> # Putting the Person into Personality

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Introduction

Types and traits: Essential differences between the two approaches

Psychologists look at people in two quite different ways. On the one hand we see people as being collections of 'traits', like Extraversion, or Persuasiveness. On the other we see them as having a portfolio of styles and behaviours that are characteristics of a certain type of person. In every day parlance we tend to use these two approaches implicitly and flip from on to the other, often using a trait characteristic as a cue to a type. For example: 'John's much more outgoing than me. I bet he's a real party animal, confident, relaxed and never embarrassed'. In science we tend to keep them further apart and are wary of making inferences from someone's position on one trait to their overall type.

The trait approach extracts from the population those attributes that account for differences between its members. For personality, these attributes form the scales of instruments like the OPQ32. Each person is 'described' by a collection of trait scores. What is more, these traits are used individually in considering factors such as the prediction of

future job success, training outcome, prosocial behaviours at work and so on. At the level of the Big 5, we talk about conscientiousness having good generalisable validity for a wide range of jobs, while other factors have more specific validities. The trait approach is a variable-centred approach that has developed from studying the characteristics and distributions of personality attributes within groups of people and populations. As a result this approach is also sometime referred to as a nomothetic approach.

The type approach is different in that it is person-centred. It is focused on patterns or configurations of attributes and adopts a way of describing people that incorporates both information about traits, about trait combinations and their interactions. The type approach provides a richer individual description, treating people as an integrated whole. The type approach has been sidelined in the scientific literature mainly because it is far less amenable to sample and population based statistical treatment than the trait approach. If we were to consider using typologies for selection, for example, we would need to consider whether there were differential probabilities of success associated with each type. There is no direct analogue of

the process of forming linear weighted combinations of trait scores for use as a selection indicator. The richness of the type approach does however have value in-depth exploration of personality at the individual level, and for use in exploring individual development in work settings.

If we consider the recruitment process, then recruiters are interested in hiring people, not traits. However, trait measurement procedures provide them with useful mechanisms for short-listing and sifting. Once they are face to face with a potential new employee, though, they need to be able to consider the whole person and not have to work with a bundle of traits values.

Historically, up to the 1950's personality was dominated by theories and models with relatively little good measurement or empirical testing. There was a transition in the 1950s away from 'grand theories' which were scientifically un-testable towards the more robust empiricism and objectivity of the trait approach. We are now beginning to see a move towards revisiting theory and models of the person, and we now have much better scientific tools with which to bring these two approaches together. If we consider these as two complementary ways of describing the same phenomenon (i.e. personality), then it becomes possible to see how we might reconcile the two approaches within one system. The key to this through person-centred trait approaches. That is, approaches which involve measurement at the conventional trait level, but which can also provide ways of mapping these trait scores patterns onto useful typologies. OPQ32i is particularly well suited to this approach as it starts from taking a person-centred trait approach. The ipsative format requires people to consider the relative balance of traits within themselves as a whole person. As we are dealing with so many traits, the constraint this provides on the ability to make comparisons between people on a trait by trait basis is very slight – unlike other ipsative models that use very few scales and can only work by comparing people in terms of types.

Recently we have been conducting research on the degree to which trait measures from OPQ32 can be used to model each of two very different type models: one is categorical (the

Myers-Briggs Types) and the other is a prototypical type model (the Enneagram typology).

Types of type: Categories and prototypes

It is important to recognise that not all type approaches are the same. There are two quite distinct ways of conceptualizing personality types. One is exemplified by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and can be defined as 'categorical types'. The MBTI assesses people's preferences in relation to four attributes:

- Extraversion – Introversion
- Sensing - Intuition
- Thinking – Feeling
- Judgement – Perception

People are hypothesized as preferring one or the other pole of each dimension, thus creating 2x2x2x2 = 16 categories of type. The problem with this sort of category type approach is the need to assume that the distributions of scores on each dimension have an underlying bi-modal distribution. In practice, score data show the expected unimodal distributions with most people scoring in the mid range and fewer having scores that would indicate clear preferences. As a consequence the categorization of people by splitting around the mean of a normal distribution is quite unstable, with only 47% of respondents retained their initial type designations over a period of 5 weeks in one major review study conducted by the National Academy of Sciences in 1991 (National Research Council, 1991).

