

The Enneagram: Unlock Your Hidden Personality Potential

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The Enneagram of Personality (or simply the Enneagram, from the Greek words ennea and grammos) is a typology of human personality. Principally developed by Oscar Ichazo and Claudio Naranjo, it is also partly based on earlier teachings of G. I. Gurdjieff. The typology defines nine personality types (also called "enneatypes"), which are also indicated by the points of a geometric figure, called an enneagram, which also indicate some of the connections between the types. As there are different schools of thought among Enneagram theorists about some aspects of how it is understood, its interpretation is not always unified or consistent.

The Enneagram of Personality is not a typology that is commonly taught or researched in academic psychology. It has been widely promoted in both business management and spiritual contexts through seminars, conferences, books, magazines and DVDs. In business contexts it is generally used as a typology to gain insights into workplace dynamics; in spirituality it is more commonly presented as a path to higher states of being, essence and enlightenment. It has been described as a method for self-understanding and self-development but has been criticized as being subject to interpretation, making it difficult to test or validate scientifically.

History

G. I. Gurdjieff is credited with introducing the enneagram figure to the West. He did not, however, develop the nine personality types associated with the Enneagram. Oscar Ichazo is generally recognized as the principal source of the contemporary Enneagram of Personality. Ichazo's "Enneagon of Ego Fixations", together with a number of other dimensions of personality mapped on the enneagram figure, forms the basis of the Enneagram of Personality. Bolivian-born Ichazo began teaching programs of self-development in the 1950s. His teaching, which he calls "Protoanalysis", uses the enneagram figure among many other symbols and ideas. Ichazo founded the Arica Institute which was originally based in Chile before moving to the United States and coined the term "Enneagram of Personality".

Claudio Naranjo is a Chilean-born psychiatrist who first learned the Enneagram from Ichazo at a course in Arica, Chile. He then began developing and teaching his own understanding of the Enneagram in the United States in the early 1970s, influencing others, including some Jesuit priests who adapted the Enneagram for use in Christian spirituality. Naranjo's student Helen Palmer has written a number of books that focused the Enneagram on self-analysis, family and workplace relationships. There is no unified school of thought among proponents regarding the interpretation or use of the Enneagram personality types. Ichazo disowned Naranjo, Palmer and the Jesuits on what he felt were misinterpretations and uses of the Enneagram, however even within Naranjo's group of followers there are differing interpretations of the nine types. Various other authors, including Richard Rohr, Elizabeth Wagele and Don Richard Riso, also began publishing widely-read books on the Enneagram of Personality in the 1980s and 1990s.

Enneagram figure

The enneagram figure is usually composed of three parts; a circle, an inner triangle (connecting 3-6-9) and an irregular hexagonal "periodic figure" (connecting 1-4-2-8-5-7). According to esoteric spiritual traditions, the circle symbolizes unity, the inner triangle symbolizes the "law of three" and the hexagon represents the "law of seven" (because 1-4-2-8-5-7-1 is the repeating decimal created by dividing one by seven in base 10 arithmetic). These three elements constitute the enneagram figure.

Nine types

The table below gives the principal characteristics of the nine types along with their basic relationships. This table is based on *Understanding the Enneagram: The Practical Guide to Personality Types* (revised edition) by Don Richard Riso and Russ Hudson. Other theorists may disagree on some aspects. The types are normally referred to by their numbers but sometimes their "characteristic roles" (which refers to distinctive archetypal characteristics) are used instead. The "stress" and "security" points (sometimes referred to as the "disintegration" and "integration" points) are the types, connected by the lines of the enneagram figure, that it is believed a person may be particularly influenced by in more adverse or relaxed circumstances. According to theory, someone classed as a One type, for example, may begin to think, feel and act more like a Four type when stressed, or more like a Seven type when relaxed.

Wings

Most, but not all, Enneagram of Personality theorists teach that a person's basic type is modified, at least to some extent, by the personality dynamics of the two adjacent types as indicated on the enneagram figure. These two types are often called "wings". A person of the Three personality type, for example, is understood to have points Two and Four as their wing types. The circle of the enneagram figure may indicate that the types or points exist on a spectrum rather than as distinct types or points unrelated to those adjacent to them. A person may be understood, therefore, to have a core type and one or two wing types that influence but do not change the core type.

Stress and security points

The lines between the points add further meaning to the information provided by the descriptions of the types. Sometimes called the "security" and "stress" points, or points of "integration" and "disintegration", these connected points also contribute to a person's overall personality. There are, therefore, at least four other points that can significantly affect a person's core personality; the two points connected by the lines to the core type and the two wing points.

Instinctual subtypes

Each of the personality types are usually understood as having three subtypes. These three subtypes are believed to be formed according to which one of three instinctual energies of a person is dominantly developed and expressed. The instinctual energies are usually called "self-preservation", "sexual" (also called "intimacy" or "one-to-one") and "social". On the instinctual level, people may internally stress and externally express the need to protect themselves (self-preservation), to connect with important others or partners (sexual), or to get along or succeed in groups (social). From this perspective, there are 27 distinct personality patterns, because people of each of the nine types also express themselves as one of the three subtypes. An alternative approach to the subtypes looks at them as three domains or clusters of instincts that result in increased probability of survival (the "preserving" domain), increased skill in navigating the social environment (the "navigating" domain) and increased likelihood of reproductive success (the "transmitting" domain). From this understanding the subtypes reflect individual differences in the presence of these three separate clusters of instincts.

It is generally believed that people function in all three forms of instinctual energies but that one usually dominates. According to some theorists another instinct may also be well-developed and the third often markedly less developed.