

Course Name: Organizational Behaviour: Individual Dynamics in Organization

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Week – 01

Lecture – 05

Lecture 5: Understanding individual differences -2

Hello all. Welcome back to the course on Organizational Behavior, Individual Dynamics in Organization.

Today as part of lecture 5, we will look deeper into understanding individual differences. If you just recall in the previous classes, we tried to introduce to you what organization is, what specifically do you mean by individual differences, how do OBM, Organizational Behavior Management exists within an organization, how OB has emerged as a discipline over the years taking significant contributions from subjects like psychology, sociology, anthropology etcetera, how a body of knowledge has emerged. We have also looked into different approaches of OB including evidence-based management, systematic approach and even intuition in making good decisions within organization.

So, today we will dig deeper into individual differences, understanding the nitty-gritties of individual differences.

I am Dr. Abraham Cyril Issac, faculty at the School of Business, Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati. Let us start with again a quote, “do celebrate our differences”. Generally, we tend to ignore our differences, generally we tend to oversee our differences, generally we tend to not adapt to our differences, but today as part of this lecture I would like to include or ask you to celebrate our differences.

Let us look individual differences in detail. Individual differences at work, if you look into the encyclopedia of social psychology, it defines individual difference in terms of enduring psychological characteristics. Now enduring psychological characteristics is critical because the individual difference points out the reality of the traits that distinguish individuals. It could be in a long term; it could be with respect to more endurance to the characteristics or the trait that is involved that the individual has. These help the individual to define his or her personal individuality.

Now when you are looking into individual differences, you say that this individual, we will look deeper into this, but as a precursor to the entire class, I would like to mention one thing at the beginning.

When you look into an individual, we tend to categorize him, stereotype him to one set or one category or one bucket altogether, but that in itself is helping her or him to build a certain individuality. So individual differences should not be taken as a weakness, rather individual difference has the potential to be a strength, to be a strength which can be captured, harnessed by the organization and which can be employed effectively within the organization. Among the most important kinds of individual differences are intelligence, personality traits and values. These are the findings of Williamson, 2018.

So when we have introduced individual differences, I had mentioned or I had taken that topic in a more peripheral level, but today I am going bit deeper including incorporating certain research perspectives also. So mainly with respect to intelligence, with respect to personality traits, with respect to values, you find individuals differing within the organization. The study of individual differences is otherwise known as differential or trait psychology and is studied more by personality psychologists rather than social psychologists. So basically, the traits are involved, how one individual is different from another in the organizational setup that is what makes the whole equation relevant.

Now let us look into individual differences in a very fragmented microscopic angle. Why are people different? Why are people different? People are generally different mainly because of one, genetic characteristics and two, acquired characteristics. When you are looking into genetic, you have physical, you have mental, temperamental and when you are looking into acquired, you have social, cultural, educational and emotional. I will be dealing with each of them in a detailed fashion, but let us understand one thing before we progress.

The genetic and acquired differences do not operate separately. It is not a watertight segmentation as I made here, but individual behaviors is nothing but a manifestation of each of these aspects.

Let us take any individual, let us take Ramesh. He comes into an organization or Suma. She comes to an organization. There are individual differences that could be supported, but mainly if you look into, it is a mixture of genetic and acquired characteristics. It is a mixture of what all factors you see. It could be physical, it could be mental, it could be temperamental from social, cultural as well as educational or emotional.

This is what makes every individual different, this combination. So let us have a clarity in thought that individual differences is not caused by a single element. Rather it is an

outcome of what you see as a combination or a combinatorial arrangement of these many factors. At a time, there could be different factors that could be working in place and this is what individual differences signify.

Now we also look into a case where you look into an example where employees' physical disability. Now it is a restricting aspect, no doubt about it, that restricts their movement, but providing an assistive technology altogether, an inclusive culture can bring them to work at par with any other employee. Let us remember one thing. You are providing any assistive technology making her or his movement quite easy within the organization. It does not end there.

You have to have an inclusive culture to estimate or to facilitate the maximum productivity or realize the maximum potentialities of that particular individual. So let us take a case where there is a physical disability. In that particular case you can overcome that, no doubt about it, because we do not talk about disabilities anymore. We talk about differential abilities that every single individual is having. So, this particular example which requires an assistive technology incorporated with the inclusive culture will give you a very good environment for the individual to work in a very good manner, in a very productive manner.

