

**PERSONALITY TYPOLOGIES AND TRAIT PERSPECTIVES:  
BACKGROUND TO SCOPE IN THE CUSTOMIZED VERSION OF PREPARE**

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Trait theorists describe personality in terms of enduring behavioural tendencies. According to trait theory, personality can be reduced to a limited number of traits, which are present in each individual to a greater or lesser degree.

## **1. EARLY APPROACHES**

Gordon Allport (1897-1967) believed that:

- we develop personal traits, or personal dispositions – these are the unique, individual characteristics associated with a particular individual.
- these traits or dispositions were “...a generalized neuropsychic structure (peculiar to the individual), with the capacity to render many stimuli functionally equivalent, and to initiate and guide equivalent (meaningfully consistent) forms of adaptive and stylistic behavior.” Allport, G. *Pattern and Growth in Personality*, 1961, p. 347)
- traits or dispositions are concrete, and are readily recognized consistencies in a person’s behavior.
- a personal trait or disposition produces equivalences in function and meaning between various perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and actions that are not necessarily equivalent for other individuals. For example: A person with the personal disposition of prejudice against members of an outgroup may generalise about them and respond to any of them with a set of discriminatory behaviors that express this disposition (fear of people who are different).
- every person has a small number of specific traits that predominate in his or her personality – these are a person's central traits. Central traits are the building blocks of personality. There are also secondary traits, those that are less obvious, less consistent and more general (eg. preferences, attitudes, situational traits). Sometimes one of the central traits becomes a strongly dominant and pervasive force in the person’s life - this is a person's cardinal trait.
- that central traits and cardinal traits are environmentally influenced. As a child develops, specific behaviors and interactions become a part of the individual's personality. As the person grows, these traits may become functionally autonomous, becoming so much a part of the person that they no longer require maintenance of the conditions that originally caused it to develop.

## 2. LATER APPROACHES

The trait approach has come to be associated with the quantitative psychometric approach to personality testing. There is a strong reliance on the use of factor analysis to summarize the detailed item-by-item responses to such tests. Factors are conceptualized as measurements of fundamental traits. *Chapter 7 in the Facilitator Manual CD has excellent detail and background on these approaches.*

### 2.1 Cattell

Raymond Cattell (1905-1998) developed a measure of 16 personality factors (The 16PF Questionnaire) from his factor analytical work over 45 years. There are 16 different scales that are further grouped together into global factors: self-control, anxiety, extraversion, independence, and tough-mindedness.

The five global factors are:

	←----->	
Extraversion	Introverted	Extraverted
Anxiety	Low Anxiety	High Anxiety
Tough-Mindedness	Receptive	Tough-Minded
Independence	Accommodating	Independent
Self-Control	Unrestrained	Self-Controlled

The 16 source traits or personality factors are:

	←----->	
Warmth	Reserved	Warm
Reasoning	Concrete	Abstract
Emotional Stability	Reactive	Emotionally Stable
Dominance	Deferential	Dominant
Liveliness	Serious	Lively
Rule-Consciousness	Expedient	Rule-Conscious
Social Boldness	Shy	Socially Bold
Sensitivity	Utilitarian	Sensitive
Vigilance	Trusting	Vigilant
Abstractedness	Grounded	Abstracted
Privateness	Forthright	Private
Apprehension	Self-Assured	Apprehensive
Openness to Change	Traditional	Open to Change
Self-Reliance	Group-Oriented	Self-Reliant
Perfectionism	Tolerates Disorder	Perfectionistic
Tension	Relaxed	Tense

## 2.2 Eysenck

Hans Eysenck (1916-1997) argued that all people could be described in terms of three global traits or “supertraits”, which he believed had a biological basis:

- *Introversiion-extraversiion* (a continuum of sociability, dominance, liveliness) Eysenck hypothesized that extraversion-introversion depends upon the balance of “inhibition” and “excitation” in the brain itself.
- Emotionality-stability or *neuroticism* (a continuum of upset and distress) Eysenck was convinced that neuroticism was a genetically-based, physiologically-supported dimension of personality. For example, based in the functioning of the sympathetic nervous system that controls much of our emotional responsiveness to emergency situations – preparing for “fight or flight.” Eysenck argued that some people have a more sensitive and responsive sympathetic nervous system than others –feeling considerable fear and being terrified by even very minor incidents, whereas others people remain very calm during emergencies.
- *Psychoticism* (a predisposition towards becoming either psychotic or sociopathic, a tendency to be hostile, manipulative, and impulsive)

The first two were identified in his early work and psychoticism was added later – perhaps largely on pragmatic grounds as he broadened the range of his sampling taking in mental institutions in the United Kingdom. Factor analyses in which the extended samples were included, revealed a third significant factor - psychoticism.

Eysenck designed the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ) to assess individuals on these three dimensions.

Some researchers (eg. Souief, M., Eysenck, H., & White, P., in H. Eysenck & S. Eysenck [eds,], *Personality Structure and Measurement*, 1969) have shown that a second-order factor analysis of Cattell's 16PF reveals two factors - introversion/extraversion and anxiety. This suggests that the underlying factors of Cattell's scales are very similar to those proposed by Eysenck.

