
UNIT 1 **DEFINITION, ORIGINS AND CHARACTERISTICS FEATURES OF PERSONALITY**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The word “personality” has been derived from the Latin word “persona” which means a mask worn by an actor while performing a character on the stage. Thus personality is taken to mean the characteristic pattern or style of behaviour of the person revealed from his external appearance. The external properties of a person include his dress, speech, bodily actions, postures, habits and expressions. Thus a person endowed with good external properties is considered to possess a good personality and vice versa. But you know this is not the reality. Mere external properties can not make a personality. And if we go by this concept how and where would we rate the personality of persons like Mahatma Gandhi, Lal Bahadur Shastri. George Bernard Shaw and many others whose external appearance was not highly endowed. These persons are certainly not favored by nature in external properties. Therefore, it was realised that personality included something more than external properties and the concept of external appearance in personality was relegated to background.

The word personality now stood for an all inclusive concept. It is the sum total of an individual’s properties as a distinct and unique human being. The external properties are directly observed, while the internal are only inferred from the behaviour of a

person. The concept of personality is a derived concept. The derivation is possible in three ways:

- 1 The first is subjective, popular derivation based on subjective impressions formed by the individual's behaviour and is expressed through evaluative expressions like charming, dominating, weak or bold personality.
- 1 The second derivation of personality is based on an objective description of the overt responses of the individual.
- 1 The third derivation is organismic according to which personality is the inner pattern of a person's characteristics.

In the first unit of this block, we intend to discuss various definitions of personality, characteristics features of personality and dimension of personality. We shall highlight definitions of personality from various angles like, popular definitions, political definition, psychological definition, and so on. We shall discuss how personality is organised, why we call it a dynamic system. While discussing dimensions of personality, we shall highlight trait dimension and motivation dimension. Allport's definition of personality best represents third concept.

1.1 OBJECTIVES

It is expected that after reading this unit, you will be able to:

- 1 Understand and discuss the concept of personality;
- 1 Understand different definitions of personality;
- 1 Understand the characteristic features of personality;
- 1 Understand and discuss in your own words different dimensions of personality; and
- 1 Will be able to write an essay on the concept and various aspects of personality.

1.2 DEFINITIONS OF PERSONALITY

According to Allport (1961) personality is the "dynamic organisation within the individual of those psycho-physical systems that determine his unique adjustment to his environment" It means that personality "resides" within the individual and these systems are woven into an organisation. Personality is not static but dynamic, the organisational pattern determines the kind and degree of adjustment of the individual to his environment, and this adjustment-pattern is unique to the individual. With the Latin meaning of the term personality taking backseat and acceptance of personality as an all inclusive concept scientists from different disciplines of knowledge approached personality from different angles. Their efforts can be summarised under the following headings:

1.2.1 Popular Definitions of Personality

This includes those definitions of personality which place emphasis on social values. For example, a person who is attractive and good looking, is liberal, easily mixes up in social situations and exhibits socially desirable characteristics, is considered in popular parlance as having the best personality. However, this definition does not fit every individual. Going by this definition would result in some people having no personality at all. Besides, you know very well that in real life we often encounter people who have all the charms, they exhibit all the socially desirable traits but their

tendencies are antisocial, for instance, noted criminal Sobhraj. He has an exterior pleasing personality but basically has a criminal behavioural tendency. He killed many innocent people.

1.2.2 Political Definition of Personality

According to political definition a person has personality only when he is charismatic, attractive and represents the masses. He should be able to present himself in an impressive manner at a public debate. His personal life should be marred with scandals. Even this definition is not acceptable for if we accept this definition then majority of political leaders should not have any personality.

1.2.3 Biophysical Definition of Personality

This category of definitions regards personality as organic internal element of a person. It regards personality as consisting of traits which lend themselves to objective measurement. For example, Sheldon classified people on the basis of physique. He described three types of personality namely: endomorphic, mesomorphic and ectomorphic, with endomorphic being fat and fleshy, mesomorphic being athletic in build with a lot of muscles and ectomorphic being thin and bony in build. .

