



Whitepaper

Is Personality Set In Stone?

Myths, facts and data on how personality develops over time

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VALUE PEOPLE

PERSONALITY OVER TIME

Can a person's foundation change?

An accurate and validated personality profile can deliver significant value in both recruitment and development initiatives. But how long does that picture remain valid? Can people genuinely reshape their deeper personality traits, or are we recruiting for patterns that remain relatively stable over time?

People change throughout their lives, but neither randomly nor overnight. Understanding how personality matures, changes and responds to external circumstances is not just a matter of psychology. It is a significant strategic advantage.

Drawing on extensive data from the OPTO personality test and the latest research in the field, this whitepaper explores the true nature of personality. We examine which traits remain relatively stable, where the greatest potential for development can be found across generations, and how you can turn this knowledge into concrete results within your organisation.

Key takeaways from this whitepaper:

- **Insights into measurement:** How the Big Five model enables a data driven and objective understanding of human behaviour.
- **The formula for change:** The five primary catalysts that shape behaviour and drive personality development.
- **Generational differences:** A statistical review of personality development from young new hires to experienced senior professionals.
- **Strategic retention:** Why development does not stop with senior employees and how to keep the most experienced profiles motivated.

We hope you find this whitepaper insightful.

WHAT ARE PERSONALITY TRAITS?

Personality traits are the relatively stable ways in which we think, feel and behave. They help shape how we perceive the world, how we respond to it, and what motivates us.

Although everyone possesses personality traits, they are expressed differently from one individual to another. It is these differences that explain why people experience and respond differently to the very same situations.

Lise Sustmann Allen, Chief Psychologist at Master International, on personality: *"Personality traits are the ways in which we engage with the world. They shape our intuitive and preferred behaviours. They influence what motivates us. And, last but not least, personality traits are relatively stable patterns in our thoughts and emotions."*

Consider two people riding a roller coaster. One laughs and enjoys the experience, while the other finds it unpleasant and reacts with fear. Although they are in exactly the same situation, their experiences are fundamentally different. This illustrates how personality traits influence both how we perceive situations and how we respond to them.

Personality traits also play a central role in what motivates us and how we translate motivation into action. For example, many people could complete a marathon if they were sufficiently motivated, but what drives them to do so differs. For some, it is the sense of community and the shared experience. For others, it is the competition, the challenge of achieving a goal, or the ambition to perform at their very best.

As mentioned earlier, personality traits are relatively stable, but they are not static. They do not change from one day to the next, but they can gradually develop over time through life experiences, environmental influences and conscious choices.

WHAT IS A PERSONALITY PROFILE?

A personality profile can, in many ways, be compared to a home survey. When you buy a house, you receive a survey that provides a snapshot of its current condition at a given point in time. You do not expect the house to change dramatically from one day to the next, but over time, natural changes inevitably occur. Windows are replaced, insulation is improved, and perhaps even an extension is added. Eventually, the original survey no longer reflects the property's current condition, creating the need for a new assessment.

The same applies to personality. It is stable, but not static. The home survey analogy illustrates that a personality profile provides an accurate picture of an individual at a specific point in time, while recognising that personality also has the potential to develop over time.

Personality traits do not change overnight. Instead, they develop gradually through life experiences, environmental influences and conscious efforts.

It is also important to remember that a personality profile is a simplification. Just as a home survey cannot capture every nuance of a property, a personality profile represents only one of several perspectives on an individual. It makes something inherently complex more tangible and actionable, supporting better decisions while providing a valuable framework for development. In this way, personality profiles help HR professionals not only choose the right "house", but also develop and maintain it over time.

"Personality traits are dimensional rather than categorical. In other words, they exist on a continuum rather than as a dichotomy."

Lise Sustmann Allen

Chief Psychologist at Master International A/S

HOW IS PERSONALITY UNDERSTOOD IN PSYCHOLOGY?

There are many different ways of understanding personality within psychology. The field encompasses a wide range of theories, each offering a different perspective on what personality is and how it develops. Here, we introduce two of the most widely recognised approaches: social constructivism and humanism.

