Careers and development

Yeung At Heart –

Determining your five personal traits (Part II)

Dr Rob Yeung is a psychologist and executive coach at leadership consulting firm Talentspace and author of bestselling career and management books including *E is for Exceptional: The new science of success*, and *I Is For Influence: The new science of persuasion* (both published by Macmillan).

In the first part (http://www.hkiaat.org/e-newsletter/Mar-12/Personality_I.pdf) of this two-part article on personality, I introduced the OCEAN model of personality. I described two dimensions (openness to experience and conscientiousness). In this concluding part, I'll outline the remaining three dimensions and suggest how such knowledge may be useful to all of us in not only our careers but also our personal lives.

E – Extraversion
Most people have a fairly good idea of what the extraversion dimensions measures. Individuals who are high on extraversion don't just enjoy the company of others – they *need* others around them. They may feel lost, lonely and even less able to function without others around them that they can talk things through with. They enjoy and need being around others so much that they may inadvertently dominate conversations and become the centre of attention. When they are faced with problems, their preference is to discuss options with others and work together on a solution.

It's a common misconception that people who are low on extraversion lack social skills. I had a colleague who was extremely socially gifted; however, he just found lots of social interaction draining. After dealing with lots of clients, he needed time on his own to read, research and catch up with correspondence. People who are low on extraversion prefer working on their own or perhaps with small groups or even just one or two people at a time. When faced with problems, their preference is to think things through on their own before perhaps presenting their ideas to other people.

A – Agreeableness
Agreeableness is a measure of the extent to which an individual needs to be in agreement or harmony with others. People who are high on agreeableness, for example, prefer to agree with others when they can. They naturally put the needs of others before their own needs. The positive side of such behaviour is that they come across as courteous, amenable and diplomatic. Even when individuals who are high on agreeableness don't like someone else's ideas, they may go along with them – for

the sake of avoiding conflict and promoting harmony within the relationship. The risk of doing that is that they may at times even go along with ideas that may be ill-conceived or otherwise objectionable.

People who are lower on agreeableness are more willing to speak up for what they want. They are assertive. They are direct. They are not afraid to speak up or challenge others. In the workplace, they are not afraid to be critical and to point out when others have done wrong. However, the downside of their behaviour is that they may be perceived by others as being *too* direct, brusque or even unnecessarily abrasive.

N – Neuroticism
Part of the human brain is geared up to be our in-built alarm system: to detect the presence of threats and dangers. Neuroticism is a measure of the sensitivity of this system.

People who are high on neuroticism have more sensitive threat detection systems. They worry more about things that may go wrong in the future; they also worry more about problems and issues that may have happened in the past too. This doesn't necessarily make them less capable of dealing with problems and issues – they just worry and feel more anxious about what might go wrong.

People who are low on neuroticism, on the other hand, have less sensitive threat detection systems than average. So they tend to worry less than most people. That can be an advantage in pressurized, stressful environments in which they need to make fast decisions without worrying unduly about the consequences. However, that can be a disadvantage too as they tend not to dwell for long on their own mistakes; they may not always learn the lessons from the mistakes they've made.

Conclusions
In a short, introductory article such as this, I simply can't go into recommendations in depth. However, a few suggestions include:

1. Read up on your personality elsewhere. Try typing the words "OCEAN personality" into Google and you will find plenty of entries on what are sometimes also called the "big five" personality traits. I've also written a book on the topic (*Personality: How to unleash your hidden strengths*, published by Prentice Hall Life).

2. Recognize that your personality will be reflected in how you behave, which will affect how people perceive you and therefore treat you. People are generally quite astute at guessing other people's personality traits. If, for example, you are naturally quite low on extraversion, people may find you quiet and unapproachable. You may need to fight your personality preferences to be effective at work.

3. Recognize the weaknesses associated with your personality styles and find ways to work around them. Technology can often help; for example, people who are low on conscientiousness tend not be natural planners and organizers. They may benefit most from alarms, alerts and reminders on their computers and PDAs. Or seek to work with people who complement you, who are strong where you are weak.

4. Ultimately, understand that you will be happiest and most productive if you can find environments in which you can be yourself. For example, if you are low on extraversion, you would be better suited to an office environment where your colleagues give you the time to think on your own and work independently rather than a busy, open plan office where you constantly feel crowded.