UNIT 2 FOUNDATIONS OF INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOUR: DETERMINANTS, MODELS AND PERCEPTIONS*

Structure

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the factors that affect individual behaviour;
- Understand the determinants of personality;
- Appreciate the usefulness of MBTI instrument; and
- Understand the importance of and factors affecting perceptions.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Organisations are much more than a mere group of human beings. However, there is no doubt that human beings are a vital part of all organisations, and as such human psychology has considerable impact on organisational behaviour. Since no two humans are alike, one notices a variety of behavioural pattern within an organisation. Some of these will be in sharp contrast to others, leading to possible conflicts. To be effective in an organisation, one ought to possess knowledge about different types of human behaviour. This will help in augmenting personal satisfaction and organisational effectiveness. There are several factors that contribute to differences among individuals.

*Contributed by Dr. Lishin Moothery Joshy, Associate Professor, SCMS Cochin School of Business, Cochin.

2.2 BIOLOGICAL FACTORS

We are a product of our genes and the environment in which we grow up. Thus, both 'nature' and 'nurture' influence our behaviour. Biology affects human behaviour through genetically regulated heredity. How much of our behaviour is a product of biological factors and how much is due to the environmental context is still an open question. Biological factors control the flow of neurotransmitters (chemicals that transmit messages from one nerve cell to another) in the brain. Hereditary, on the other hand, refers to the aspects pre-determined at conception. Inherited factors account for matters like height, complexion, strength etc. Some researchers suggest that it is in the molecular structure of the chromosomes that determine the nature of one's personality.

A few studies about identical twins separated at birth indicate that there are several similarities in personality and behaviour of the separated twins even when they are raised in totally different environments. This result would not have been obtained, had there been no effect of hereditary factors on behaviour. However, genes do not account for all the similarities/dissimilarities in behaviour of human beings; human behaviour is also influenced by life experiences and environment. In fact, all things that happen around us shape our personality and condition our responses to them. The behaviour of our parents, the value system imparted to us, the education that we received, the kind of friends that we have, the society that we grow up in etc., are factors that influence our personality and behaviour.

2.3 ABILITY

Ability means the mental or physical capacity to do something. It follows that an organisation cannot achieve its stated objectives in the most efficient manner without the support of its 'able' members. A person's abilities are also determined by both genetics and environmental factors. Imagine someone who has the genes required to be a great sportsperson. However, he needs to nurture his inborn talent if he really has to become a sportsperson. Thus, although he is born with an advantage, it will get wasted if the environment is not conducive to his growth. The opposite is also true. A person who is not a born-athlete can also do wonders on the sports arena through continuous training and practice, especially since many who are naturally gifted do not turn up on the field due to lack of a conducive environment.

2.4 PERSONALITY

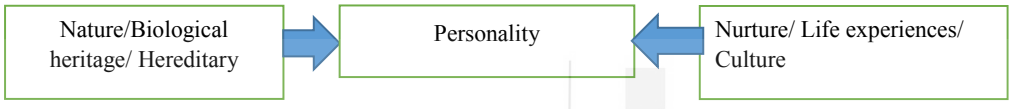
Personality is a set of characteristics or qualities that form a person's distinctive character. This set comprises behaviours, thoughts, ideas, habits, perceptions and emotional patterns that originate from biological and environmental factors. The word 'personality' has been derived from the Latin word "persona" which means "mask" used by actors to change their appearance. Gordon Allport (1937) defined 'personality' seven decades ago as the "dynamic organisation within the individual of those psychological systems that determine his unique adjustment to his environment". Kurt Lewin considers personality as "a dynamic totality of systems". According to American psychologists Randy Larsen and David Buss, "personality is a stable, organised collection of psychological traits and mechanisms in the human being that influences his or her interactions with and

modifications to the psychological, social and physical environment surrounding them". J.F. Dashiell regards personality as "the sum total of behaviour trends manifested in social adjustments" (Aggarwal, 2014).

The concept of 'personality' is understood by both the common man and the OB practitioners alike. Lay people often refer to this concept when talking about people who have dashing 'personalities' or about people who have charming 'personalities'. For OB practitioners, the concept of personality is crucial to understand and manage the workforce. It allows them to analyse why their employees are behaving in a particular fashion and why some of them are good organisational citizens and why some are not.