Social Constructivism

From a social constructivist perspective, personality is viewed as a product of the social relationships we are part of. It emerges and develops through our interactions with other people. This means that personality is not considered fixed but is largely shaped by the contexts and relationships in which we participate.

As a result, we may present ourselves differently depending on the situation, whether at work, at home or among friends. According to this perspective, personality can only be understood in relation to others, because it is through our interaction with the world around us that it is formed and transformed. Personality is therefore dynamic and influenced by the social environments we navigate.

Humanism

The humanistic perspective takes a different starting point. It views personality as having an inner core – a set of fundamental traits that remain relatively stable over time. While this core is influenced by our environment, it does not disappear.

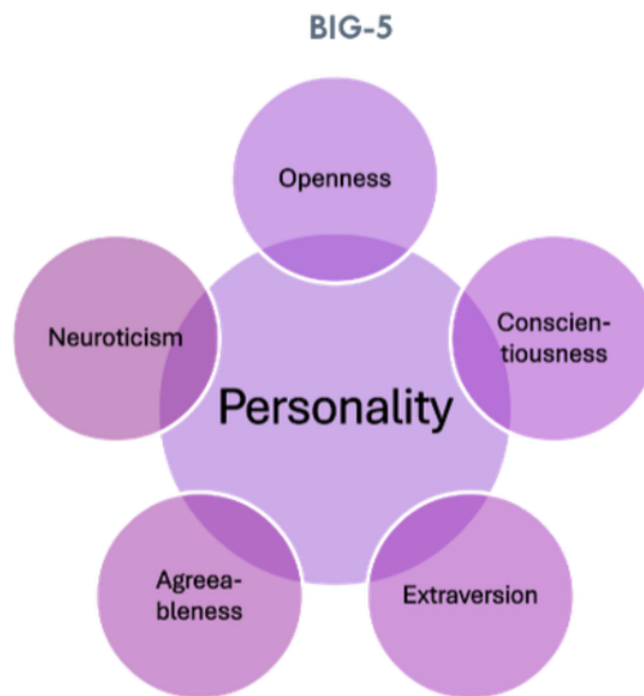
This means that we may behave differently across situations while still maintaining a consistent sense of who we are. In other words, we can think of different "versions" of the same person, where the outward expression changes but the underlying personality remains the same.

This understanding also forms the foundation for measuring and working with personality. Without relatively stable traits, it would be difficult to identify meaningful patterns or draw reliable conclusions about how people are likely to behave across different situations.

While the humanistic perspective provides the theoretical foundation for understanding a stable core of personality, psychology has also needed an objective and data-driven way of measuring it. This is where the Big Five model has established itself as the leading framework.

HOW DO WE MEASURE PERSONALITY?

There are several ways to measure personality, depending on the theoretical approach applied. However, research points quite consistently to one framework as particularly robust: the Big Five.



Unlike many other personality models, the Big Five was not developed from a single psychological theory. Instead, it is based on extensive statistical analyses of how people describe themselves and others. Drawing on large datasets, researchers identified five broad personality traits, each comprising a number of underlying facets.

"When we measure personality, the Big Five is the most scientific way to do it."

Lise Sustmann Allen

Chief Psychologist at Master International A/S

OPTO PERSONALITY TEST

The OPTO personality test is based on the Big Five model. It is designed for use in selection and recruitment processes and can be applied across all organisational levels within an adult population, regardless of industry, educational background or ethnicity.

OPTO measures 20 aspects across eight dimensions:

- Influence
- Resilience
- Cooperation
- Efficiency
- Delivery
- Compliance
- Agility
- Innovation



Illustration.

OPTO overview. Showing the three main areas (People, Operations and Exploration), three of the eight dimensions (Influence, Efficiency and Innovation), and their associated aspects.

Drawing on a comprehensive dataset comprising both assessment responses and demographic information, we are able to analyse personality patterns on a robust empirical basis. This enables us to identify which personality traits remain relatively stable over time and which are more strongly influenced by experience, context and development. The data also provides valuable insight into how specific personality traits, or OPTO aspects, typically develop throughout life, including when they increase, level off or stabilise. We will explore these patterns in more detail on page 8. Before examining the different stages of life, however, it is important to understand the mechanisms that drive personality development. What is it that actually triggers change?

