

Openness to experience: Everything you need to know

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What exactly does "open-minded" imply? Is it true that some people think more broadly and process information in broader ways than others? Experiments in personality psychology demonstrate that open-minded persons receive information differently than the average person and may physically perceive the world differently (Smillie, 2017). "Openness to experience," or simply "openness," is the personality quality that most reflects the general understanding of open-mindedness (Smillie, 2017). People who are open to new ideas are more likely to be intellectually curious, creative, and innovative

They enjoy art and are enthusiastic consumers of music, books, and other cultural products. They also have liberal political views. Openness, according to personality theorists, displays a larger "breadth, depth, and permeability of consciousness" as well as a proclivity to "cognitively examine" both abstract (ideas and arguments) and sensory information (sights and sounds). In other words, open people engage with the different percepts, patterns, and views that compete for mental space—information is like catnip to their brain.

A 'Big Five' Factor

Openness to experience is one of the five personality traits generally referred to as the 'Big Five,' along with four others: conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. These elements can be combined to create a broad assessment of a person's personality.

Conceptualizations of Openness

One of the five essential elements that make up the Five-Factor Model (FFM) is [openness to experience](#), which encompasses an extensive range of loosely connected attributes. Openness is the least well-understood of the five elements, maybe because the connections between such attributes are not clear.

The fifth element is commonly referred to as intellect in studies of [trait-descriptive](#) adjectives, and it is defined by phrases like observant, analytical, and reflective (McCrae, 2004). Such terms imply intelligence, and openness is frequently misunderstood with intelligence. In truth, intellect (as evaluated by ability tests like the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale) has a slight link with openness but is treated as an independent variable. Years of schooling are also associated with openness in a minor way;

however, it is unclear if education fosters openness or whether open people seek out additional education (McCrae, 2004).

The Revised NEO Personality Inventory's Openness scale is perhaps the most commonly used assessment of this characteristic. Costa and McCrae included subscales for fantasy, aesthetics, sentiments, actions, ideas, and values, as well as six other facets of life to which people may be more open or closed (McCrae, 2004). As a result, high-scoring individuals are inventive, receptive to art and beauty, aware of their feelings, open to new experiences, intellectually curious, and unconventional (Psychology Today, 2021). There appears to be a motivational and a structural component to these characteristics. Open people are more motivated and open to new experiences and a deeper evaluation of their own beliefs, feelings, and ideals (Psychology Today, 2021).

They have a porous type of consciousness that allows for remote associations to be created effortlessly. On the other hand, closed people are more at ease in their world and tend to compartmentalize their thoughts and feelings.

Research on Openness to Experience

It's more difficult to establish precise and consistent forecasts about [openness to experience's](#) impact on events linked to well-being changes. Individuals who are more open to the world may live longer lives than their peers, although this effect appears to be contingent on which aspect is explored (Jonassaint et al., 2007; Turiano, Spiro, & Mroczek, 2012). As a result, one may expect a "mixed bag" of results in terms of cross-sectional relationships between this attribute and happiness. The impact of openness on health (Goodwin & Friedman, 2006) and relationships (e.g., Nettle & Shaver, 2006) likewise yields mixed results, with results varying depending on the precise outcome of interest.

As a result, the direction in which openness to experience promotes well-being change may be less stable (McCrae, 2004). Instead, this personality attribute could be expected to play the "opposite" role to conscientiousness. Openness to experience, in other words, may influence well-being trajectories less in the direction of well-being and more by increasing fluctuations and variability (McCrae, 2004). This destabilizing effect, like conscientiousness, may be difficult to detect in standard moderation tests.

Sub traits of the openness domain

There are six facets or sub characteristics to each of the Big Five personality traits. In a personality test, these can be evaluated independently of the attribute they belong to. The openness domain has the following sub traits:

- Imagination
- Artistic interests
- Emotionality
- Adventurousness
- Intellect
- Liberalism

Measuring Openness

Questionnaires are used to assess each of the 'Big Five' personality traits, including openness. Subjects are asked to reply to descriptive statements by rating how well the sentences accurately depict their attitudes. While questionnaires are commonly used to examine personality traits, they have some limitations (Psychologist World, 2021).

