

## HOW RELEVANT IS PERSONALITY TO A NEGOTIATION?

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Negotiation

There are many personality traits that can both help and hinder a negotiation; a fear of failure, a desire to win, or even our own sense of self-belief. Of course it's not just our thoughts and feelings which are affected by our personalities- they also drive our behaviour and make us unique.

While the jury may be out concerning the degree to which our personalities can change over the course of our lifetime, if you go back about 100 years the work of Sigmund Freud suggested that personality could not be modified after childhood. However, at the same time, he also suggested ways to influence the deep-rooted desires which shape our behaviour, suggesting that personalities are malleable and adaptable.

While neo-Freudians such as Carl Jung, Alfred Adler and Karen Horney accepted many of Freud's ideas, they argued that human motivation is more complex and that people have a greater capacity to shape who they ultimately become.

Over the years, many psychologists have attempted to classify and measure the different characteristics of personality. In 1921, Carl Jung categorised people into four primary types of psychological function:

- sensation and intuition – which are described as the 'perceiving' functions; and
- thinking and feeling – which are the 'judging' functions.

It is this work that now forms the basis of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI); an introspective self-report questionnaire designed to indicate psychological preferences in how people perceive the world and make decisions.

In 1936, Allport suggested that there are traits and rules of personality that can be generalised, defined and universally attributed, as well as some which are unique to an individual.

He identified three types of personality trait:

### 1 - THE CARDINAL TRAIT

This is a single trait which dominates an individual's life, personality and behaviour. Cardinal traits are very uncommon as most people's lives are shaped by multiple traits. However, when you look back in history, there are some individuals with cardinal traits who were so distinguished that their names became synonymous with the qualities of the trait. Good examples of this are Christ-like, Freudian, Machiavellian and Narcissistic.

### 2 - CENTRAL TRAITS

These are the general characteristics which form the basic foundations of personality. Examples include conscientiousness, anxiousness, agreeableness and so on.

### 3 - SECONDARY TRAITS

These are related to attributes of preferences and typically appear in certain situations or under specific conditions, such as becoming aggressive when under pressure.

More recently, Costa and McCrae identified five different dimensions to personality, known as the OCEAN model or 'The Big Five'. These are:

- Openness;
- Conscientiousness;
- Extraversion;
- Agreeableness; and
- Neuroticism.

Personality has a big role to play in any negotiation as it influences how we see the world and make decisions. This, in turn, drives how we behave. If some or all of our personality is shaped by early environment and through education and experience, it would explain why there is such a thing as culture-specific behaviour.

While we may or may not be able to change our personality, depending on which school of thought you subscribe to, spending time on a psychoanalyst's couch in readiness for a negotiation is not practicable.

There is, however, a technique available to help you gain an advantage in a negotiation – adopting a different identity for that specific negotiation event. Personality is very distinct from identity. While an assumed identity could be heavily based on our personality, it can manifest itself differently. In fact, with lots of skill and practice, it can be whatever you want it to be.

Before you all dash off and start assuming a different identity before your next negotiation, here are a few words of warning. If your new identity is very different from your own personality you could run the risk of reverting to your true personality traits when put under pressure.

However, with a good degree of self-awareness and an understanding of the traits that drive us, it is possible to choose a different behaviour pattern and, thereby, adopt a new identity or negotiation personality. This new style is called our 'negotiability' and it is at the heart of any effective negotiation.

Do you know yours?

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Jonathan O'Brien, CEO of Positive Purchasing Ltd, is a leading expert on negotiation and works with global blue-chip organizations to help transform their negotiation and procurement capability. He also helped pioneer the Red Sheet® negotiation methodology.

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