

Introverts in Leadership

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FILE	7824_KATELYN_CARPENTER_INTROVERTS_IN_LEADERSHIP_1548636_970813378.DOCX (25.76K)	WORD COUNT	1671
TIME SUBMITTED	20-JUN-2019 04:16PM (UTC-0400)	CHARACTER COUNT	10201
SUBMISSION ID	1145624756		

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Abstract

This paper examines introverts in leadership. It seeks to determine why they're so underrepresented in leadership positions and if there's any validity to it. I am using two primary sources; peer-reviewed literature as well as personality tests and questionnaires to be completed by my management team at my organization. The literature will; show that there is a severe imbalance of personality types in leadership roles, explain why it occurs and what can be done about it from both the perspective of an introverted employee and managers who may want to pursue untapped resources. I expect that the personality tests and questionnaires to be completed will support the academic literature.

Keywords: Introvert, extrovert, leadership, personality

Introverts in Leadership

Introduction

I have noticed that in my organization the vast majority of managers and senior leaders are extroverts. They are outgoing and genuinely enjoy talking to people. They seem energized by their interactions as they hop from meeting to meeting and have no problem striking up conversations with complete strangers. However, this isn't just true in my personal observation. Statistics show us that although the general population is split about evenly between introverts and extroverts, up to 96% of leaders and managers are extroverted. (Grant, 2019) Why is this?

One of the explanations is that society values the attributes of extroverts and this is one of the many reasons they dominate positions of leadership. As a self-diagnosed introvert trying to climb the ladder I have noticed this and have struggled with, and I believe because of it. There is no handbook or accommodations made for introverts trying to navigate the workplace.

My paper will outline the generally accepted working definitions and characteristics of these personality types and examine introverts in leadership and why there are so few of them there. What attributes are so valued in extroverts that they dominate leadership positions? In a leadership world full of extroverts what can introverts bring to the table and how do they get a seat there?

Literature Review

What are introverts and extroverts? The Myers-Briggs Type Personality Indicator Test qualifies introversion and extroversion as 'different attitudes people use to direct their energy.' (Farrell, 2017) Typically, those who say they're an introvert are drained by a lot of social interaction while extroverts report being energized from it. In the workplace this can be an issue for introvert leaders who are required to attend lots of meeting and collaborate on projects. One

of the common misconceptions about introverts is that they are indifferent or disinterested, when in actuality they just don't express themselves outwardly or enthusiastically. It's important that introverted leaders 'explicitly state when they're passionate about something, even if it doesn't come naturally for them to do so.' (Vien, 2016)

What do all these personality traits combined with misconceptions mean for introverts and leadership positions? I don't think it would come as a surprise to anyone that most leaders are extroverts, 'there is a tendency in our busy, workaholic North American culture to think all of our leaders must be extroverts.' (Saunderson, 2017) The imbalance is real. The general population is split about evenly between introverts and extroverts, however up to 96% of leaders and managers are extroverted. (Grant, 2019) This kind of data leads one to wonder if introverts really don't make good leaders.

'It is well documented that the perception on a successful leader is one with extroverted, charismatic, outgoing personality traits.' (Stephens-Craig, Kuofie, & Dool, 2015) The limitation of this article, which it acknowledges, is that there is no research available about the perception of introverted leaders. One would assume that if the above characteristics are favored, characteristics of the opposite type would be less likely found in those in leadership.

A 2012 article, *Why the World Needs More Introverts* by Adam McDowell says differently. He cites that there is growing research that shows introverts often make better leaders-often spectacularly successful ones-largely because they actually listen to what other people say. If more introverts took charge, we might all be better off.

So how can they get there? One way is for the employee to take a personality assessment 'to show leaders who they are and how to optimize their strengths. Not only can understanding

their personality help leaders succeed, it can guide the company on how best to train them.

(Weistein, 2017)

Managers who are dealing with and/or trying to develop an introverted employees must be mindful of specific dynamics. For instance, introverted team members may not want to contribute in a group setting. Alternate methods should be provided for everyone to contribute in a different way, like written responses after the meeting. ‘The leader must keep in mind the goal and help find ways to meet these goals without straining the extravert-rewarding corporate culture too much’ (Smith, 2018)

Framework for Analysis

My project brings light to the disparity between personality types as they’re represented in leadership positions. The qualitative data from my literature review explains the reasons for this. The ‘why’ behind the imbalance has to do with what society places value on. The more distinguishable differences between introverts and extroverts are things like; thought-process, outgoingness, listening skills and preferences for work environment.

In addition to the literature, I have collected data from my own research method. The most relevant pieces from the personality indicator test are whether the participant is extrovert or introvert dominant. The other part of my research was a questionnaire asking specifics about what managers find easy or difficult in various workplace dynamics.

I also use a combination of the information gathered to compile some approaches and tactics for introverts to better navigate the workplace.

Methods

The methodology includes my review of literature as well as my own research with human participants. I distributed a Meyer's-Briggs personality type theory. A questionnaire was also sent out to the management team at my organization. This survey asked questions like; Do you find you are first to speak up at a meeting? Do you feel more/less productive after a group work session?

Results

I received results for half of the surveys I sent out. Only one of the five managers who responded identified himself as an introvert, the Meyer's-Briggs indicated the same. All of the extroverted leaders said they found it easy to speak in groups and that they feel energized after socialization. Interestingly enough, the introverted manager also said he felt energized after socialization and found it easy to speak to people he doesn't know. This is a really important point. It reaffirms that there is a spectrum when it comes to personalities, no one is all introvert or all extrovert. It also upholds the statistics that extroverts dominate leadership, even the one introvert in my management team has extrovert-dominant traits.

Limitations

As mentioned in the Perception of Introverted Leaders article they could not find any research on the perceptions of introverted leaders. I believe the major reason for this is because there just aren't a lot of them. There have been studies done on famous introverted leaders such as Ghandi, Einstein and Steven Spielberg however the fame and notability muddies the water and the results really can't be compared to introverted leaders in the everyday workplace.

Another limitation and area I would like to explore is the journey of introverted leaders. I would be particularly interested in those who that have climbed the ladder to success in smaller organizations. What are their dominant qualities and how did they navigate an extrovert-rewarding society.

Finally, some other research that I'd like to see and didn't appear to exist is that if organizations adopt the awareness, change in dynamics and what behavior they recognize would the number of introverted leaders increase?

Conclusion

Clearly, there is a disparity between different personality types in leadership positions. The general population is divided approximately 50/50 introvert to extroverts however 96% of upper level leaders are extroverted. This is a result of many factors first, society rewards outgoing, charismatic traits. Secondly, extroverts tend to make themselves more visible in group settings by speaking and contributing in the moment. Introverts may think of an even better idea, but it's after they've had time to process and reflect. It's a much steeper hill to climb when you have to track down the boss for a one-on-one meeting or submit your thoughts in writing to the group when the moment has passed.

For managers who are interested tapping the underutilized resources that exist in introverted employees, they need to make some changes to some workplace dynamics and processes. Allow different types of forums for feedback, offer alternate work groups and spaces.

For introverts trying to navigate the extroverted workplace world, ask for what you need. Request the meeting agenda beforehand, ask for an individual project or a quiet work space. No ,

these things are not always feasible, but at least you've made the effort and your performances known.

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