Chapter 03 - Individual differences

Answers to end of chapter questions

1. Are factors inventions rather than discoveries?

Because factors are seen to be underlying trends in personality and intelligence, and are discovered through rigorous statistical analysis, factors are discoveries rather than inventions.

2. To what extent is the ‘big five’ account of personality an unhelpful oversimplification?

It does not take into account context, and assumes that behaviour is consistent across all situations.

3. Is Freud essentially fiction?

Fiction describes events and people in an imaginary way. Freud uses imaginative ways to describe our subconscious, and how it is influenced therefore it could be considered fiction. Hans Eysenck were extremely critical of Freud, seeing his work as essentially unscientific fairy stories. The oral and anal personalities to some extent resemble the agreeable and conscientiousness dimensions described earlier. Their presence as factors does not, of course, imply Freud was correct about the way these differences develop.

4. Is the only way to describe personality or intelligence scientifically to use factor analysis?

If science is considered to be the systematic study of the structure and the behaviour of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment or an organized body of work on any subject, then the approach taken by Freud can be considered to be a scientific way to describe personality or intelligence.

5. What relevance do Freudian concepts have to the workplace?

Freudian concepts are relevant to the workplace as they help us to understand why people don’t always act rationally, and that there are often underlying reasons for some behaviours which can’t always be obviously attributed to the organizational environment.
6. What is ‘G’?

Unlike personality, which can be broken down into a number of factors, there is a considerable amount of agreement that a large proportion of the variance in intelligence scores can be accounted for by a single, large general factor: G. G is also one of the most controversial results in psychology, which to this day causes extreme reactions. It is either seen as explaining everything or as something that itself needs to be explained away. Summarizing 85 years of selection research, Schmidt and Hunter (1998) concluded if hiring individuals with no previous experience of a role, an individual’s performance on a test of G still seems to be the best predictor of his or her future performance.

7. An individual’s ability can be captured best by assessing his or her level of G—discuss.

G measures how well we do on spatial, verbal, numerical, memory and other types of test. It measure a type of intelligence however whether or not it captures ‘best’ our ability in all situations is questionable.

8. Can intelligence be improved?

Not if it’s considered to be biologically determined.

9. What impact do assumptions about differences in intelligence have on effectiveness at work?

Carol Dweck (2002) argued that the belief that intelligence is fixed has profound consequences and produces striking differences in behaviour compared to those who believe it is more malleable. Dweck conducted a number of studies with students. She found that the belief intelligence is fixed appeared to lead to defensive, self defeating behaviours, for example sacrificing valuable learning opportunities. Students who have been praised for their intelligence demonstrate a steep decline in their enjoyment of a task once they hit difficulty. They did not appear to want to remedy their deficiencies. In contrast, she argued that the belief intelligence is more malleable engenders a focus on the longer term and the strategies which lead to learning, self-improvement and achievement.