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Distinction Between Personality and Behaviour

There is a fundamental distinction is between personality and behaviour. The word “personality” has many common uses and many definitions. So what does it mean? Essentially, personality is taken to mean a mix of values, world-views, set responses and characteristics which are relatively enduring aspects of the person.

What Is Personality?

Personality is taken to be what we are while behaviour is what we do. We cannot change what we are but we can change what we do – for short periods of time at least. The ability to change behaviour is at the root of the concept of management style.

As Robin Stuart-Kotze says,

“... it has been maintained ... that personality becomes virtually fixed at about age five. Current research indicates that we are more flexible than that but that changing one’s attitudes, values, beliefs and aspirations – the substance of personality – is difficult”

What is Behaviour?

Behaviour, on the other hand, is what we do. While much of our behaviour (see Theory X and Theory Y) is of course the result of our values and beliefs, it is much easier to behave differently (if only for a short while) than to change beliefs. Moreover, if we try out different behaviours – different ways of doing things – and find that they are a success, this in itself may cause us to change even deeply held views and values.

The word “personality” is used in everyday language quite differently from the way that the behavioural scientist uses it. People talk about other people as having a nice personality, a cheerful personality or even as having lots of personality. Sometimes people are said to have no personality. The word, in everyday speech, tends to have an evaluative meaning and refers to the degree to which we are attracted, repelled or bored by another person. This is not the way that the effective manager or behavioural scientist uses the word.