineffective (Sinha JBP 1980)

Indian culture is <u>authoritarian</u> and Indians foster <u>excessive dependency</u> in their children. Meade (1967) argued that if Indian Culture is relatively authoritarian then the needs of the Indian subordinates can be more adequately met in an authoritarian leadership atmosphere than in democratic leadership as he provides a match between what subordinates' expect and what he would provide. Some studies have found authoritarian to be effective and some have found the participative leader to be effective. Sinha JBP however argued that authoritarian leader is basically self oriented hence he can not be effective. At the same time he has questioned the effectiveness of participative style for all kinds of organizations, subordinates and culture.

In an extensive study, Sinha JBP found that situations where work ethics have yet to crystallize and where employees have yet to acquire the normative structure and the goals of the organization, commitment to work can not be accepted as given. In such instances democratization through full participation are likely to be misconstrued, employees tend to take undue advantage and resort to their dysfunctional values – this eventually reduces productivity as well as jobs satisfaction.

An ICPE-IPE workshop group in India (1989) made an observation that the leadership is cultural specific development. It is a culture specific phenomenon that is why the effective leadership profile varies from country to country and from culture to culture.

Consider the Indian culture and the presence of such values and preferences of the Indian subordinates, Sinha (1980) postulated that a

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task oriented with a blend of nurturance, disciplined minded, tough leadership with personalized approach would be more appropriate and successful in Indian setting. Such a leadership style was named **"Nurturant Task"** (NT) and was recommended as an alternative model suited to Indian culture. Such a leader cares for subordinates, shows affection takes personal interest in their well being and above all is committed to their growth (Sinha 1980). The NT leader guides and directs them to work hard to maintain high level of productivity. Those who meet his expectations are in turn reinforced by nurturance. In the process, there develops a relationship of understanding, warmth and interdependence leading to high productivity and better growth of both the leader and the subordinates. As they work hard, they develop skill and again experience & develop self confidence. They start enjoying hard work without patting on their back. Now they need less guidance and direction and need more independence and participation in decision making.

A number of studies have been conducted to test the Nurturant Task Model and the results have confirmed that the NT style of leadership style would be most conclusive to organizational effectiveness and subordinates satisfaction in the Indian Work Organizations.