Now let us look into each of these factors, both genetic as well as acquired in a very detailed fashion. Let us look into the first and the foremost on physical. Now there is no doubt that physical characteristics are there. You take an organization, you go to your organization, just have a, you already would have definitely noted it, but you generally have a cursory look of the entire set of individuals working in your organization. You will see that every single individual is different from one another in one or another perspective, one or another aspect of physical appearance.

It could be anything from color, skin tone, the way they are appearing, the body structure, the texture, the tone, tenor, there are lot of such difficulties. Let us look that into in detailed fashion.

Physical differences refer to the variations in the physical characteristics or attributes of individuals which can encompass a wide range of characteristics related to human body, I repeat physical differences refer to variations in the physical characteristics or attributes of individuals which can encompass a wide range of characteristics related to the human body. Now, these differences are many. These differences are one genetic diversity.

Many physical differences if you see are determined by an individual's genetic makeup. If

you remember in the first class we had looked into this genetic makeup and the variations that can bring in in terms of organizational behavior, composition, organizational behavior, predisposition. So genetic makeup is very critical. It can include variations in terms of height, in terms of eye color, in terms of skin tone, hair type, body shape etc. which we already talked about.

Let's look into race and ethnicity which is very clearly considered or understood in multicultural organization, multinational organizations, multinational corporates. Race and ethnicity are often associated with specific physical characteristics. For example, people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds may have distinct skin tones, facial features, the hair textures might be different. So, we are now specifically looking at the physical variations which you can notice within the organization. You might see a lot of your colleagues who are even from the same place, same district, same town, same city or same village but still they are different from you.

They might have different altogether child rearing practices, lot of psychological aspects, the mindset, everything would be different but one thing is that distinguishes you from them is the physical characteristics. You cannot have two individuals of similar characteristics in terms of the physical appearance.

Physical abilities is yet another factor. Physical abilities where physical differences can encompass disabilities, impairments that affect an individual's mobility, sensory perception or even physical functioning. Let's take the example of mobility impairments, visual or hearing impairments.

In the case of situations like cerebral palsy or let's look into issues like muscular dystrophy. So, all these aspects there are some physical disabilities. Now when your work environment, the motto here is to make you more sensitized to what all are the different physical differences that exist within the workplace. You must have already noticed if not please look into how inclusive the workplace has become over the last few decades. If you look specifically with respect to last decade you will appreciate that how inclusive your workspace has become.

Be it any organization there has been a drastic change without seeing the organization in particular. There could be gradation, there could be difference in degrees. But one thing that is very particular is every single organization has worked a certain extent to incorporate the differences especially with respect to physical differences and this is to sensitize you to those changes.

There could be another important aspect which is age related changes which is not significantly within our own aspect or within our own hands. So, what age related

changes means that being a natural process aging has certain connotation or certain ramifications in terms of your body, within your body. There are some changes that happen in your body including wrinkles, grey hair, decreased muscle mass altogether and there could be problems with vision or hearing etc. But that does not mean that he or she, the employee which you are referring to is no more good for the organization and you can just throw them off. No, that is not the way, that is not the aspect that you have to understand. You have to look them in more consideration. You have to look into their experience.

You have to look into how fruitful they are or how effective they could be within the organizational set up. So physical aspects are many. There are lot of differences that are enshrined by the physical differences be genetic diversity, the race and ethnicity, physical abilities, disabilities, multiple abilities, age related changes etc.

So first and the foremost type of factor which contributes to the individual differences within the organization towards the employees is nothing but physical.

Now let us look into cognitive, the mental ability part. Diverse cognitive functions. You can look into memory, you can look into attention, reasoning, problem solving, language comprehension, logical ability, creativity. The functions work together to help individual process, interpret and respond to information within their environment. I repeat they help them to process, interpret and respond to information from their environment. So basically, you look into any of these factors, be it memory, be it attention, reasoning, problem solving, language comprehension etc. You have these abilities or every single individual uses these abilities to mainly respond to, interpret and process the changes that are happening, the environmental cues that you are going to get, the stimuli you are going to get. You are getting these insights to respond to that particular stimuli and that is what diverse cognitive functions are all about.

Let us look into influence and learning of learning on performance. Learning on performance is again underscored by mental ability which plays a critical role in individual's capacity to learn and acquire new knowledge and excel in various tasks and domain. You might have seen individuals who the moment, the day they come into the organization they have the urge to study, to develop, to learn. But there are also individuals within the organization set up who once they are into the organization they feel completely relaxed, they stop the learning process, they achieved what they wanted to in their life that is the intention, that is a mindset that they might be carrying.