1.2.4 Ominibus Definition

This category includes all those concepts which lay emphasis on the description of personality. Morton Prince (1924)'s definition best represents this approach. According to him "personality is the sum total of all biological, innate dispositions, impulses, tendencies, appetites and instincts of the individual and the acquired dispositions and tendencies acquired by experiences. Although all encompassing, it is criticized on the basis of this being highly subjective and complex.

1.2.5 Integrative Definition

Essence of this definition lies in finding order and consistency in the behaviour of an individual across different situations. Thus personality is a pattern or organisation. For example, Cagan and Haveman define personality as the total pattern of characteristic ways of thinking, feeling and behaving that constitute the individual's distinctive method of relating to the environment.

1.2.6 Psychological Definition

This definition includes all those which define personality on the basis of variables like adjustment, temperament, uniqueness, and dynamic organisation. Under this category we can place quite a number of definitions but for our purposes we will consider only a few.

- 1 Personality is the dynamic organisation within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustment to his environment. (Allport, 1938).
- 1 Personality is the more or less stable and enduring organisation of a person's character, temperament, intellect and physique that determine his unique adjustment to his environment. (Eysenck, 1952).
- 1 Personality usually refers to the distinctive patterns of behaviour (including thoughts and emotions) that characterise each individual's adaptations to the situations of his life or her life. (Walter Mischel, 1981).

- 1 Personality is generally defined as individual's unique and relatively stable patterns of behaviour, thoughts and emotions. (Baron, 1993).

Self Assessment Questions

- 1) What are the component factors of personality according to Allport?
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- 2) Describe the different definitions of personality and indicate how each helps in understanding personality.
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1.3 CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF PERSONALITY

Now if you carefully analyse all these definitions of personality, you will find the following:

- a) **Psychophysical systems:** Personality is a system that has both psychological and physical aspects. This system is composed of interacting elements and the main elements of the system are traits, emotions, intellect, temperament, character and motives. All these elements are psychological but they are based in the neurology and endocrinology of the body.
- b) **Dynamic organisation:** It signifies that different elements of psychological system are independent but function in an interlocking manner and are subject to change. However this change can take place over a period of time in a gradual manner.

Dynamism of personality

Let me cite you an example, suppose your friend Shyam is extrovert, fun loving care free person. His motto of life is to enjoy, therefore, he is least disciplined, does not value punctuality and hard work in life. He is the eldest son in his family with two younger sisters. Both of you pass out from the same college. You proceed abroad for higher studies. After your return from abroad, you suddenly meet Shyam on one fine evening but notice that he is no more the earlier Shyam. On inquiry you find that the sudden demise of his father changed his life. The entire responsibility of catering to his family fell on his shoulder. He had to take of his mother, younger sisters' education and their marriage. All this had brought about a change in his personality and ways of thinking and behaving. Thus environmental experiences bring about a change in one's personality.

Another example may be of a person who too has a happy go lucky attitude toward life. One day he falls ill and comes to know that both his kidneys are not supporting his body and at the most he will survive two or three years more, that too with the help of medicine. He can no longer play football or indulge in pleasures of life. His gait, way of talking, perception of life all undergo changes and you find that he is no longer his earlier self but a totally new person.

The above examples may seem to you quite radical, but changes in the personality of all individuals do come as they enter new roles, responsibilities and circumstances.

