



The Secrets of the “High-Potential” Personality

A) Warm up

1. How big a role do you think that personality plays in career success?
2. What characteristics do you believe are the most important for achieving success?

B) Adapted Text - The Secrets of the “High-Potential” Personality

The Secrets of the “High-Potential” Personality

By David Robson

Adapted from an article published in 2018 by BBC Worklife

Are you curious, conscientious and competitive? Do you also have the more mysterious qualities of “high adjustment”, “ambiguity acceptance” and “risk approach”? If so, congratulations! According to new psychological research, these six **traits constitute** a “high potential” personality that will take you far in life.

Ian MacRae, a psychologist and co-author of the book “High Potential”, and Adrian Furnham of University College London have now identified six traits that are consistently linked to workplace success.

MacRae points out that each trait may also have **drawbacks** at extremes, meaning there is an optimal value of each one. He also emphasises that the relative importance of each trait will be determined by the job you are doing, so the particular thresholds would need to be adapted depending on whether you are hoping to succeed in, say, a technical position. But the version of the test that I have seen was focused on leadership roles. With this in mind, the six traits are:

Conscientiousness

Conscientious people commit themselves to plans and make sure they follow them **to the letter**. They are good at overcoming their impulses and thinking about the wisdom of their decisions for the long-term. After IQ, conscientiousness is often considered one of the best predictors of life outcomes like educational success. At work, high conscientiousness is essential for good strategic planning, but in excess it may also mean that you are too **rigid** and inflexible.

Adjustment

Everyone faces anxieties, but people with high adjustment can cope with them more easily under pressure, without allowing it to negatively influence their behaviour and decision-making. People with low scores on this scale do appear to suffer from poor

performance at work, but you can reduce those effects with the right attitude. Various studies have shown that **reframing** a stressful situation as a potential source of growth – rather than a threat to their well-being – can help people to recover from negative situations more quickly and more productively.

Ambiguity acceptance

Are you the kind of person who would prefer tasks to be well-defined and predictable? Or do you **relish** the unknown? People with a high tolerance for ambiguity can incorporate many more viewpoints before coming to a decision, which means they are more open to open debate and discussion.

Someone who can accept ambiguity will find it easier to react to changes – such as an evolving economic climate or the rise of a new technology – and to cope with complex, **multifaceted** problems. “We’re trying to identify the ability of leaders to listen to lots of different opinions, to take complex arguments and to make sense of them in a proactive way, instead of simplifying them,” MacRae adds.

Low ambiguity acceptance will not always be a drawback. In certain fields – such as regulation – it can be better to take a more ordered approach. Knowing where you stand on this spectrum may prevent you from moving too far from your comfort zone.

Curiosity

Compared to our other mental traits, curiosity has been somewhat neglected by psychologists. However, recent research shows that an interest in new ideas brings many advantages to the workplace: it may mean that you are more creative and flexible in the procedures you use, help you to learn more easily, increases your overall job satisfaction and protects you from burnout.

In excess, however, curiosity can also lead you to have a “butterfly mind” – flying from project to project without completing any of them.

Risk approach (or courage)

Would you try to avoid a potentially unpleasant confrontation? Or do you move forward in the knowledge that the short-term discomfort will resolve the situation, bringing long-term benefits? Unsurprisingly, the capacity to deal with difficult situations is **critical** for management positions where you need to take action for the greater good, even when you are faced with opposition.

Competitiveness

At its best, competitiveness can be a powerful motivation that leads you to **go the extra mile**; at its worst, it can lead teams to break down.

Together, these six traits consolidate most of our understanding to date on the many different qualities that influence work performance, particularly for those **setting their sights on** leadership.

Equally interesting are the personality traits that MacRae and Furnham haven't included, however. The extroversion-introversion scale, for instance, may determine how we deal with certain social situations, but it seems to make little difference in overall job performance. However, the contribution of introverts may go unnoticed in some work environments. Agreeableness – our capacity to get along with other people – doesn't appear to predict professional success.

