



# Trait Development: Research and Application

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# ABSTRACT

When thinking about the major factors contributing to organizational growth, it is crucial to consider both trait and skill development of the employees. However, most of the research in the field of organizational development continues to focus on skills only. Consequently, due to the limited amount of research on trait modification, the number of development applications addressing trait change has also been quite limited if any. This paper, introduces the importance of the trait modification and its potential for future research

It has always been assumed that we are either born with a set of innate traits, or acquire them early on in our childhoods as a result of our environment. Thus most traits are perceived to be not only the building blocks of our personalities, but also consistent companions throughout our lives, always influencing our decisions, behaviors and views of ourselves. Furthermore, given this view of traits as inborn aspects of ourselves, many believe that that it is quite impossible to change them; one can merely improve oneself through development of skills. For this reason, most of the research done in the area of Organizational Development continues to be in skill acquisition; some of the skills most commonly studied have been for the improvement of leadership, motivation, conflict resolution, team building and decision making.

In general, the formation of traits is a result of genetics and the environment which acts as a catalyst for the emergence of these traits by wiring the brain to process information in a certain way. The wiring usually occurs as a result of the person being constantly exposed to various stimuli and cues in their environment, thus prompting the brain to pick up and learn patterns regarding everyday situations and behaviors of others. Once the pattern has been learnt, the person will respond to those stimuli by behaving in ways that are most effective in ensuring his/her survival and adaptation within their surroundings, based on their genetic predisposition. The combination of these distinct behaviors is what lies in the foundation of all traits, while the combination of these traits is the basis of personality. According to research, even though personality is constantly transforming throughout ones' life, most psychologists believe that its fundamentally formed by age seven, thus making it highly difficult for someone to change who they are, especially at an older age. In addition, given the commonly accepted limitations associated with trait modification, there has not been much research done in that area, which directly reflects the lack of organizational and management development programs currently available specifically geared towards traits. However, considering the influential nature of traits and skills on individual's behaviors and productivity, it is plausible to conclude that if one wishes to increase their ability to achieve their personal and professional goals, it is important to learn ways to modify their traits and learn new skills.

The Dharma Life Program offers the opportunity for people to learn how to modify their traits and is geared towards addressing their specific unbalanced traits. The program is science based, thus most of the solutions and interventions provided throughout the course of the program are created from current research in neuroscience, psychology, physiology and original

research completed by the Dharma Life research team. At the foundation of the Dharma Life program is the idea that genetics, coupled with various experiences in ones' childhood cause an individual to attain a certain trait, referred to as the primary trait, which acts as the main driving force of all behaviors and decisions a person makes throughout their life. Thus far, we have identified many primary traits such as: anger, high empathy, low empathy, impatience, laziness, nervousness, perfectionism, pessimism, sadness, self-esteem, self-control, sensitivity, social fear, submissiveness, superiority, and trust. Each primary trait is linked to a unique wiring statement, which is an unconscious set of preconceived and highly subjective beliefs regarding the situations one encounters in their life in relation to self and others. All information gets processed through the lens of the wiring statement associated with the person's trait. Often a time, due to the subjective nature of the wiring statements, the conclusions reached via this route are not always the best for the person as these beliefs become distorted in the person's mind and are not reflective of reality. That is not to say that primary traits are always negative, there are positive aspects to all traits, however due to the cognitive distortions at the root of each primary trait, people will often react in ways that are detrimental to their success and overall well-being. In other words, all primary traits manifest themselves on a spectrum from low to high, with average being the ideal; it is when the trait falls into one of the two extremes that it becomes unbalanced. In addition, very often as a result of the primary trait, a person can acquire a set of secondary traits which further reinforce the person's maladaptive habits. For example, a person whose primary trait is low self-esteem, will often develop sadness and/or submissiveness as their secondary trait. Secondary traits are often more observable by the person and others, thus making it easier to identify.

Considering the increased need for Organizational Development programs which focus on trait modification, the Dharma Life Trait Skills program is a 6-week program specifically tailored towards working with employees on discovering and balancing their unbalanced traits which hinder them from achieving their organizational and individual goals. The program consists of several main components. First the employee works with their assigned mentor on discovering their trait through one-on-one phone discovery sessions, once their trait has been identified their mentor will discuss their company's and individual goals and how they relate to their trait. The employee will then begin working on actions which are meant to balance his/her trait through the use of a downloadable app and weekly one-on-one over the phone mentor sessions.

There are five types of research-based actions: Physical actions-which change the required hormones and neurotransmitters, dietary actions-which provide the precursors for the required hormones and neurotransmitters, brain actions-which are games meant to alter the brain wiring that unconsciously creates the unbalanced trait, mind actions-which cause a change in the trait at both the conscious and unconscious levels, and real-world actions- which help to make changes permanent by integrating them into real-life activities and situations. The desired organizational behavioral change is achieved through specific programs for the selected employees that are critical for achieving the organizational goal. Progress is measured through the use of scores attained on questionnaires prior and right after the program and is computed by the Dharma Life program which measures the progress of each activity in relation to time it takes the person to complete it.

Given the lack of organizational development programs focusing on trait modification and the breakthrough these program can offer, we recommend further research on the effectiveness of trait modification in relation to improvement in leadership, motivation, conflict resolution, team building and decision making.