2.5 DETERMINANTS AND MODELS

Personality research identifies the determinants of personality as 'nature' or biological heritage/hereditary and 'nurture' or life experiences/ environment.



A 'trait' is a particular component of personality. Researchers have, over the years, prepared long lists of personality traits. A trait describes whether a person is shy or outgoing, has an open or closed nature etc. Since a very large number of personality traits are not of much use, neither in research nor in practical situations, researchers have focused on five core personality traits, called 'Big Five' personality traits. The following are the Big five factors: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience.

Extroversion: The extroversion dimension captures sociability, being comfortable with relationships, talkativeness, being enthusiastic and assertiveness. Extrovert persons tend to be happier when they have people around them, rather than when they are alone. They find psychological fulfillment from the outside world rather than from within. They like to be part of social gatherings and it follows that they will get along well with a group in an organisational setting. They search for chances to engage with the outside world. Hence, such people are suitable for jobs that involve a high degree of inter-personal communication. They are also likely to take up and succeed in leadership roles as they generally tend to be assertive.

Introverts are quite the opposite of extroverts. They tend to be reserved and nervous, and their quiet nature leads them to have fewer interactions with the outside world. However pure extroverts and pure introverts are a rarity. Most people belong to somewhere in between these two extremes. Extroversion, rather than introversion, being one of the Big Five personality traits, we can define introverts as people low on the extroversion scale.

Emotional stability: The emotional stability dimension measures a person's capability to endure stress. People with adequate emotional stability are not easily disturbed by unfavorable environment or events at the workplace or elsewhere. Conversely, they generally tend to be cool and composed and do not overreact to external stimuli. The opposite of emotional stability is 'Neuroticism'. People

who are high in Neuroticism get frustrated very easily and are almost always in a bad mood. They feel stressed at work and react aggressively and negatively at the slightest provocation. Although this can affect their performance at the workplace to a very large extent, it is also believed that since such people have the tendency to be critical, they are the best suited for jobs requiring critical thinking, evaluation, quality control etc.

Agreeableness: Agreeableness is the tendency to get along well with others. Agreeable people are empathetic and cooperative rather than being suspicious about others. They tend to be good team players and are well liked by others. Hence they excel in jobs that require team building and fostering of relationships. However, they may find it difficult to do jobs that require them to be firm and tough with others. They might find it difficult to take harsh decisions affecting others.

Conscientiousness: Conscientiousness is the degree to which a person is careful, cautious, self-disciplined, meticulous, dutiful, reliable and dependable. Conscientious people achieve success through meticulous planning and its careful execution. However, they can tend to be over-zealous perfectionists and hence the returns that they get may not justify the efforts put in. Those who score low on this dimension are relatively more unorganised and dependable, but they may, at times, reap short-term benefits.

Openness to experience: Openness to experience captures the extent to which an individual is open to be innovative and non-conforming. Openness is generally considered a healthy trait. However different jobs require different levels of openness to experience. A lecturer or a researcher needs to be open; however, this trait may not suit a soldier or a policeman.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

1. 'Both biological and environmental factors influence individual behaviour'. Do you agree? Why?

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2. Define Personality. Which are the Big Five personality traits?

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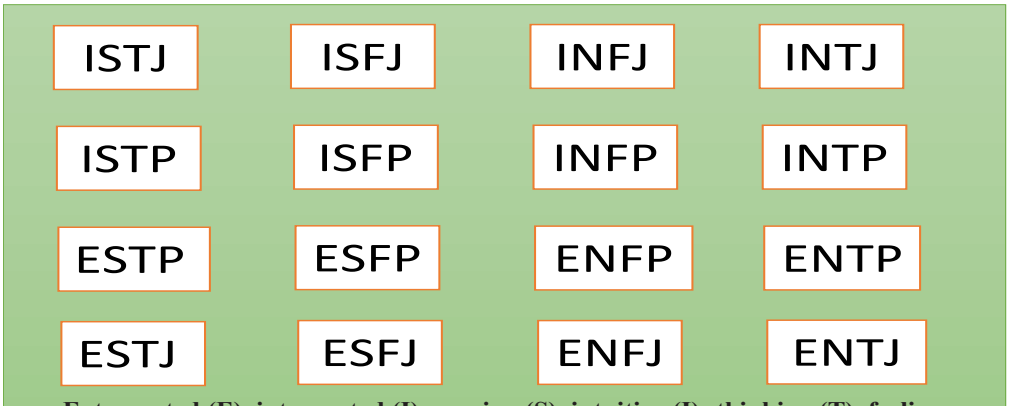
2.6 THE MYERS-BRIGGS TYPE INDICATOR (MBTI)

