

EXTRORVERTS RULE!



It has been a long-held belief that extroverts rule, while introverts often struggle to have their ideas heard, but both personality types bring fresh perspectives to work.

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As featured in
The CEO Magazine
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The role of introverts in the workplace has gained more prominence in occupational research. Susan Cain, the author of *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, highlights the differences in how introverts perceive and operate their world. Neither shy nor aloof, they choose to remain more reserved, and can become over-stimulated or frazzled in chaotic, noisy environments.

One can be an introvert, and enjoy socialising, but the choice of environment and how they conserve and expend energy differs. Introverts need time alone to regroup from overstimulating environments that can cause them energy loss. This differs to extroverts, who gain energy from social interactions, and so give the impression they have more to offer in the business world.

The simple matter is that introverts become fatigued by large groups and need time out to process and reflect, while extroverts do not. Introverts may prefer to write their ideas down instead of presenting them. It does not necessarily mean that introverted personality types shy away from anything social or stimulating, but rather, as Professor of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences at UCLA, Emanuel Maidenberg argues, their preference for quiet time differs.

Introversion and extroversion are a continuum, however. Depending on the context, all of us can display both tendencies. Research has shown that there is also a third personality type on this spectrum called ambiversion. This is characterised by oscillation between introversion and extroversion, depending on factors such as context, stressors, subjective feelings, and group dynamics. Ambiversion is more situational than genetic or psychological, and individuals with this personality type adapt to the situation they are in.

While personality differences have been the focus of studies for decades, their role in workplace dynamics and the link to positive organisational behaviour has only recently emerged. No two people are the same and no two people will interact with their environment in the same way. That raises a challenge to organisations to tailor their approaches to meet individual needs. Personalities play a key role in how employees handle workplace stress, and heavily influence workplace dynamics and culture.

WORKING WITH OTHERS

The working environment can be a struggle for different temperaments and personalities, and organisations can manage these differences through supporting employees individually. It is imperative that managers do not use a one-size-fits-all model with their employees, but work to find a tailor-made solution to meet individual needs.

According to Dr Mark Parkinson of the Association of Business Psychology, people have stereotypical views of the personalities of their colleagues, and this is especially so if the personality is significantly different to their own. It is not necessary for organisations to balance teams in terms of personality types, but the composition of a team should be based on its purpose. This, he argues, is where psychometrics comes in.

Personality profiling can help managers delegate work because it gives an understanding of what each employee may be good at. That said, an unbalanced team of different personality types all working towards a common goal can be useful to an organisation because each team member can bring something different.

Psychometrics may be useful for determining an individual's default personality and behaviour type, but managers should be aware that employees are multifaceted individuals, and different situations will bring out different traits in each. Psychometrics can only tell us so much and, therefore, has limited validity when it comes to predicting the multiple ways in which an employee can act in a given situation.

COLLABORATION OVERLOAD

Many working models subscribe to the notion of teamwork, collaboration and endless meetings to harness creativity, but this does not work well for individuals whose creative juices and energy levels are depleted through constant collaboration. In fact, many individuals, especially those on the introverted end of the personality spectrum, find it difficult to get their work done in this environment. As such, they begin to suffer 'collaboration overload' and can burn out.

Organisations can provide a space for these individuals to work in isolation, where their productivity increases and creative juices flow. Providing a tailored environment is imperative to an employee's success and, ultimately, the success of the organisation.

QUIET TIME

Introverted personalities are not only deep thinkers but also deep feelers, and these attributes can be used to benefit the work environment. They often display a good level of empathy and are good listeners; listening quietly, processing and thinking, and taking on board the thoughts of others. They patiently review, through introspection, a response. This is a good skill in team meetings, where it may initially appear that they have nothing to say, but they are quietly mulling over, taking on board the ideas of everyone in the group, where they can then reflect on their ideas in their own time and space. ■