A link to the original article can be found below:

<https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20180508-the-secrets-of-the-high-potential-personality>

C) Key Words from Context

Based on the context of the article, can you match the words in the box to the definitions listed below? Then add the word into the example sentence. You may need to change the form of the word to fit the meaning of the sentence.

rigid	to go the extra mile	drawbacks	to reframe
To constitute	multifaceted	conscientious	to the letter
To set your sights on	critical	Traits	to relish something

1. To make a special effort to achieve something; to put in extra work:

"I always try to _____ for my clients."

2. To gain great enjoyment from something: _____

"I would _____ the opportunity to grow with your company."

3. To do something exactly as you have been instructed to do it:

"It was important carry out her instructions _____, because I didn't want to make any mistakes."

4. to be inflexible, not changing or adapting: _____

"My daily schedule is very _____, so it is not possible for me to rearrange meetings."

5. Someone who is willing to do their work to the best of their ability; hard-working:

"I am very _____ with all of my work tasks."

6. To have an ambition to achieve or reach something: _____

"We have _____ a 2% increase in profits in the next 12 months."

7. Extremely important to the success of something: _____

"It is _____ that we secure this deal."

8. To change the way that you think about something or express something: _____

"Whenever you make a mistake, it is a good idea to _____ the situation and think about the positives that have come from it."

9. A characteristic of a person: _____

"The candidate has some really positive _____, which I believe could be valuable to the team."

10. Something that has many different aspects and features: _____

"We have put together a _____ strategy."

11. To be part of a whole: _____

"There are many important aspects which _____ a successful team."

12. Features which make something less acceptable; disadvantages:

"Aside from the advantages and growth opportunities, there are also many _____ to working in a multinational company."

D) Comprehension

Can you answer the questions below about the text?

1. In paragraph 3, why is it not so simple as to say that these traits are good traits?

2. What are some of the main positives and drawbacks of being a conscientious person?

3. According to certain bodies of research, what can we do when we feel stress?

4. Based on the article, how would you define the term 'ambiguity acceptance'?

5. What advantages can we gain from having high 'ambiguity acceptance'?

6. In what field might high 'ambiguity acceptance' be more of a hinderance?

7. What difference does the author mention between curiosity and the other characteristics listed?

8. In terms of job performance, is it better to be an extrovert or an introvert, and why?

E) Key Words in a New Context

Below you can find a paragraph. Can you fill in the gaps in the paragraph with the words from the box below? You may need to change the form of some of the verbs in order for them to fit into the sentence.

Rigid	to go the extra mile	drawbacks	to reframe
To constitute	multifaceted	to the letter	trait
To set your sights on	critical	to relish something	

Can I train myself to become conscientious?

Since the beginning of time, one thing has always been crystal clear in the world of work. Some colleagues are far more conscientious than others. There is always one colleague in the team who is willing to _____, to stay later in the office than required and complete all of their tasks more efficiently than anyone else. Indeed, such colleagues are _____ to the success of any project, but they can be seen as an annoyance or even a threat in the eyes of others, especially rivals who _____ a promotion.

Conscientiousness is a personality _____ that has been studied extensively in the field of psychology, but is it something that is purely genetic, or can it be developed over time?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is extensive evidence to suggest that conscientiousness is at least partially determined by genetics. Studies carried out on twins have shown that identical twins are extremely similar in their levels of conscientiousness. Furthermore, research has found that those who have a strong prefrontal cortex, a part of the brain involved in decision-making and planning, demonstrate a high level of conscientiousness. Not only that, but they seem to _____ completing complex tasks. It could be said that this enjoyment is partly responsible for a conscientious person's ability to carry out instructions _____ and with extreme accuracy.

However, research has shown that it is not necessarily genetics alone that determine our levels of conscientiousness. The issue is evidently more _____ than it first appears. Parenting style can also influence our levels of conscientiousness. For example, children who grow up in households that emphasize responsibility, organization, and punctuality _____ a strong foundation for conscientiousness in the future.

But what if we weren't brought up in such households? Well, luckily, our brains are not so _____. The brain is capable of changing and adapting consistently in response to new experiences and behaviors. If we consistently engage in conscientious activity, such as being organized and responsible, we can gradually _____ our own mindset to become more conscientious. Studies have found that interventions such as goal setting, self-monitoring, and feedback can all be effective in increasing conscientiousness. For example, setting specific, achievable goals and monitoring our progress towards them can help us develop the discipline and focus needed to be more conscientious.