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) instrument was developed by Isabel Briggs Myers and her mother, Katharine Cook Briggs to help people understand and appreciate differences in each other's personalities and to thereby increase productivity of teams comprised of diverse people. According to Isabel Briggs Myers, when people differ, knowledge of the 'type' of each of them reduces the friction between them and thereby eases the strain in interpersonal relationships. She adds that it reveals the value of differences. To her, no one has to be good at everything. According to Isabel Briggs Myers, "it is up to each person to recognise his or her true preferences." She says that people can develop themselves at any age by understanding their 'type' and by making appropriate use of their gifts.

MBTI instrument is the most widely used personality assessment instrument. It assigns people to one of 16 personality types based on four bipolar dimensions: extroverted (E)–introverted (I); sensing (S)–intuitive (I); thinking (T)–feeling (F); and perceiving (P)–judging (J). The instrument helps one to become aware of one's personality preferences. A preference is what one likes. You may prefer tea to coffee. But that doesn't mean that you will never have coffee. Similarly, on being pressurised, you may go out on a picnic even though you would have preferred to stay back home. A preference is not what you actually do, but what you want to do.

Extroverts look outward and find energy in interaction with others. By contrast, introverts turn inwards and find energy by spending time alone. Sensors use as-is data: they are concerned with actual physical reality that they experience through their five senses. Intuitive people use their hunches. They recognise patterns in what they see, they read between the lines. Thinkers make objective decisions based on logic. Feelers are subjective and tend to consider the people involved and the circumstances while deciding. Perceivers are flexible and they remain open to options while dealing with the outside world. Judgers want to get things decided and closed.

One needs to ascertain one's preference in each of the above mentioned categories. This will reveal the personality type, which will be one of the sixteen types shown below:



Extroverted (E)–introverted (I); sensing (S)–intuitive (I); thinking (T)–feeling (F); and perceiving (P)–judging (J)