The alternative is to consider 'prototypical' patterns of traits. This approach is based on the fact that we do not find an equal distribution of all possible combinations of trait-based scale scores. Certain traits tend to go together and form patterns. If we consider, for example, the Big 5 as having three possible scores each: low, medium and high, then there are 243 possible Big 5 scale configurations. In practice only a relatively small number of these occur with a high frequency – it is these that we define as prototypical patterns. The importance of this approach it that it then becomes possible to take a person-centred approach to describing each of these patterns. Unlike the categorical approach, which places a person into one type

or another, people may have profiles that are more or less like a prototype.

The Enneagram represents the best-known prototypical approach to type. The Enneagram approach to understanding people (their behaviours, motivations, values, thinking styles, ways of problem solving, and so forth) provides a taxonomy of individual differences and maps out the basic motivations of each of nine different personality orientations (simply labelled with the numbers One through Nine). These represent 'prototypes' rather than categories into which people are 'fitted'. A prototype can be thought of as a particular pattern, profile or configuration of trait attributes. As the Enneagram typology is less well-known in the UK than the Myers-Briggs

typology, Table 1 gives some simple outlines descriptions of the types. The nine types are described in great detail in Riso & Hudson (1996). The characteristics of the types, their development, the different ways in which they handle the stresses and strains of life have been extensively described and documented. The typology has proved to be of considerable value in aiding personal understanding and development in a range of settings including work and business related ones. The underlying development of the Enneagram typology is rooted in psychodynamic approaches to personality and adopts a 'process-oriented' view of how personality provides a filter through which people attempt to make sense of their lives, interactions with others, and experiences.

Table 1: Enneagram Types – Outline business-oriented descriptions.

Type	Basic Motivation	Preferences & dislikes
One: The Reformer	To be good, to have integrity, to be in balance with everything	Principled, purposeful, self-controlled & perfectionist Dislikes sloppiness and error, attracted to order and high standards for self and others
Two: The Helper	To be loved unconditionally	Caring, generous, people pleasing & intrusive. Dislikes solitude and impersonal dealings, attracted to service and making personal connections
Three: The Achiever	To feel valuable and worthwhile (not to disappoint others)	Adaptable, self-developing, efficient & image-conscious
Four: The Individualist	To find themselves and their significance (to create an identity out of their inner experience)	Intuitive, expressive, individualistic & temperamental Dislikes uniformity and regulation, attracted to creativity and putting their personal mark on things
Five: The Investigator	To be capable and competent (to have something to contribute)	Perceptive, innovative, secretive & detached. Dislikes intrusions on their time and space, attracted to depth and learning
Six: The Loyalist	To find security and support (to belong somewhere)	Committed, responsible, anxious & suspicious. Dislikes unpredictability and rapid change, attracted to clear structures and foresight
Seven: The Enthusiast	To be satisfied and content – to have their needs fulfilled	Spontaneous, versatile, talkative & scattered Dislikes limitations and routines, attracted to new possibilities and excitement
Eight: The Challenger	To protect themselves (to be in control of their own life and destiny)	Self-confident, decisive, willful & confrontational Dislikes indecisiveness and indirectness, attracted to strength and strategic action
Nine: The Peacemaker	To have inner stability ("peace of mind")	Calm, reassuring, agreeable & complacent Dislikes tension and conflict, attracted to harmony and stability

We have completed two research studies, one looking at OPQ32-Ennegram relationships and one looking at OPQ32-MBTI relationships.

