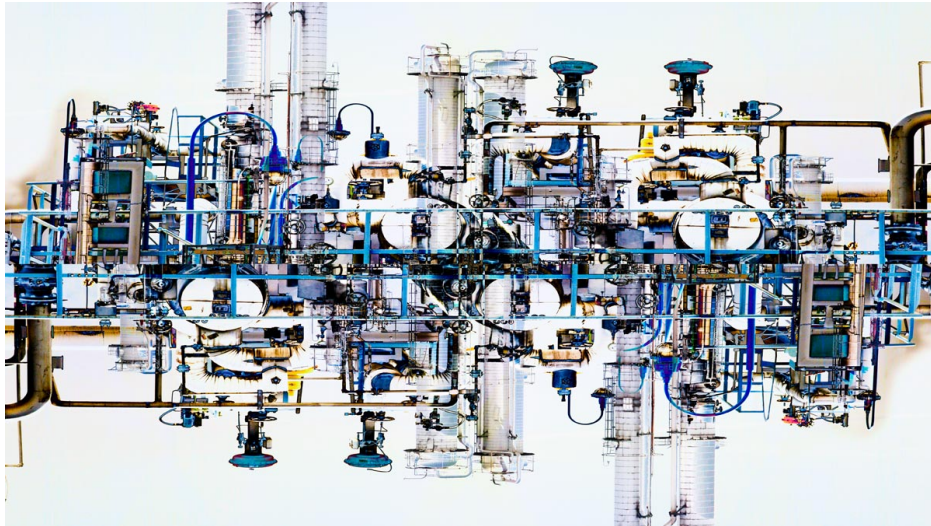


Introverts, Extroverts, and the Complexities of Team Dynamics

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Let's start with a short personality test. For each of the following dimensions, indicate the extent to which each of the following words describes you, with a 5 indicating "very much so" and a 1 indicating "not at all": assertive, talkative, bold, not reserved, and energetic. Now sum up your scores. What's the total?

If you scored under 10 points, you are likely to have an introverted personality rather than an extroverted one. If that is the case, you are certainly not alone. Studies find that introverts make up one-third to one-half of the population. Yet most workplaces are set up exclusively with extroverts in mind, a fact that becomes clear when you look at traits associated with the two personality types.

Extroverts gravitate toward groups and constant action, and they tend to think out loud. They are energized and recharged by external stimuli, such as personal interactions, social gatherings, and shared ideas. Being around other people gives them energy. In contrast, introverts typically dislike noise, interruptions, and big group settings. They instead tend to prefer quiet solitude, time to think before speaking (or acting), and building relationships and trust one-on-one. Introverts recharge with reflection, deep dives into their inner landscape to research ideas, and focus deeply on work.

What do these tendencies mean for the ability of extroverts and introverts to succeed in team settings, where they must interact and sometimes lead others? My research suggests that the answer depends on the types of team members being led.

Team leaders who are extroverted can be highly effective leaders when the members of their team are dutiful followers looking for guidance from above. Extroverts bring the vision, assertiveness, energy, and networks necessary to give them direction.

By contrast, when team members are proactive — and take the initiative to introduce changes, champion new visions, and promote better strategies — it is introverted leaders who have the advantage. Extroverted leaders are more likely to feel threatened, I've found. When employees champion new visions, strategies, and work processes, they often steal the spotlight, challenging leaders' dominance, authority, and status. As a result, extroverted leaders tend to be less receptive: They shoot down suggestions and discourage employees from contributing. By comparison, an introverted leader might be comfortable listening and carefully considering suggestions from below. This finding is consistent with a wealth of research on what is known as *dominance complementarity*: the tendency of groups to be more cohesive and effective when they have a balance of dominant and submissive members.

The intuition here is that extroverted leadership may drive higher performance when employees are passive but lower performance when employees are proactive. To test this idea, my colleagues Adam Grant of Wharton, Dave Hofmann of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and I studied a U.S. pizza-delivery chain. Since the stores in the chain were highly similar, they offered a natural opportunity to track whether their success varied as a function of extroverted leadership and employee proactivity.

With the goal of isolating the influence of extroverted leadership, we compared the profitability of 57 different stores. We assessed each store leader's levels of extraversion — how assertive, talkative, bold, and energetic he or she was. In addition, an average of six to seven employees per store completed surveys about how proactive their store was as a group: to what extent did they voice suggestions for improvement, attempt to influence the store's strategy, and create better work processes?

Then, for the following seven weeks, we tracked each store's profits. We statistically adjusted for factors beyond the leader's control, such as the average price of pizza orders and the total number of employee labor hours. We found that extroverted leadership was linked to significantly higher store profits when employees were passive but significantly lower store profits when employees were proactive. In stores with passive employees, those led by extroverts achieved 16% higher profits than those led by introverts. However, in stores with proactive employees, those led by extroverts achieved 14% lower profits. As expected, extroverted leadership was an advantage with passive groups, but a disadvantage with proactive groups.

These results suggest that introverts can use their strengths to bring out the best in others. Yet introverts' strengths are often locked up because of the way work is structured. Take meetings. In a culture where the typical meeting resembles a competition for loudest and most talkative, where the workspace is open and desks are practically touching, and where high levels of confidence, charisma, and sociability are the gold standard, introverts often feel they have to adjust who they are to "pass." But they do so at a price, one that has ramifications for the company as well.

How can you get the best from deep, quiet team members during meetings? A look at practices used in some organizations points to an answer. At Amazon, every meeting begins in total silence. Before any conversation can occur, everyone must quietly read a six-page memo about the meeting's agenda for 20 to 30 minutes. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos instituted this process after recognizing that employees rarely read meeting materials sent in advance. Reading together focuses everyone's attention on the issues at hand.

The real magic happens before the meeting ever starts, when the author is writing one of these six-page memos, which are called "narratives." The memos must tell a story: They have a conflict

to resolve and should conclude with solutions, innovation, and happy customers — a structure that provides the meeting with direction. Writing forces memo authors to reason through what they want to present, spend time puzzling through tough questions, and formulate clear, if not persuasive, arguments. It's no surprise that Bezos also banned PowerPoint presentations in meetings, thus doing away with simplistic and fuzzy bullet-point logic.

The type of clear thinking that these structured memos require also serves the purpose of leveling the playing field for team members who differ in their level of introversion and extroversion. The imposition of writing as a medium turns self-discipline and personal reflection into effective meetings and participative decision making. After devoting time to reading, the group can then focus on engaging in a valuable discourse: reaching shared understandings, digging deeper into data and insights, and perhaps most importantly, having a meaningful debate. The process gives introverted team members the time they need to formulate their thoughts and, for some, build up the courage to share them with the rest of the team. It also encourages the extroverted to listen, reflect, and become more open to the perspectives of their more silent peers.

Thinking more carefully about how to structure meetings can be very helpful to make sure they produce good outcomes. And it can also assure management can [get the best out of the introverted members](#), in addition to the more extroverted ones.



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