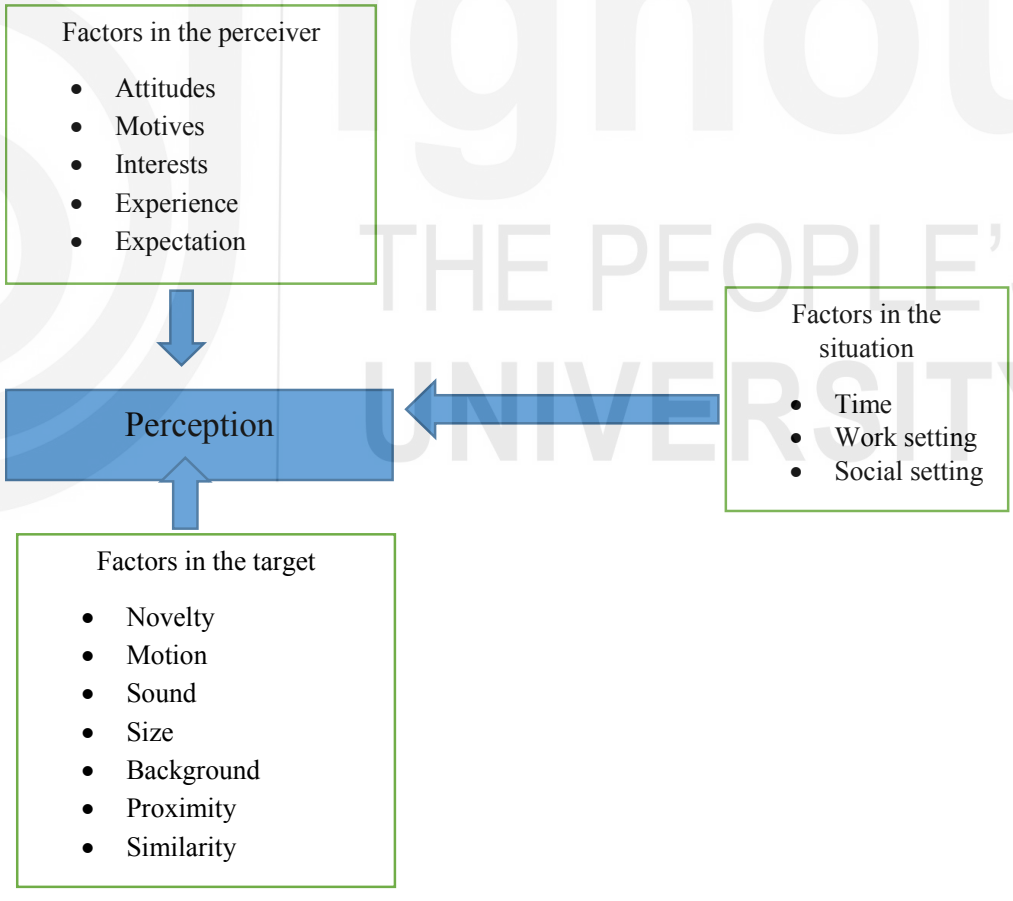
Personality Types

Each of the above refers to one of the 'types'. ISTJ types are quietly systematic and logical, ESTJ types are active organisers and logical, and so on. Once you know your type you can decide which career will suit you best, what your gifts are and where your talents lie. The MBTI instrument is used by top organisations like APPLE, AT & T etc. Even the US Armed forces make use of the same. It helps the organisations to put the right person on the right job (www.myersbriggs.org).

2.7 PERCEPTIONS

Perception is the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted. Individuals organise their sensory impressions and interpret the same to derive meaning. Perceptions are extremely important in an organisational context as it is perceptions, not reality, that drive human behaviour. Employees may harbor negative attitudes about the employer, if they 'perceive' the employer as unfair, irrespective of whether the employer is actually unfair or not. The employer may reward an employee if he is 'perceived' to be hardworking and efficient, even if he is neither hardworking nor efficient.

2.7.1 Factors that Influence Perception



Source: Robbins & Judge (2017).

Factors in the perceiver

When an individual tries to interpret or perceive, that interpretation is generally influenced by the personal characteristics of the perceiver. Personal characteristics that influence the perception process include attitudes, motives,

interests, experience and expectations. An ardent supporter of a political party may perceive the actions of the party as 'just' while the opponents of the same party may interpret those actions as grossly unfair. Here the target is the same, but perceivers are different and hence the diversity in perceptions.

Factors in the target

Characteristics of the target also influence the perception process. Target characteristics that influence the perception process are novelty, motion, background, proximity, similarity, sound and size. For instance well-groomed and impeccably dressed executives may be perceived favourably, whereas shabbily dressed people will be looked upon unfavourably. This shows how the factor of the thing/person being perceived affects perception.

Factors in the perceiver

Similarly, contextual factors also influence the perception process. The time at which we see the object, the location and the social setting — all have an impact on the perception process. For instance, a young man wearing only a pair of shorts is not a misfit at a sea beach, but the same people who have seen him at the beach see him wearing shorts in a formal meeting will perceive him as too casual. Here neither the target (the young man), nor the perceivers have changed. But the situation has. This shows how perception can get affected by the context.

2.7.2 Process of Perception

Perception involves five sub-processes: stimulus, registration, interpretation, feedback and reaction.

1. A stimulus situation initiates the perception process. It acts as the trigger.
2. Registration involves physiological mechanism, including both sensory and neural. The sensory organs, eye, nose, ears, tongue and skin receive the stimulus and initiate the excitation of nerve fibres. The nerve fibres, in turn, transfer the impulses to the central nervous system.
3. Interpretation is a very important factor in the perception process. An individual's interpretation of a stimulus is influenced by his attitudes, motives, experiences and expectations.
4. Feedback is important for interpreting the target. For example, in organisations, a superior's change in the voice tone might influence a subordinate's perception about something.
5. The perception process ends when the respondent reacts, either overtly or covertly.

A large number of industrial conflicts happen because of the divergence between the perceptual interpretations of the parties involved. We can minimise the conflict in the work setting by correctly assessing interpretation of the perception process of both the parties. Following are some of the errors that influence perception and hence the decision-making process:

Selective Perception: It is the tendency to not notice things that we do not want to notice because they contradict our prior beliefs, or for any other reason. For example, a team leader may have a favourite member in the team. The leader will (subconsciously) tend to not notice the favourite member's occasional poor performance. It is also true that we cannot take in and understand all that we observe; we assimilate selectively. The point is that the selection is not done randomly; instead it is based on our preferences.

