The General Framework for Unambiguous Personality Trait Categorizations

Everyone possesses personality traits—a set of behaviors, feelings, and thoughts that span across time, relationships and situations. However, each person will experience life differently based upon which traits they possess.

While personality traits are known determinants of one's quality of life, current personality inventories lack a design that aids interventions geared towards bringing personality traits to a balanced state.

Here, we will establish the ways in which Dharma Life Sciences addresses this issue by highlighting our general framework for unambiguous personality trait categorizations and our unique approach leading to the treatment of maladaptive personality traits.

- What are personality traits and why are they significant?
- How are personality traits classified?
- How is Dharma Life Science's personality assessment different?
- What are Dharma's preliminary steps to designing a personality intervention?

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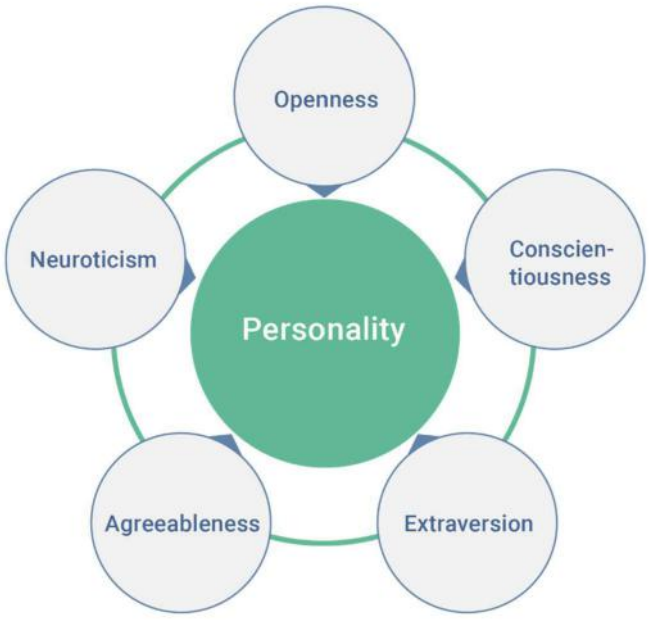
Introduction

Defining Personality Traits

Personality traits are defined in a myriad of ways. The American Psychological Association (APA), for instance, defines personality as "individual differences in characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving." DeYoung (2010) expands on this definition by identifying personality traits as "relatively stable patterns of behavior, motivation, emotion, and cognition that are not specific to a particular milieu or culture." Contrary to this belief, personality traits are not completely stable since major life events can alter personality traits for a period.

Here, personality traits will be defined as a characteristic way of behaving, feeling, and thinking that spans across time, different situations, and different relationships.

Personality Inventories



There are two widely accepted methods for trait identification—the Five Factor Model and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). The Five Factor Model consists of five categories: extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness (DeYoung, 2010). Extraversion and agreeableness pertain to sociability, but in two different ways. Whereas the category extraversion is a measure of where

someone derives their energy, agreeableness is the measure of the extent to which a person gets along well with others (John & Srivastava, 1999). Neuroticism measures a person's emotional reactivity. Conscientiousness measures one's ability to engage in goal-directed behavior and additionally measures one's ability to control their impulses. Lastly, openness measures the extent to which a person is open to trying new experiences. Each domain of this model can be split up into sub categories, most of which are positively correlated within their respective domains.

The MBTI is a four-factor model composed of the following domains: Extroverted/Introverted, Sensitive/intuitive, Thinking/Feeling, and Judging/ Perceiving. The first domain is a measure of a person's orientation, whether it be towards others or internally (Boyle, 1995). The second listed domain, sensitive/intuitive, pertains to whether one attends to sensory information vs internal sources of information. With the third domain—thinking /feeling—a person can either be identified as having a logical approach or a subjective approach to reasoning. Lastly, the judging/perceiving domain measures the speed at which one decides. Following from this idea, a person can either decide upon something based upon their first impression or may take some time to gather information before they react. What differentiates the MBTI from the Five Factor Model, other than the number of domains it presents, is the dichotomous nature of the traits, and the emphasis it places on different cognitive styles.