But that is in counter purpose with what organizational learning is all about. You have to be an individual who is having that urge to learn, to excel, to make or do the task even if it is, let us say there could be a counter argument, what about a mundane activity, what about very mechanistic job structure, it does not require much of learning. But how about

thinking it from a different dimension? Let us look into the job. Can we do that job, the same job, the same mundane mechanistic job that every day you are supposed to do, can you do it in a more efficient and effective way? Can you be more effective in reducing the number of actions or the steps involved in the job process? If you invoke the scientific management principles of F.W. Taylor which we discussed in the first class, we will see that can the job, the entire job could be broken down into simple task and each task come bring out a best way to perform that task in the most efficient manner. This could be the learning process. This is the influence of learning on performance within the organization. So, when you are into the organization, do not think yourself as a person who has achieved everything now no need to do anything, just do the work, what is assigned, you will keep on getting promoted, you will keep on getting up the hierarchy and that is how it is never. In the ever-changing world, in the era of information, you have everything at your fingertips.

You have everything within you that you can just check in and just cross check, just learning is just few few fingertips away, finger strokes away. So basically, you have this scenario, every one of your peer is making use of that, so if you are not making use of this, the learning will get disrupted and you will end up in the bottom of the hierarchy.

Now coming to development and adaptability. This is yet again another significant aspect of mental abilities where mental abilities are not static but can be developed and improved throughout the life. Let us say factors such as training, education. You might be seeing that a batch of recruits, a freshly recruited batch has come up and the HR manager is facing a conundrum. He or she is facing a problem that all these individuals who have come up as part of this latest recruitment batch, they are not good in terms of working English or their language skills is pretty poor. What they can do? They can obviously give some training, some external education so that they can bring them up to speed, give them the necessary working knowledge in the language what is preferred there. That could be one thing. You also feel that some individuals who are not good in keeping time. There is lack of time management that is happening. You can obviously pitch in and give a training in time management or some skills, soft skills or some particular analytical skills. Anything and everything could be trained. So learning is a process and your mental ability which is a part of individual differences gives you a chance to develop and adapt to the situation which the organization demands you from. This is what the development and adaptability means in the mental ability framework.

So types of individual differences we are looking one by one. We looked into physical, we are looking into mental ability. One another critical factor within the mental ability is intelligence. Intelligence yes for sure has a genetic basis with hereditary factors contributing to an individual's cognitive potential. No doubt about it. There is a certain element. This is again leading to the nature versus nurture debate but this is strongly in

favor of the genetic manifestation. There is a cognitive potential associated with the genetic manifestation. These genetic influences shape an individual's inherent capacity for learning, problem solving and adapting to new information. For example, some people they are very wary of new information.

Let's say there is some new technology transfer. You are working in an Indian company and there has been a collaboration with a Chinese company. Let's say you are working in BHEL. There has been a collaboration with Shanghai Engineering Corporation or there is a collaboration with GE. So suddenly there is a technology transfer that is coming in and there are some individuals who are within your team who are wary about the changes because you are dealing mainly with the analog systems. You have to train yourself, attune yourself to the SCADA systems or the digital system.

So suddenly there is a level of difference that you feel in terms of accepting the technology transfer, in terms of imbibing, absorbing the technology transfer. This is also part of an individual difference. This is also part of intelligence. This is also part of mental capability.

Another factor which is very critical in terms of individual difference is the temperament. Now temperament refers to an individual's innate and enduring patterns of behavior, emotions and reactivity. So, I will use the three terms behavior, emotions and reactivity, stimuli which are present from early in fancy and tend to remain relatively stable throughout the life. So how as an individual you develop, let us say you do not feel that there has been a temperament that has suddenly happened within the organization. Temperamental issues are always with you. You might be a person who reacts very heavily, very strongly in terms of an adverse stimuli.

There are individuals who are very calm, composed. They are not too much frustrated. Even when there are adverse stimuli all over the place, their reactions are quite subtle. They are very calm and composed. Are you that type of individual or are you the person whose behavior, emotions and reactivity to stimuli are quite strong and violent or vociferous? So, this is what makes you critical and this is what underlines what temperament within individual difference means. It is nothing but the biological foundation of your personality.