- c) **Consistency:** Since personality is a stable organisation it also has the element of consistency. By consistency we mean that an individual behaves in the same way in different situations and behavioural consistency is found when same situation is repeated across time. Psychologists give four types of consistency.
 - 1 Type “A” consistency: In this type the situation and behaviour remain same. For example, a football player is asked to play match against team X and after 10 days he asked to play against the team.
 - 1 Type “B” consistency: When the same behaviour is repeated in two different situations. For example, a person appears for an interview before one selection board then he appears for interview for the same job before another board in the final round.
 - 1 Type “C” consistency: When an individual is asked to behave differently in the same situation. For example, when an actor is asked to imitate different actors.
 - 1 Type “D” consistency: When a person behaves differently in different situations. A person is able to behave in different situations according to the demand of the situation because he is influenced by particular type of traits. For example, a person is supposed treat his students differently as compared to his colleagues. His behaviour with his parents would be different form that with his friends.
- d) **Unique adjustment to environment:** Every person is characterised with a dynamic organisation of psychological traits that makes his adjustment. The reason for this is that experiences of every person are unique therefore their reaction to the environment is also unique. You may notice that even identical twins who come out of the same embryo, though have the same genetic make up, react differently to the same situation because their frame of references is unique.
- e) **Development of personality structure:** Personality development is the natural quality of a growing organism. The path is from simple to increasingly complex factors and situations an individual has to pass by. According to Heniz Werner, at birth the mental organisation of the infant expands slowly. Through interactions with the environment, the parts of the child’s mental structure become progressively crystallised and differentiated from each other. The analytical stage is followed by synthesis or integration when the differentiated parts become functionally organised. From a diffused mass through progressive differentiation to an integrated whole is, then the course of development of personality structure.
- f) **Consciousness:** Personality is conscious in that it develops out of our interaction with the environment. This interaction results in formation of concept of self. Self-concept means who we are and what we stand for. All the responses of a human being are oriented toward protection of the self concept.
- g) **Potentiality for change:** Potential for change is another characteristic of personality. The earlier psychoanalytical view did hold personality as a rigid structure. However, modern humanistic theories have demonstrated not only the human has the capacity for reorganisation but also the conditions do foster change. Integration or organisation is the quality of the human personality, that is it occurs to human beings naturally and normally. It is the normal development

outcome of personality structure. Disorganisation, that is, the isolation of the functions of the individual parts from the total system, is a pathological condition (Goldstein) of a psychological disorder.

Self Assessment Questions

- 1) What are the four types of consistency in personality?

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- 2) What are the characteristic features of personality?

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1.4 DIMENSIONS OF PERSONALITY

Let me ask you a question. How many people you have come across since you grew up? A reasonable answer would be thousands. Now another question is how many of these people were similar in terms of personality? Again a reasonable answer is that none of them was similar or identical in terms of personality. They might have exhibited similar characteristics say for example, extroversion but they might not have exhibited extroversion in identical quantity or manner. Thus you can conclude from your own observation that no two people in the world are identical in terms of personality. This principle applies to identical twins as well. Now the problem is how to explain these differences in the personality of the people. Psychologists on the basis of researches have identified some dimensions of personality to explain differences in personality.

Now the question is what are these dimensions? Actually these dimensions are category scales which help us understand behaviour of individuals in terms of its main traits, motivational power, temperament and character. Chiefly these dimensions are of four types: traits, motivation, temperament and character.

1.4.1 Traits

Traits are relatively permanent characteristics of personality which compel an individual to behave consistently across different situations. People can be compared by measuring these traits. We call these traits relatively permanent because they change over time. For example, an introvert person may not remain that introvert after 10 years. Some of the important traits are (a) Introversion-extraversion; (b) Neuroticism-stability (c) Psychoticism

a) Introversion-extroversion

It is a bipolar trait. People with predominance of introversion are self-centered. Such people are idealistic, imaginative, shy and secluded. Predominance of thoughtfulness steers them in the world of brooding, fantasy and daydreaming. These people take considerable time in reaching decision and are worried about the future. Such people are theoretical and often are philosophers, poets, scientist and professors.

Extroverts are more inclined to social activities. They are gregarious and social by nature. Such people are realistic, practical, talkative, and active. They show more interest in leadership. However, very few people are completely extrovert or introvert. Majority of the people fall in between that is, they exhibit some degree of introversion and some degree of extroversion in their behaviour and hence are called **Ambiverts**.