The Significance of Personality Traits

Personality traits shape everyone's experiences. Depending on the traits someone possesses, one can expect to have a better quality of life *or* face some hardships. Roberts et al. (2007) for instance, found a notable relationship between personality traits and the life outcomes life expectancy, divorce rates, and occupational attainment. Based on the Big Five Traits, they found positive emotionality or extraversion related to longevity whereas, they found pessimism and neuroticism linked to premature death. This was the case even after controlling for other determining factors. The following traits were shown to be greater predictors of divorce rates than socioeconomic status—neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness. Whereas higher levels of conscientiousness and agreeableness predicted lower rates of divorce, higher levels of neuroticism predicted greater rates of divorce. For the outcome, occupational attainment, the Big Five traits were similarly found to be predictors. Even cross-culturally, certain personality traits were known predictors of higher levels of subjective well-being (McCrae, 2001). Among 55 different cultures, extraversion was positively correlated with subjective well-being whereas neuroticism was negatively correlated with subjective well-being—indicating a greater perceived likelihood with one trait over the other.

Although personality traits are responsible for greater life outcomes, there are downsides to holding certain traits. For instance, certain personality traits can overlap with personality disorders (Deary & Peter, 1998). As a by-product, those who have maladaptive personality traits or personality disorders are at a greater risk for having a mood disorder (Cloninger et al., 1999). Specifically, the 182 participants who scored high on a schizotypal rating, were significantly more likely than the control group to have some form of mood disorder. Most notably, they were more likely to experience a major depressive episode than the control, at 35% vs. 20%. As shown, maladaptive personality traits are in fact linked to more severe issues—such as personality disorders and less directly speaking, to mood

disorders. With the information presented, one can see that personality traits are important components of a person's life, regardless of if the person holds a disorder or not.

An Introduction to Dharma Life Sciences: Trait Categorization

At Dharma Life Sciences, we take a novel approach to the categorization of personality traits. We firstly define personality traits as a set of behaviors, thoughts, and feelings that presents itself in an all-encompassing way. These behaviors, thoughts, and feelings will be seen in all areas of a person's life, whether it be personal or professional, and are independent of any major life events. Additionally, these traits will be present across all

Opposite Trait Pairs	
Confidence (high)	Confidence (low)
Dominance (high)	Dominance (low)
Empathy (high)	Empathy (low)
Envy (high)	Envy (low)
Guarded	Sensitivity
Guilt (high)	Guilt (low)
Happiness (high)	Happiness (low)
Integrity (high)	Integrity (low)
Irritability (high)	Irritability (low)
Lackadaisical	Obsessiveness
Nervousness (high)	Nervousness (low)
Optimism (high)	Optimism (low)
Patience (high)	Patience (low)
Perfectionism (high)	Perfectionism (low)
Self-control (high)	Self-control (low)
Shifting interests (often)	Shifting interests (seldom)
Social Confidence (high)	Social Confidence (low)
Stubbornness	Dependency
Submissiveness	Rebelliousness
Trust (high)	Trust (low)

relationships, with varying intensities. Each trait we identify is categorized as imbalanced in one direction based upon the degree to which the manifestations of the traits are the degree to which the manifestations are problematic. We have identified 20 distinct trait pairs, all of which are composed of traits that exhibit opposite behaviors. The traits are shown in the chart above. Be mindful that this is not an all-encompassing list of traits as the trait pairs are still expanding.

The General Dharma Life Sciences Approach

Indivisible Traits

Our personality traits are indivisible, meaning they cannot be further split into two or more traits.

The Five Factor Model, on the contrary, is known for having domains that can be further split into additional aspects and facets (DeYoung, 2010). For instance, extraversion can be split into the following aspects: enthusiasm and assertiveness. These aspects can then be further split into traits. In having indivisible traits, we offer an explicit definition of the traits. Every trait has a unique behavior, a specific behavior that is definitive of what the trait is and whether it is present. Take nervousness (high) as an example. Nervousness (high) is defined by its unique behavior—hyper vigilance and persistent worry due to a constant anticipation of threat. This unique behavior applies to no other trait, facilitating the correct identification of this specific personality trait.