I repeat it is the biological foundation of your personality. Temperament traits can include qualities such as levels of adaptability, the social adaptability, sociability, adaptability, emotional intensity, activity level and sensitivity to stimuli. Apart from everything the sensitivity to stimuli is critical. There might be individuals who work in any environment. It does not make any sense that the environment is very harsh. It is very disadvantageous

for you, but they are able to perform because that is the passion which they bring to the work.

But there are also some individuals who are very much wary, who are very much fussy about the environment. These are the ways you react to external stimuli. These are the ways you tend to adapt to external stimuli. These are the ways you tend to bring out your emotions and bring out your behavioural patterns towards external stimuli.

Then comes another individual difference which is more of a social. The norms, the values, the attitudes individuals develop are shaped by the social set ups and groups. There is no doubt about it. When you are actually working in a collectivistic scenario like the Indian culture, you will be able to appreciate it in a much better way. The norms, the values, the attitudes all are moulded, all are shaped by your social fabric, your social support system.

Personal values generally aligned with that of organisation influence their behaviour at the work. So, you have a certain level of learning within your social set up that this is how you perform. So even if you have a certain other level of intelligence, even if there is difference in your ability, be it mental or physical, even if you are different from the rest of the lot, there is some learning that has been happened in your CRPs, within your child rearing practices that you know you have to adapt to environment, you have to accept every change, you have to accept people as it is, you have to try to acknowledge the differences, then you are prone to be a team player. You are prone to be a versatile person within the organisation. The contrary would be that you are always the thorn among the bushes, you are the person who is always loathed, you are the person who will not succeed himself or herself as a team player.

It certainly, the social fabric or the social support certainly adds to the self-concept and identity. Many a time you feel that the individual is making his mark mainly because of the social support, mainly because of the social set up he is in, mainly because of the support system he gets across. So social is also an angle of individual differences.

Now let us look into cultural differences. We are going one by one. Cultural differences again in the coming modules I deal with the specific national culture and the ramifications in greater detail but to put things into perspective, variations in beliefs, values, behaviours and even customs and norms that arise from distinct cultural backgrounds in which people raised and they leave. So basically, you come from a cultural disposition, you come from a cultural pattern where you are respectful of your elders. So, this is one universal trait I have seen across. In an individualistic scenario you are respectful to elders but some collectivism, let us look into a case of Japan where people are more respectful. Every talk, every interaction, every greeting, every discussion

has a certain higher level of respect when compared to other cultural contexts.

So, culture difference, so those individuals who have this in their background, they come and see that a totally different cultural phenomena is happening in terms of greeting, in terms of appreciation, in terms of talking, this would create a cognitive dissonance in them. The individual difference also is marked by cultural differences. Effective could be by geographic locations. We have already seen that language, religion, spirituality, cultural symbols, art, food, cuisine, all are different. These are the different parameters, these are the different set factors that actually create a cultural mixture within you.

How you are, what you are, the basic definition of you as an individual, the basic identity, cultural identity of you as an individual is an amalgamation of the entire set of language, religion, spirituality, culture, symbols, art, food, cuisine, what you are is defined by these factors. So, these are the culture differences. Now let us look into type of individual differences from the educational angle. You can look into a person who is more prone to developing the skills as I have already mentioned in the learning predisposition. The moment he or she comes into the organization, there is greater learning capability or, larger learning urge that is being displayed by the individual.

Some are more aware about the social distinction. Some are more aware of the, there are people who are culturally ignorant. There are people who do not take the cultural differences seriously. They tend to believe that okay this culture, I don't know, I don't care about those things, my ultimate intention is to perform. I am a task-oriented person. That could be detrimental for you if you are in a more team-oriented organization.

If your task is bigger, it is always better to work in team because there are individual limitations. There are limitations in terms of your abilities to get a task done. There are limitations in terms of the amount of data you can process. There are limitations in terms of the amount of work specifically you can do with respect to a job. So, all these aspects, your cultural and social awareness creates, kicks in and makes an individual difference.

There are certain values and beliefs already established in cultural dispositions. There are personal interests and passions. There are some individuals who even if it is a very mundane activity, they tend to have a certain bit of passion. Let's look into a case of Rajesh who has been working in a mundane situation but still he as an individual, though he is working in let's say CNC machining or let's say he is working in some manufacturing firm, he has a passion towards coding.