Halo effect: It denotes the tendency to draw a general impression or an overall judgement about an individual on the basis of a single trait. It is the halo effect that makes people believes that world-class cricketers and superstars from the film world can also become good legislators/administrators.

Contrast effect: It causes perceptions to be affected (enhanced or diminished) due to comparisons with stimuli that rank higher or lower on the same characteristics. We always judge people and things relative to other people and things. An interviewer may negatively perceive an interviewee who is interviewed immediately after a very strong candidate is interviewed. The opposite is also true. A candidate who gets interviewed after a comparatively weaker candidate is likely to create a favourable perception in the mind of the interviewer.

Self-fulfilling Prophecy: It is also called the 'Pygmalion effect' in which the person's expectation of another (target) has an influence on or is transferred to the subject in such a way that the subject alters his or her behaviour in conformity to the expectations. These models exemplify how a manager's behaviour results in self-expectancy of subordinates and thus motivates employees for registering a better performance in the fulfillment of his responsibilities.

Stereotyping: A stereotype is an over-generalised belief about a particular group of people. It is a fixed general image that is generally believed to represent a particular type of person or thing. Once somebody is stereotyped it is assumed that he will behave in a particular manner. Women are often stereotyped as weak and men as aggressive and macho. 'Metrosexual' concept was an attempt to break this stereotype. Mark Simpson who coined the term 'metrosexual' in an article published in The Independent on 15 November, 1994, later described (in 2012) David Beckham (2012) as the "the biggest metrosexual in Britain" and defined a metrosexual man as a "young man with money to spend, living in or within easy reach of a metropolis – because that's where all the best shops, clubs, gyms and hairdressers are". A metrosexual man is especially meticulous about his grooming and appearance, typically spending a significant amount of time and money on shopping. However this depiction has not stuck and the old stereotypes still continue!

With reference to perceptions, studies have shown that what the employees perceive from their work situation influences their efficiency. Therefore, to influence productivity, it is essential for managers to assess how workers perceive their jobs. Factors like absenteeism, turnover and job satisfaction are important in an employee's perception of the job. Those individuals who perceive their jobs as negative are likely to have increased absenteeism, more frequent turnover and less job satisfaction. The only way to influence these variables is to recognise how an employee personally perceives the workplace.

Thus, it can be stated that perception does influence decision-making within an organisation.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

1. What is MBTI instrument? What is it used for?

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2. Why are 'Perceptions' important? What are the factors that affect perception?

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2.8 CONCLUSION

Organisational behaviour is the study of both group and individual performance and action within an enterprise. Individual behaviour can be defined as how an individual behaves at work. Biological factors, environmental aspects and personality traits determine how an individual behaves at workplace and in general. Further, individual behaviour affects an organisation's performance to a very large extent. Hence the study of individual behaviour, in addition to having academic importance, has great practical utility.

2.9 GLOSSARY

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator : MBTI instrument was developed by Isabel Briggs Myers and her mother, Katharine Cook Briggs to help people understand and appreciate differences in each other's personalities and to thereby increase productivity of teams comprised of diverse people.

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2.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1. Your answer should include the following points:

- Biology affects human behaviour through genetically regulated heredity.
- Biological factors control the flow of neurotransmitters (chemicals that transmit messages from one nerve cell to another) in the brain.

2. Your answer should include the following points:

- Organised collection of psychological traits and mechanisms in the human being that influences his or her interactions with and modifications to the psychological, social and physical environment surrounding them.
- Extroversion; Emotional stability; Agreeableness; Conscientiousness; and Openness to experience.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1. Your answer should include the following points:

- Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) instrument was developed by Isabel Briggs Myers and her mother, Katharine Cook Briggs.
- To help people understand and appreciate differences in each other's personalities and to thereby increase productivity of teams comprised of diverse people.

2. Your answer should include the following points:

- Perception is the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted. Individuals organise their sensory impressions and interpret the same to derive meaning.
- Selective perception; Halo effect; Contrast effect; Self- fulfilling prophecy; and Stereotyping.