Now the question is why are some people introvert and some extrovert? Are there any physiological correlates of it? Researches reveal that introvert and extroverts differ in cortical excitation level. Extroverts have lower cortical excitation threshold, therefore, small amount of stimulation is sufficient to activate them. This fact makes them sensation seeking. On the other hand cortical excitation level of introverts is quite high as a result they remain unaffected by stimulation from external environment.

b) Neuroticism stability dimension

This too is a bipolar dimension. People high on neuroticism exhibit particular traits and behavioural tendencies. They show lack of emotional control and will power with an added characteristic of slowness in thought process and activity. Even small things perturb them. People with high neuroticism are high on suggestibility and low on sociability. However, such people are also characterised by increased emotional impulsiveness.

Contrary to neuroticism, people high on stability are cool and do not get easily disturbed or perturbed by conflicting issues. They are able to keep themselves under control even in most difficult circumstances. They can detach themselves and think over the problem in a balanced manner so as to arrive at a right decision. This quality of them makes them realistic and problem solution oriented.

As for the physiological correlates of neuroticism and stability, it is believed that autonomic nervous system of people with high neuroticism is more reactive. These people are vulnerable to reaction to environmental stimulus. Researches reveal that people with high cortical excitation threshold and increased autonomic reactivity show more acute and explicit symptoms of disorders like phobia, anxiety disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

c) Psychoticism dimension

People with this trait show lack of concentration power and weak memory. They are also characterised with insensitivity. They are more worried for themselves than for others. Element of cruelty and sensation seeking marks their behaviour and they are unable to protect themselves from danger and dangerous situations.

d) Internal and external locus of control

Locus of control refers to internal or external control over reinforcement resulting from operating response upon the environment. In fact it is the development of a generalised expectancy within the individual as to how he receives reinforcement. People with internal locus of control think that skill coupled with hard work, foresightedness and feeling of responsibility can change their fate and bring reinforcement. While people high on external locus of control think that reinforcement is not in their control that is, they can not influence the outcome of happenings. Whatever happens is ascribed to luck and coincidence.

Table 1: Characteristics of people with Internal and External Locus of Control

Internal Locus of control subjects	External locus of control subjects
1 Refrain from situations which threaten control over reinforcement.	1 Not able to keep balance in situations of learned helplessness.
1 They like to maintain a certain probability of success.	1 They show more conformity to social influence
1 characterised with independence of thinking.	1 Depend on others for opinions to quite an extent.
1 When deciding about a target, make use of information present in the environment and their previous experiences in this regard	1 Even in regard to target they go by what others say
1 Give serious and long consideration before arriving at a decision.	1 Take quick decisions
1 While arriving at a decision, they rely more on their skill than leaving things on chance factors.	1 They discuss with others and take their opinions
1 More resistant to social influence.	1 Get easily influenced by outside social factors.

e) Field dependence–independence

This relates to differences in information processing. Field dependent person is directly influenced by the stimuli and events in his environment because he accepts all these information in a non-selective manner while field independent person selects information coming from the environment on the basis of internal cues coming from within. The differences between these two factors are given in the table below.

Table 2: Differences between field dependent and field independent personalities

Field -dependent	Field -independent
1 Goes by the cues available outside externally	1 Is endowed with capabilities that allow him to make effective use of his cognitive abilities
1 Less oriented towards problem solving tasks	1 More oriented towards problem solving tasks
1 Does not have the ability to reality monitoring	1 Has better ability for reality monitoring in memory. Reality monitoring is the capacity to determine if a the origin of an information is external or internal
1 More responsive to social stimuli	1 Less responsive to social stimuli
1 Considered more friendly, considerate, and warm by others	1 Considered less friendly and less warm by others.

Self Assessment Questions

- 1) Which of the following is not a personality trait? tick mark the odd one
A) introversion-extroversion B) inward-outward C) Psychoticism
D) neuroticism-stability E) field independence-dependence
- 2) Differentiate between introvert and extrovert subjects.