Diagnostic Parameters

Unique Behavior

As aforementioned, every trait in our table has its own unique behavior—used to determine the presence of the trait. This feature allows for a clear method for trait identification. In some cases, there may be traits that can be confused with others, given the behaviors associated with them and one's understanding of their meaning. The purpose of the unique behavior is twofold. First, it allows for a way that we can *conceptualize* the traits regardless of the trait's connotation. Second, it allows for a way that we may *distinguish* the traits from one another. For example, based on our concepts, Nervousness (high) can potentially be confused for Optimism (low) due to the similar manifestations of behaviors. Optimism (low) is defined by its unique behavior, the prediction that the outcome of anything in the future may be negative. Nervousness (high) is defined by the unique behavior, hypervigilance and persistent worry due to the constant anticipation of threat. Like Optimism (low), Nervousness (high) involves the expectation that something bad may happen. However, the unique behavior for nervousness adds two features that are not included in the unique behavior for Optimism (low). The first feature is the *constant worry* that a person with this trait may experience. The second feature is the *hypervigilance* involved in preparing for a threat. Someone with Optimism (low) may predict a negative outcome but won't necessarily have a fight or flight response due to this prediction. The unique behavior, as shown, prevents any ambiguity that results from trying to distinguish the traits.

Direct vs Reverse Causes of Dharma Traits

We believe all personality traits are formed during a person's early developmental years. Each trait is formed due to a direct or reverse cause—derived from the environment the individual was placed in. In some circumstances, a child may mirror what they see or learn to process information

much like their caregiver. This is known as the direct cause. In other circumstances, the opposite may occur. A child may develop thought processes, behaviors and feelings that *do not* mirror those of the caregiver. This is considered a reverse cause for the development of the child's personality trait. Knowing the direct and reverse cause of a trait can be useful as a diagnostic tool for clinicians. Although it is not given as much weight as the unique behavior, it is still indicative of whether a trait is present.

Let's use Nervousness (high) as an example. A direct cause for nervousness (high) would be experiencing many important events in early years that are unpredictable and uncontrollable. Another direct cause would be having a caregiver who could not make predictable outcomes and who emphasized predictable outcomes. The reverse cause would be growing up in an environment that is always stable and predictable and/or having a caregiver who doesn't stress about threatening cues. An example of the direct cause would be growing up in an environment where one's parents were inconsistent with paying rent and utility bills. Due to this, the child may learn to worry constantly about necessities and their safety. Even in an environment where things are stable and the parents *never* had to pay heed to potential financial hardships, the child may still develop Nervousness (high). The child may learn to worry about what *could* happen if their parents don't pay the bill. Therefore, too much predictability could prompt the child to be hypervigilant to potential threats in order to feel prepared for the worst. As shown, even opposing circumstances can promote the same perspective.

Moving to an Intervention

The direct causes and unique behaviors are associated with one and only one respective trait. Due to this, we're able to create a clear methodology for trait identification, trait distinction, and establishing causal factors. Not only are we able to identify traits, we're also able to provide clients with an idea of the source of their maladaptive trait, the behaviors linked to the trait, and the ways in which the client's past life experiences shape the way they think. Given this knowledge, an intervention can and was in fact designed to address the existing problem.

Call to Action

Although personality traits are known determinants of life outcome, current personality inventories do not provide any insight on how a personality trait is caused and how an intervention can be designed to develop a balanced personality trait. We, on the other hand, do more than identify personality traits. We offer awareness to the problems related to the trait(s) and offer solutions to overcome it. Anyone can benefit from this knowledge. Involving yourself with Dharma Life Sciences means gaining insight into the ways your trait is manifested and how it may be preventing you from achieving your goals.

Contact Us

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