

Notes on Openness to Experience

Trait or value?

Openness to Experience has been considered a personality trait for over 50 years and includes aspects like curiosity, imagination and introspection.

Trait usually refers to the part of a person's personality that won't change much after the age of maturity. I'm beginning to think, though, that a lot of what we call traits are more like values. To me, "a value" is a thing that one bases their thoughts and actions on, maybe even their identity. Something that one can grow in the more time and effort they give to caring and learning about it. So, when I started reading about Openness and its various aspects I was already seeing it as a value.



Curiosity

I decided to play the part of sales guy and hit up a friend who recently joined a great company. I intended to get an introduction and then hand them off to someone more qualified to strike a deal. However, my first attempt didn't work so I put together some swag and took them downtown. I was planning to drop the packages off but the front desk ended up being in the middle of a very open, very glass filled office. As folks started walking into reception to greet me I got that kind of nervous energy that either makes you shut down or amp up. I forced myself to stay loose and ended up having some great conversations about how our companies could partner.



Thinking about it now I realize that my Openness to Experience was propelled by curiosity. I wanted to know what it would be like to walk into the unknown, make a connection and win some business. I had a feeling that I was in the best position to make the connection. My desire to dig deeper and make connections is fueled by my imagination and internalization, aspects of Openness. It's a value that I practice.

Dopamine...

Openness to Experience has for years been understood as having little bearing on job performance. Mind boggling. A long held personality trait that is responsible for making connections and imagination, read *creativity*, has mistakenly not been valued in the workplace. Maybe this is in part due to how business for years has been done. Taylorism so deeply engrained in our understanding? I don't know, but what I think I do know is that Openness to Experience is perhaps the most important value we can look for in our leaders, maybe in every hire. Tech is advancing so rapidly and with it the marketplace and all of society. Don't we want people that are open and creative, thoughtful and curious making the changes that will determine how we engage with each other for decades?



Interesting fact about folks that are open to experience, they have higher rates of dopamine release while engaging in exploration. Exploration sounds a lot to me like solving great problems. Is this the recipe for productive employees? Maybe then we can all stop looking at our phones for our next high.