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1.4.2 Motivation

Psychologists widely believe that for a person to engage in some particular behaviour the presence of motivation is a must. This dimension of personality includes all those motivational activities which while directing a person towards the target, give rise to specific patterns of behaviour. Motivational dimension include the following:

a) Achievement motive dimension

It refers to motivation which impels a person to work in a manner that ensures success in that work. People with high achievement motivation are characterised by the following aspects:

- 1 Liking for tasks that have high probability of success.
- 1 Accomplish those tasks on which comparison is possible.
- 1 Tasks that reflect personal characteristics are more liked by people high on achievement motivation.
- 1 Success on a given task makes achievement oriented people raise their aspiration level.
- 1 Such people like to work in situations where they have control over outcome so that they can determine whether success would be coming or not.
- 1 Achievement motivation reflects gender differences. Usually girls are less achievement oriented as compared to boys.
- 1 Presence of achievement motivation in a person depends on independence training. For example, children of parents who allow and motivate their offspring to do things for themselves are more achievement oriented as compared to children of parents who are over indulgent with their offsprings.

b) Power motive dimension

This refers to the tendency of a person that impels the individual to establish his or her influence and suzerainty over others. Such people are able to make others act according to their directions through threat or pleading. following are the characteristics of high power motive people:

- 1 Such persons whether he is playing a game or is in real war with other person tries his best to eliminate the opponent.
- 1 Person with high power motivation are often intolerant of low socio economic strata persons. Such people treat others on the basis of power scale so that those less powerful are considered inhuman while those above them in the

power scale are attributed all qualities. Thus high power motivation people are quite aggressive and impulsive toward low social status people.

- 1 Such people are found of collecting antiques and expensive things which they readily show to cast impression on others.

c) **Affiliation motive dimension**

Human beings are social animal. They like to live with members of their own species. People high on affiliation are gregarious and liberal. Affiliation has two dimensions, first positive dimension, it is reflected in hope for affiliation and, second negative dimension which is reflected in fear of rejection. Like achievement motivation individual differences are found in affiliation motive.

d) **Approval motive dimension**

It controls those behaviours which we undertake to secure praise and approval of significant others. When active this motive makes us seek social approval for our thoughts and responses. We follow the dos and don'ts of the society in order to become the acceptable member of the society.

Self Assessment Questions

- 1) What is motivation? Define with suitable answer.

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- 2) What are the various dimensions of motivation?

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1.4.3 Temperament

Temperament is the third main dimension of personality. It refers to the sum total of the emotional and affective tendencies of the person. Sensitivity, irritability, nervousness, pleasantness are some of the adjective used to describe temperament. Temperament is believed to be the innate quality of person that means it is present at the time of birth.

1.4.4 Character

By character we mean moral excellences. As a dimension of personality character signifies the morality or immorality in the person. It is the learned aspect of personality and is acquired through process of socialisation. It is also known as **conscience**. In a way it is similar to Freud's superego and represents the do's and don'ts. Violation of conscience arises pangs of guilt in the individual.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we studied the concept of personality, its origin and derivations. We studied different definitions of personality i.e. popular definition, biophysical definition, political, omnibus, integrative and psychological definitions. We studied how these definitions partially explain the concept of personality. This was followed by a study of the characteristic features of personality. We are now able to understand how personality is organised, and why we call it a dynamic system. We now know personality keeps evolving throughout life and it is not static. Now we also know and can explain in our own words why we call personality conscious. We studied the different dimensions of personality like- trait dimension, motivational dimension, temperament dimension and character dimension. We also studied trait and motivational dimension in some detail.

1.6 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) What do you understand by the term personality? Discuss in detail.
- 2) “Personality is conscious” comment in the light of characteristic features of personality.
- 3) Discuss the trait dimension of personality, in detail. Also give examples.
- 4) Define motivation and discuss various motivational dimensions.

1.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

John Maltby, Liz Day, Ann Macaskill (2009). *Personality, Individual Differences and Intelligence* (2nd edition) Pearson Education Europe, Middle East and Africa., Canada.

Robert B. Ewen (1998). *An Introduction to Theories of Personality* (5th edition) Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers , New Jersey.

Cooper, C. (2002). *Individual Differences* (2nd edition) New York: Oxford University Press.