The Enneagram types

For the Enneagram typology we have found very clear and consistent OPQ32 profiles relating to each of the nine types. What is more the data suggest that these types do relate to natural groupings of OPQ32 profiles. We also explored the relationship between a person's Enneagram type and their Big 5 personality scores and their SHL Universal Competency Framework Great Eight factor scores (using the OPQ32 to generate each of these). Again the patterns of traits complexes associated with each type fitted the Enneagram definitions extremely well. As an example, the relationships between Big 5 scores and Enneagram types are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Big 5 Enneagram profile patterns.

Type	High	Above average	Average	Below average	Low
One: The Reformer	C		A	E, O, ES	
Two: The Helper		E, A	O, ES, C		
Three: The Achiever		E	O, ES, C, A		
Four: The Individualist		O	E, C, A	ES	
Five: The Investigator		O	C, ES		E, A
Six: The Loyalist			E, C, A	ES	O
Seven: The Enthusiast	E	ES, O	A	C	
Eight: The Challenger	E, ES	O, C		A	
Nine: The Peacemaker		A, ES		E, C	O

E – extraversion, ES – emotional stability, A – agreeableness, O – openness, C – conscientiousness.
High/Low=Type mean is 0.5 SD or more above/below the mean; Above/below average = Type mean is 0.2 SD above/below the mean; Average = Type mean is within +/- 0.2 SD of the mean.

Using their OPQ32 profile, we were able to classify into their Enneagram type with a high degree of accuracy: 73% of people were correctly assigned to their types on the basis of the closest fitting profile. A further 13% had their correct type as the second smallest distance and overall, 94% had their correct type as the first, the second or the third smallest distance between their profile and the prototypical profile.
We also tested hypotheses generated by the Enneagram authors, Riso and Hudson, as to which types should be high, average or low on each of the 32 OPQ scales. The average fit of their hypotheses to the data was kappa=0.75, a fit of as high as 0.90 for some types.

The MBTI types

Here again we found strong associations between OPQ32 scales and the relevant dimensions of the MBTI. This is summarized in the table below for OPQ-based Big 5 scores.

Table 3: Correlations between MBTI and OPQ derived Big 5 scores

	Emotional stability	Extraversion	Openness	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness
E-I	.216(**)	.621(**)	.259(**)	.042	-.003
S-N	-.033	-.067	-.451(**)	.050	.316(**)
T-F	.102	-.085	.062	-.448(**)	.200(*)
J-P	-.078	-.079	-.312(**)	.010	.519(**)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Positive correlations mean the same direction relationship of the Big 5 to the end of the MBTI scale indicated by the first letter, for example Extraversion and E-I.

Associations found between MBTI Types and OPQ32 scales were both strong and meaningful. It was possible to correctly classify between 76% and 87% of people in terms of their independently identified preference by using the prototypical OPQ32 trait profiles for each type. Patterns relating the MBTI to the Five Factor Model found previously were also confirmed.

Discussion

The research has shown that is it possible to predict type membership with a high degree of accuracy using trait-based measures. For both the prototypical and the categorical cases, OPQ32 scales could be used to model type patterns and predict type membership with above 70% accuracy – far higher if one takes into account that type misclassifications are not random, but tend to be close to the 'correct' type.

The research has both shown the value of using the Big 5 as a framework for summarising patterns of relationships between types and traits and also its limitations. However, accuracy of classification and nuances of interpretation of type differences are both considerably enhanced when the full 32 scales are considered.

There is considerable value in being able to consider a person from both a person-centric view and from a trait-centric view – and to be able to flip between these perspectives. The value of starting from the trait-based measurement rather than a typology, however is that, as illustrated in the present work, it is possible to then consider a person in terms of

two quite different typologies: one categorical and the other prototypical. This greatly adds to the richness of the interpretation one can obtain from a personality assessment and also helps to increase our understanding of types.

References and note

National Research Council (1991). *In "The Mind's Eye", Washington, DC: National Academy of Science.*
Riso D.R., & Hudson R. (1996). Personality Types. *Houghton Mifflin, Boston, New York.*

For more information about the Enneagram and the work of Riso & Hudson, got to the website: www.EnneagramInstitute.com.