

Dynamics versus Traits - (versus Situation and Role)

There is a factor called “Dynamic Usage” which ranges from 0% to 100% and is an indication of a person’s preference to use Dynamics over Traits. At its low end the person tends to primarily focus on Traits as drivers of their behavior and at the high end the person’s behavior is driven by Dynamics.

The most obvious manifestation of a person’s behavior is usually their **Traits**. For example if a person is extraverted or socially aggressive, usually most people can recognize this behavior in normal social settings. Hence, the higher or lower a person’s trait score on any dimension, the more obvious (unless there is some external motivation to do otherwise such as “stifle your normal aggressive behavior” when your superior is present) is your overt behavior.

Now if your Trait scores are “average” (i.e., in the 40% to 60% range) often the **Situation** determines your behavior. For example if a person is moderately extraverted (e.g., 51%), and they have to interact with others on a new team, they will probably do so at a level that is more driven by the situation than their personality. By way of contrast it would not be surprising to find that the aggressive extravert has a lot to say and the passive introvert has very little to say in the same situation. That is, personality drives their behavior and not the situation. Hence as a personality becomes more “vanilla” (i.e., that Trait is at the 50% mark) the situation is likely to drive their behavior and as their personality becomes more “radical” (very high or low scores) their personality is likely to drive the behavior.

Before we move to Dynamics there is one other major issue that drives a person’s behavior in most settings and that is their social **Role** relative to that situation. Using the above example where the person has a moderate score on extraversion and dominance, now picture that they are in the role of being the Team leader or manager. It would not be surprising to find that they were “more” extraverted and/or aggressive because that was their role expectation (i.e., to lead the meeting). Likewise if they were a new hire and just joined the team, the expectation would be to take a much less active role until you understood what was going on. It is not too difficult to imagine interactions between the Traits and Roles. For example, picture a boss who is also aggressive and extraverted or one who is passive and introverted and think about the impact of their personality on their management style.

Now while the Traits are fairly well understood by most people because they are usually more obvious, the Dynamics are more complicated but can be a more powerful predictor of behavior. Let’s go back to the person who is aggressive and extraverted. If Dynamics are not a major driver they are “socially controlling” most of the time and often without concern for the situation (e.g., at home, work, among friends). Now let’s add Dynamics. There are nine major dynamics and like traits people can have different combinations of Dynamics where they may emphasize a couple or may be more complicated. Let’s take a look at four different dynamics.

If the person is a Leader (he/she strives for social control over others) it seems that the Traits and dynamics are synchronized and that will often be the case. Now suppose the person is a Theoretician (control through knowledge) where they show aggressive behavior in areas that are intellectually meaningful to them (e.g., the engineer who debates a technical position with his superior but doesn’t care about the marketing plan). The person who is an Egoist first has areas that are important for their self-esteem (e.g., being admired by superiors) so if they feel they are “being attacked in that area” they can be very aggressive but if their peer is getting attacked for a similar “offense” they may decide to say nothing (whereas the Leader may jump in). Lastly, you have the Relating dynamic (where how significant others feel about you is important to your esteem) so if you don’t care what Bill thinks about you and he insults you, you drop it. However, assume that Mary’s opinion is very important to you and she expresses the same insult. Now you may vigorously take her on and defend yourself. The point is that underlying Dynamics drive the overt behavior (e.g., aggressive and extraverted) and not the Trait. Of course the Dynamic usage can move from 0% (traits are most critical) where there is “little recognition of Dynamics or motivation” to 100% where the person almost always analyzes the situation first (e.g., is this important to me?) and then exhibits their “normal trait behavior.”

When you understand the Traits and Dynamics, the person’s Mix (they are ONLY determined by the Digital Couch) and the Situation and the person’s Role; their behavior is highly predictable.