Self-reporting questionnaires have the disadvantage of allowing people to respond with answers that they believe portray them in a more positive light. Respondents may misrepresent their genuine answers due to a desire for social desirability.

When asked how open they are to new experiences, a person may reply favourably even if they are more closed because openness is frequently regarded as a desirable personality feature.

Openness and Intelligence

Openness to new experiences has been linked to higher IQ. As a result, openness and intellect are sometimes coupled as linked personality traits, as in the following definition from the journal *Frontiers in Psychology*:

"Imagination, creativity, intellectual curiosity, and appreciation of esthetic experiences are reflected in openness/intellect. Openness/Intellect, in general, refers to the ability and desire to pay attention to and understand complicated stimuli." 2011 (Weisberg, DeYoung, and Hirsh).

Openness is positively connected with verbal/crystallized intellect in particular (Schretlen et al., 2010). People who are open to new experiences, by definition, put themselves in settings where they are more likely to learn new things than people who live in the same environment.

An individual's self-perception of their intelligence can also be influenced by openness. "Open persons tend to be viewed by themselves as considerably more intelligent," McCrae and Costa write (McCrae and Costa, 1987).

It is not clear, however, whether [openness](#) leads to enhanced intelligence or whether high intelligence leads to more openness to experience:

"Openness may help develop intelligence, or intelligence may help develop openness, but the two appear to be best viewed as different characteristics of individual differences" (McCrae and Costa, 1987).

Individual differences in openness

Like the other 'Big Five' traits, individual variations have been proven to influence openness to experience. There were notable disparities in openness between younger and older age groups and across genders.

1. Age and Openness

According to a study based on responses to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey Epidemiologic Follow-up Study, your willingness to try new things changes throughout time.

Researchers looked at data from a poll of 10,063 adults in the United States. They discovered that older persons reported lower degrees of openness (along with extraversion and neuroticism) than younger people. The study's findings suggest that our willingness to accept new ideas and experiences diminishes with age (Costa et al, 1986).

2. Gender

Men and women have different levels of openness to new experiences. When openness is considered separately from intelligence as a personality trait, women are found to be more open than their male counterparts.

However, inconsistent - both positive and negative - relationships have been discovered between gender and the various facets related to openness at the facet level (Weisberg, DeYoung, and Hirsh, 2011).

3. Cultural Differences

Is openness a quality that can be found throughout cultures, or is it a trait unique to the Western civilizations where it was first identified? The lexical technique to describe personality in a person's native language determines openness. As a result, openness inventories developed in English cannot assess the attribute in non-English speaking cultures.

As a result, psychologists have created culturally specific surveys to identify analogous names in French, German, and Spanish to describe elements of the five component qualities.

A series of research that looked into the replicability of Big Five findings in non-English speaking countries discovered that traits like openness are universally applicable across cultures (Psychologist World, 2021).

How Does Openness Influence Behavior?

Openness is frequently regarded as a favourable quality. Open people have a higher level of [intrinsic motivation](#). They are fascinated by the world and want to learn more about it. They're also eager to try new things.

This isn't to say that [openness is without drawbacks](#). People who have a high level of this attribute are more likely to participate in dangerous actions because they crave novelty. However, several researchers have found a correlation between decreased openness and a higher likelihood of drug use.

1. Creativity

The only personality attribute consistently [linked to creativity is openness to experience](#), which is one of the five traits outlined under the big five theory. People with a high level of openness are more likely to be creative in general, pursue creative endeavours, engage in diverse thinking, and participate in creative hobbies.

According to one study, [openness predicted creative](#) success in the arts, while having a solid sub-component of intellect predicted creative success in the sciences. Tests of this trait frequently show that artists and scientists score higher than people in other professions.

2. Learning and Knowledge

People with high levels of openness are typically encouraged to learn about new ideas and acquire new knowledge because they are interested in new things. According to research, openness to experience has been linked to intellect and what is known as crystallized intelligence. This form of intelligence entails the capacity to apply all of a person's acquired facts and knowledge throughout their life.

The ability to be open to new experiences has also been connected to cognition. The need for cognition manifests in a desire to engage in activities that require thought, such as debating ideas and performing mentally demanding tasks. Solving puzzles, brainstorming solutions to problems, and dissecting ideas are activities for people with a high need for cognition.

