

# Individual differences - Culture & Personality

Case duration (Min): **45-60**  
Organizational Behaviour (OB)  
Principles of Management (PoM)  
**Personality and individual differences**  
**Managing in a global context**

**Worldwide**

## Case summary:

The psychological construct that has been used to embrace the features of individual difference is that of personality. This case considers the nature and determinants of individual difference, discusses why organisations may consider personality an important construct and then focuses on the role of personality and personality testing in a specific work context - working in other cultures.

### Learning objectives:

Outline the concept of individual difference.

Explain the significance of individual difference as a basis for taking decisions relating to people within organisations.

### Case problem:

Considers culture as a source of individual difference and the work based problems that cross cultural encounters might present.

First, if you are taking a taught management course then consult with your tutor and ensure that the case has not been scheduled into a teaching class or tutorial. If it has not:

1. Play/ read the media associated with the case. You may need to access the Internet and enter a URL to locate any video clips.
2. Attempt the Case study questions.

Consider attempting the case study as a group exercise; you could form a study group with fellow students.

3. Check the suggested answers - remember these are suggestions only and there are often many possible answers.

Discuss questions and answers with other students.

4. If you feel your answer(s) were weak then consider reading the relevant suggested readings again (also see the case study suggested references).

Title/ Media type	URL/ Media description
Bon Voyage, Bienvenue:	<a href="http://feedroom.businessweek.com/?fr_story=2e9e0e1affdd0973651c7236540f8dc535fc68b&amp;rf=bm">http://feedroom.businessweek.com/?fr_story=2e9e0e1affdd0973651c7236540f8dc535fc68b&amp;rf=bm</a>
Film	Neil Jacobs gives the personality qualities companies should look for when sending executives abroad and gives advice for managing those executives during their tenure in a different culture.

**NOTES:**

## Case study questions...

Action		Pre/During/After class
<b>1</b>	<b>INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCE:</b> Discuss how people differ generally and the concept of personality; identify and discuss various factors that may determine differences between people, particularly with regard to the way we think and behave. Why is there no single definition of personality?	During
<b>2</b>	<b>ORGANISATIONAL APPLICATION OF PERSONALITY:</b> Discuss why organisations may consider personality an important construct.	During
<b>3</b>	<b>MEASURING PERSONALITY AND INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCE:</b> With reference to psychometrics, discuss how organisations measure personality and individual difference and the main reasons such tests or instruments may be used-the situations where the application of personality concepts could be of value within an organisation.	During
<b>4</b>	<b>WORKING WITH OTHER CULTURES (PEOPLE AND CONTEXTS THAT ARE DIFFERENT):</b> Globalization opens many opportunities for business, but it also creates major challenges. An important challenge is the understanding and appreciation of cultural values, practices, and subtleties in different parts of the world. One desired workplace competence concerns the ability to understand, work and communicate with people from different countries and cultures. With reference to the video clip, identify skills and attitudes that allow individuals to effectively and appropriately communicate with people who are different from themselves.	During
<b>5</b>	<b>INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENT PREPARATION:</b> Preparing managers for work overseas remains a critical feature of international HRM. With reference to culture shock and difference, discuss why some employees may find it difficult working with people not like themselves and in a new context.	During

# Answers...

## IDIOPHGRAPHIC APPROACH TO PERSONALITY

An approach that is suspicious of the value of generalized 'scientific' categories of classification and thereby understands personality in the terms used by individuals to described themselves. It perceives individuals in terms of personal experience; their personality is learned through social and cultural interaction as opposed to biological or genetic determination.

## NOMOTHETIC APPROACH (TO PERSONALITY)

Distinguished by the beliefs that there are underlying universals (e.g. of personality) against which everything and everyone can be measured and classified. Personality, for example, tends to be understood as an inherited phenomenon and one that is the product of biology, genetics and heredity. The nomothetic approach is based on large-scale quantitative and scientific study with the aim of discovering the mechanisms and 'laws' that explain human behaviour.

## NOMOTHETIC THEORIES OF PERSONALITY

These offer an approach based upon the identification and measurement of characteristics through psychometric tests. Norms see Group norms.

## PERSONALITY

All the internal traits and behaviours that make a person unique

## TYPE (PERSONALITY)

a distinct pattern of personality characteristics

## CULTURE

Shared ways of thinking and behaving (Uniformity)

## Question/ Answer

### 1 INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCE:

Discuss how people differ generally and the concept of personality; identify and discuss various factors that may determine differences between people, particularly with regard to the way we think and behave. Why is there no single definition of personality?