He has a passion towards learning new languages. So, he is well versed in taking courses in Python or what all languages he is passionate about interested in. So, these personal

interests and passions will go a long way to actually give him the required career boost at the right time. Career aspirations can be actually supplemented by these passions. Career aspirations could actually be driven by these passions.

There could be network and social connections. Network and social connection is yet again an important aspect in educational aspect in terms of individual difference. There are people who are very much reserved. You see that within the organization you have different cabins or cubicles. There are individuals who restrain themselves to their cabin.

There are individuals who don't come out. Let's say your job work is let's say 9 to 6. You hardly see that individual except in the lunch hours or something that you see that person coming out. There are individuals like that. In those cases, the networking suffers, the connection, social connection suffers. So, it's vital in your organizational setup, in the present day phenomenon, it's always better to have a cross functional arrangement.

It's always better to have a networking within your setup. You tend to know; you tend to understand different people from different functions. God knows when these connections, when these aspects or when these networks can be useful to you. There are also some of the educational requirements like problem solving and decision making which also trigger individual differences.

There are also aspects of cultural and socio-economic background. There are also aspects of cultural and socio-economic background which tend to give up different educational standpoint.

You might be more reserved, more focused or more inclined towards pursuing a certain level of socio-economic status. That may drive you in a different way within the organization. There are also possibilities of different learning styles and preferences that exist within the organization. So educational aspect is yet again another important individual difference denominator.

Now comes the emotional aspect, one of the most critical factors. Emotional differences add to individual differences by contributing to variations in how people experience, express and manage their emotions. I would like to use all the two. One is to experience, express and manage. So, if you are an individual who experiences the emotion in a nice way but is unable to express and manage the emotion, you are not considered well in terms of your emotional quotient. If you are a person who can experience and express your emotion but when at times you are not able to manage it properly, again you are not good with your emotional quotient.

But if you are an individual who can experience, express and even manage your

emotions to the right way, you can use your emotions to the success of you and the organization in a larger framework, then your emotional dimension within the individual differences kicks in and it is acting as a strength rather than weakness.

I repeat you have to experience, express and manage your emotions in the right way. There are individuals, there are individuals, you look into your organization, you go back and look into your organization, you will see that there are people who are not able to express their emotions. They always have a very sad, glimmer face, they always have a very different preoccupation, they always tend to not get satisfied or their face reflects dissatisfaction at all levels.

So this is that inability to express the emotion and manage their emotions in a proper way. Differences arise from a combination of genetic predispositions from early life experience to culture differences and personal development which we will look in the coming modules.

Now why? Why we look into individual differences? We have seen individual differences in greater detail, we have seen individual differences happening with respect to different factors be it terms of genetic as well as acquired. Why all these analyses is relevant? Why understanding, studying, appreciating, acknowledging individual differences is relevant, is critical? This is where we stop this lecture.

Why it is critical is because of competency. Let us look into competency. What is competency? It is an interrelated set of skills, behaviors and attitudes and knowledge needed by an individual to be effective in most professional and managerial positions. Now self-competency is something that is the ability to assess your own strengths and weakness, set and pursue personal and professional goals, balance work and personal life and engage new learning including new or change skills, behaviors and attitudes, lot of words, everything combined together. But all these individual differences, acknowledging is the first step at managing one's own and subordinate's competency. If you look into all these competencies, be it communication competency, be it diversity competency, ethics, a cross-culture competency, teams' competency, change competency, self-competency. I have given the reference, I have taken this from the research paper, but you will see and appreciate that why you want to acknowledge and appreciate the individual difference, the answer is simple.

It takes all types of people to make the world. We have established that over the previous module. It takes different people to set up your organization. People come from different backgrounds, people have different predispositions, different attitudes, different personalities, different acquired set of skills, different genetic makeup, everybody is different. But you as an organization, you as an organization if you want to exist in

harmony, you as an organization if you want to thrive, survive and flourish, then you have to acknowledge and appreciate the individual differences. Individual differences brings in a lot of opportunities rather than threats.

Individual differences brings in a lot of solutions rather than problem. Individual differences brings in a lot of results rather than questions. So, this is why it is always essential, it is always vital to acknowledge and appreciate the individual differences. I will try to establish it in greater macro-economic angle, macroscopic angle in the coming lectures with respect to diversity.

Thank you for listening to me patiently. See you in the next class. See you with the next module. Thank you. Namaskar. Thank you.