Would you like to learn more about OPTO? Download the fact sheet [here](#).

WHAT CREATES REAL CHANGE IN PERSONALITY?

Personality change rarely happens overnight. Instead, it develops gradually through the interaction of several factors that influence one another over time.

Real personality change typically results from the following factors:

1) Intentional Effort and Goal Setting

When we actively seek to develop and take ownership of the process, we increase the likelihood of lasting change.

2) Environment and Relationships

Our workplace culture, social relationships and the environments we are part of continuously influence our behaviour and, in turn, our personality.

3) Coaching and Structured Development Programmes

Targeted development initiatives can foster reflection, introduce new perspectives and support lasting changes in habits and behaviour.

4) Major Life Events

Events such as changing jobs, experiencing a crisis or other significant life transitions can act as catalysts for personal development.

5) Repeated Behaviour Over Time

Small behavioural changes, when repeated consistently over time, can gradually influence our thoughts, emotions and behavioural patterns.

In short, personality change emerges through the ongoing interaction between our existing personality traits and the influences we encounter in the world around us.

PERSONALITY OVER TIME: FROM ADOLESCENCE TO LATE ADULthood

Based on data from the OPTO Personality Test, developed by psychologists, psychometricians and data specialists at Master International, we can identify the following statistical patterns in personality traits across four life stages: adolescence, early adulthood, middle adulthood and late adulthood.

Adolescence (10-19 years)

In this age group, we observe a statistical increase in social vitality (a facet of extraversion) and openness to experience. Our data also shows that both traits tend to decline again after the age of 60.

Early Adulthood (20-40 years)

Among adults in this age group, we observe a statistical increase in social dominance (a facet of extraversion), conscientiousness and emotional stability (lower levels of anxiety). This increase reflects the maturity that often accompanies taking on adult roles and responsibilities.

Middle Adulthood (40-60 years)

In this age group, we continue to observe increases in conscientiousness and agreeableness. At the same time, emotional stability begins to stabilise, while openness to experience shows little or no change compared with early adulthood.

Late Adulthood (60+ years)

In this age group, we observe a statistical decline in social vitality and openness to experience, alongside an increase in agreeableness. This indicates greater social withdrawal and increased cognitive conservatism.

Overall, our data shows that some personality traits are more adaptable than others. The table below illustrates the distinction between traits that tend to remain relatively stable and those with the greatest potential for development.

More stable:	Change occurs -> high development potential
• Communication • Self-confidence • Assertiveness • Structure	• Stress Management • Goal Orientation • Intellect • Sincerity • Satibility

CAN SENIORS STILL DEVELOP?

It is a common misconception that personality traits become so firmly established with age that they are difficult, or even impossible, to change. Another common belief is that the motivation to develop declines over time. Neither is true.

Research clearly shows that personality continues to develop throughout life, including in later adulthood. However, development may take different forms than it does earlier in life. While some traits are more likely to develop during younger years, others are more likely to change later in life.

This means that the potential for development does not disappear. It simply shifts. Statistically, certain aspects of personality are more likely to change, while others tend to become more stable.

In a workplace context, it is therefore important not to view senior employees as "fully developed", but instead to understand how development can best be supported at this stage of life.

Three key considerations are:

1) Understand what motivates each individual

Motivation can change over time and is key to a successful development.

2) Create the right conditions for development

A supportive environment and meaningful responsibilities increase the likelihood of behavioural change.

3) Actively support the development process

Dialogue, feedback and targeted development initiatives remain important, even for experienced employees.

Personality development does not stop with age. It simply requires us to adapt our understanding and our approach to the individual's stage of life.

Learn more about OPTO

Would you like to learn more about OPTO? [Click here.](#)

You are also welcome to [book a meeting](#) or
contact us at info@master-hr.com.



The OPTO Personality Test was developed by Master International A/S in Denmark. The quality of the test is continuously maintained at a high international standard by a team of psychologists, psychometricians and data specialists. OPTO has been developed in accordance with applicable standards and guidelines from ITC, APA, EFPA and AERA, ensuring that it meets the highest international requirements for professional assessment tools.