**How people differ:** students may discuss physical, emotional and sociability differences. **Personality is the construct that defines individual difference in terms of thinking and therefore behaviour.** However, because it cannot be directly observed and because it concerns individuals and how they differ, measurement is problematic; individuals may differ according to a particular characteristic or trait or may have a particular characteristic that another individual may not have. **Determinants of personality:** several factors are thought to determine personality, some of which are to do with nature (genetics) and others nurture (the environment and our upbringing). **Environmental influences** include our family, society (culture) and wider experiences. Our families introduce and encourage desirable behaviours which may be imitated by the individual. **Individuals are also exposed to other people in the society and these people will demonstrate desirable behaviours for imitation by the individual (socialisation).** Consequently, appropriate personality characteristics will be encouraged. General life experiences will also have an effect on individual behaviour.

### 2 ORGANISATIONAL APPLICATION OF PERSONALITY:

Discuss why organisations may consider personality an important construct.

**Organisational success may require people with particular personality characteristics i.e. certain behaviours will be more or less desirable and may make individuals more or less effective and efficient and therefore able to fulfil organisational goals.** Personality determines an individual's ability to interact with their working environment, enabling them to behave according to the requirements of a particular context.

### 3 MEASURING PERSONALITY AND INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCE:

With reference to psychometrics, discuss how organisations measure personality and individual difference and the main reasons such tests or instruments may be used-the situations where the application of personality concepts could be of value within an organisation.

**Personality reflects how employees get on with each other and their work.** Psychometrics describe the process of mental measurement through the application of tests of personality or characteristic such as ability or aptitude. Personality measurements may be used to enable decisions relating to people: employees-who to recruit and select for employment, who to use for a particular role or task, who to use in a particular group and who to use for an overseas assignment and who to promote or develop; customers-how to develop and market products and services.

### 4 WORKING WITH OTHER CULTURES (people and contexts that are different):

Globalization opens many opportunities for business, but it also creates major challenges. An important challenge is the understanding and appreciation of cultural values, practices, and subtleties in different parts of the world. One desired workplace competence concerns the ability to understand, work and communicate with people from different countries and cultures. With reference to the video clip, identify skills and attitudes that allow individuals to effectively and appropriately communicate with people who are different from themselves.

**Individuals working in new contexts such as different cultures (possibly working overseas) need to be able to identify appropriate behaviours within that context and adjust their behavioural repertoire accordingly.**

**A globally competent manager must learn about many foreign cultures, be skilful in working with people from and be able to adapt to living in different cultures.** Cross cultural competence in international business is an individual's effectiveness in drawing on a set of knowledge, skills and personal attributes in order to work successfully with people from different national cultural backgrounds at home or abroad.

**It is generally thought that certain components of cultural competence cannot easily be taught, and that certain individuals may have an aptitude for developing cultural competence where others do not.** Openness to new ideas and tolerance for ambiguity (adaptable and embrace diversity) are examples of attributes that facilitate the learning of cross cultural knowledge and skills. Consequently, organisations may attempt to screen applicants for certain international business positions.

### **CULTURE SHOCK**

degree of social difficulty encountered in cross-cultural interaction

### **INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCE**

See Personality.

### **IDEAL TYPE**

An example or typical model which would not be found in practice in its exact form, but would be identifiable to a greater or lesser extent from what is found.

### **PSYCHOMETRICS**

the systematic testing, measurement and assessment of intelligence, aptitudes and personality

## **5 INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENT PREPARATION:**

Preparing managers for work overseas remains a critical feature of international HRM. With reference to culture shock and difference, discuss why some employees may find it difficult working with people not like themselves and in a new context.

The simplest form of intercultural encounter is between one foreign individual and a new cultural environment – “The foreigner usually experiences some form of culture shock”. People on temporary assignment to a foreign cultural environment often report an acculturation curve. Acculturation refers to the changes that occur as a result of first-hand contact between individuals of differing cultural origins. It is a process whereby an individual is socialized into an unfamiliar or new culture. The greater the acculturation, the more the language, customs, identity, attitudes and behaviours of the predominant culture are adopted. However, many expatriates experience difficulty in fully acculturating; only adopting the values and behaviours they find appropriate and acceptable to their existing cultures. It is a question of willingness and readiness. Expatriates typically experience a new culture which is unfamiliar and strange. In the initial stage of confrontation with the new culture, the user experiences a culture shock. Then full or partial acculturation takes place, depending on factors such as former experience, length of stay, cultural distance between home and new culture, training and language competency amongst other factors. The greater the users’ ability to acculturate, the less the impact of culture shock on them. The ability to acculturate and reduce the impact of the culture shock can be developed through an appropriate and effective cross-cultural training. Apart from that, training can also help the users to develop intercultural communication competence, which is needed to adapt better and perform well in the new environment.

### **Case study references**

Cole, G A. and Kelly, P P. (2011) 'Management Theory and Practice', Ed. 7. Cengage EMEA.

Kelly, P P. (2009) 'International Business and Management', Cengage Learning EMEA.

Martin, J. (2005) 'Organizational Behaviour and Management', Ed. 3. Thomson Learning.