## 2.3 The Big Five Approach

The Big Five Theory emerged from reservations about...

- The complexity of Cattell's 16 factor approach
- The simplicity of Eysenck's 3 dimensional approach

Paul Costa and Robert McCrae are the main investigators associated with this approach.

McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T., Jr. (1997). Personality trait structure as a human universal. *American Psychologist*, 52, 509-516

Through extensive factor analytic studies, employing extensive sampling, they have identified five traits that are claimed to describe most of the variation in human personality and these are used (with simpler names) in the SCOPE profile in the Customized Version of PREPARE:

- Extraversion (**S**ocial in the CV): talkative, expressive
- Openness to experience (**C**hange in the CV): intellectual, creative, seeking new experiences
- Conscientiousness (**O**rganized in the CV): competent, self-disciplined
- Agreeableness (**P**leasing in the CV): trusting, tolerant, compassionate
- Neuroticism (**E**motionally Steady in the CV): self-defeating, anxious, not able to cope well with stress

Aspects of these traits in more detail:

<u>Extraversion (S)</u>	<u>Openness (C)</u>	<u>Conscientious (O)</u>	<u>Agreeableness (P)</u>	<u>Neuroticism (E)</u>
warm	to fantasy	competent	trusting	anxious, worrying
gregarious	to aesthetics	ordered	straightforward	angry hostile
assertive	to feelings	responsible	altruistic	depressed
active	to creative actions	persistent	cooperative	self-conscious
excitement seeking	to creative ideas	self-disciplined	courteous	impulsive
positive emotions	to new values	deliberate	patient, tolerant	vulnerable

*Chapter 7 in the Facilitator Manual CD has excellent detail and background on this approach. Encourage trainees to read this chapter.*

### ***A formal measuring instrument for the Big Five Approach***

The NEO PI-R was designed by Costa and McCrae to provide a general description of normal personality relevant to clinical, counseling and educational situations.

The five domains (factors) measured by the NEO PI-R provide a general description of personality, while the facet scales allow more detailed analysis.

The five factors and their specific facet scales in brackets are:

#### **Neuroticism (Emotionally Steady in the Customized Version)**

(Anxiety, Hostility, Depression, Self-Consciousness, Impulsiveness, Vulnerability)

#### **Extraversion (Social in the Customized version)**

(Warmth, Gregariousness, Assertiveness, Activity, Excitement-Seeking, Positive Emotions)

#### **Openness to Experience (Change in the Customized Version)**

(Fantasy, Aesthetics, Feelings, Actions, Ideas, Values)

#### **Agreeableness (Pleasing in the Customized Version)**

(Trust, Modesty, Compliance, Altruism, Straightforwardness, Tender-Mindedness)

#### **Conscientiousness (Organized in the Customized version)**

(Competence, Self-Discipline, Achievement-Striving, Dutifulness, Order, Deliberation)

Internal consistency coefficients range from .86 to .95 for the factor or domain scales, and from .56 to .90 for facet scales.

Stability coefficients ranging from .51 to .83 have been found in three-year, six-year, and seven-year longitudinal studies of the original NEO-PI factors.

***Simpler and shorter versions of this scale have since been made available for research, counselling and educational contexts. The SCOPE items in the Customized Version have their origins in these scales and the model on which they are based. Chapter 7 in the Facilitator Manual CD has excellent detail and background on this and contains reliability data for the Customized version scales.***

### **3. Reactions of critics to the trait approach in general**

#### **3.1 Strengths**

- Objectivity – reliance on empirical/statistical or objective data rather than on subjective experience.
- Pragmatism (practicality, ease of use and understanding) - trait theory led to the development of many assessment instruments. These provide dimensions that provide information regarding a person's personality, as well as their mode of interaction with, and beliefs about self, others and the world. Individuals may be compared, to determine which traits allow a person to do better educationally, socially, or vocationally.

#### **3.2 Criticisms**

- Restrictions due to neglect of the subjective: trait theory has been criticized by psychologists adopting the humanistic approach, that is, by those who prefer a more qualitative, intuitive approach to personality analysis of the unique experiencing individual.
- Trait researchers are often seen to be reifying (treating an abstract concept or construct as if it were something having physical reality) trait measurement when these variables are simply mathematical abstractions.
- Are we assessing stable traits or short-term states? If a person scores at the high end or low end of a specific trait, is it possible that this is due to an immediate and short-term state? A state is a temporary way of interacting and dealing with the self and others. An extrovert presenting for a job interview may act more introverted, shy, reserved, and intellectual. The same person, when with close friends may be far more outgoing, fun-loving, and excitable. Careful construction of assessment items and inclusion of an idealistic distortion scale will both minimize this problem.
- Trait theory does not adequately address how traits have been shaped, and whether and how future change and development might take place. This criticism is being overcome by increased attention to aetiological factors in current research.