Persons with high cognition prefer to focus on features of the ideas themselves when listening to an argument. In contrast, people with low cognition need to pay more attention to things like the person's likability to deliver the argument.

3. Political Attitudes

Openness is linked to social and political opinions in studies. People that have a high level of openness are also more politically liberal. They are more welcoming of persons from various social, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

While [openness is associated with certain social and political attitudes](#), it is vital to recognize that the development of such beliefs is significantly more complicated than a single personality attribute. While it has long been assumed that personality features play a role in establishing subsequent political opinions, new research reveals that the link between the two could be due to genetic factors.

According to this research, other attributes, such as conscientiousness, the desire for order, intolerance of ambiguity, the need for closure, and fear of threats may also play a role in shaping overall political beliefs.

4. Relationships

[Relationships can also benefit from openness](#). While openness appears to be less relevant than some of the other personality traits, it has been demonstrated to impact sexual relationships significantly. People with high levels of openness are more knowledgeable about sexual relationships, have a more open attitude toward sex, and have had more sexual encounters.

According to research, there is also a link between women's high degrees of openness and their sexual happiness in their marriages. Another study found that openness plays a factor in determining how often married couples have sex.

Careers and Openness Trait

In tasks that need innovative thinking and a flexible attitude, having a high level of openness is critical. Advertising, research, and other artistic professions all benefit from a high level of openness. On a career exam, a person who scores low on openness may do well in repetitive tasks.

Openness and work outcomes

- *Openness in Less Complex and High Complex Jobs*

It was discovered that openness had a positive relationship with high-complexity job performance and a negative relationship with low-complexity job performance. More open individuals should be placed in occupations that will challenge them and offer them ample autonomy. Great Lakes Herald Vol 7, No 2,

September 2013 Page 30- Individuals who work in monotonous, mundane professions with a high level of openness will experience job anxiety and sadness. In contrast to previous research that found internal openness to be detrimental to performance (Griffin and Hesketh, 2004), they discovered that openness to both internal and external experience positively predicted performance in high-complexity jobs, while both dimensions negatively predicted performance in low-complexity jobs.

- *Openness and Job Progression*

Conscientiousness was found to mitigate the association between openness and career advancement. Openness has a detrimental impact on career advancement in highly conscientious people. This means that if a data entry operator is dedicated and well-organized, they may be able to advance quickly in their career. However, in such a work, a diverse set of talents and a high demand for diversity and innovation will counteract the impact of such behavior, slowing advancement. At the same time, it was discovered that openness predicts progress in low conscientious persons.

As a result, one can see that conscientiousness can compensate for a lack of openness and vice versa when looking at professional advancement. The caveat is that this association is conditional on the job's type. In a high-complexity position, the compensatory effect of openness on conscientiousness would be stronger than in a low-complexity job.

Although these two elements are opposed, they both probably connect to high demand for growth or achievement motivation (De Jong et al., 2001; Costa and McCrae, 1992). On the other hand, openness is more likely to correlate with better growth because it leads to more autonomy and the opportunity to broaden one's skill set.

- *Leadership and openness to experience*

Leadership must be transparent for innovation to flourish. Such leaders are more likely to be creative and imaginative, open to new ideas and learning new things. Openness to new experiences is thought to positively impact knowledge-sharing behaviours, speeding the speed at which information is shared and learned, critical for team growth and development (Zhang, Sun, Jiang, & Zhang, 2019).

Implications for Practice in Organizations

Because today's jobs are getting increasingly complex, it is advocated that openness be considered a key consideration for hiring individuals. Openness should be utilized as a selection factor for higher-level positions and for any role that requires a high level of task or context complexity. At the same time, employing openness as a selection or performance criterion should be approached with caution. Openness should not be confused with attributes like conscientiousness, which are more applicable to practically any job.

Conclusion

Because of its strong link to growth, openness is one of the most intriguing of the Big Five personality traits. Education, relationships, employment, spiritual, scientific understanding, and even our position as parents are all impacted by becoming more receptive to the experience. Accepting who we are, the options available, and the ability to grow entails becoming open to new experiences. While some characteristics of our personalities are inherited, we can continue to grow in our openness throughout our lives. As a result, we can live a more rewarding life while enhancing our mental and physical health.

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