

THE POWER OF INTROVERTS

Leaders who are introverts are now considered as effective as extroverts despite businesses historically prizing 'charisma' and group working, but the key for all personality types is self-awareness and the ability to learn

BY MICHAEL BARNETT

Anyone who has done a Myers-Briggs personality test will know that the workplace is often divided between extroverts and introverts. Extroverts thrive in social interactions and react to the world around them, while introverts prefer independence and need time for contemplation.

Contrary to what you might believe, it is not always the outgoing, outspoken extroverts who rise to the top in business.

Peter Corijn, CMO at Imperial Tobacco, says: "If anything – and this is quite important – the trend has been to show more respect to introverts than in the past." Corijn is an introvert according to the Myers-Briggs test, which is based on the psychological theories of Carl Jung.

Until recently, Corijn notes, "charismatic" personalities have been seen as the ideal leaders, pulling their organisations behind them with infectious enthusiasm and force of will. However, this is changing.

"We are now looking for what consultants call 'level

5 leadership' – more humble leadership styles and people who believe that the institution is more important than them as individuals, or their own agenda. That benefits people with a more introverted personality. The louder styles and more charismatic leaders sometimes also create havoc," he says.

Quiet strength

The business world's recently acquired respect for introverted personalities follows the rise of a number of leaders who exhibit these characteristics, such as US president Barack Obama, Apple CEO Tim Cook and Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer.

Prominent books, such as *Good to Great* by Jim Collins and *Quiet* by Susan Cain, have also drawn attention to the argument that businesses often neglect the creative and managerial strengths of introverts by placing too much value on personality and team-orientated office environments.

The description of an introvert – someone who works better alone than in a group and does not usually respond well in fast-paced, high-pressure environments – sounds like a poor fit for a marketer, or a CEO. However, introversion does not necessarily equate to shyness; nor does it mean a person dislikes interacting with others.

Mondelēz International marketing manager Claire Low, who identifies herself as an introvert, says: "I've learned just how important it is to make



APPLE'S TIM COOK,
YAHOO'S MARISSA
MAYER AND US
PRESIDENT BARACK
OBAMA HAVE
INTROVERTED
PERSONALITIES



"It's important to make an impression but it's not a case of being the biggest voice in the room"

Claire Low, Mondelēz

a strong impression but have also grown to understand that it's not simply a case of being the biggest voice in the room. As a more introverted person, there will always be someone who shouts louder but I now realise that people add value in different ways.

"I believe I'm a considered marketer, who wants to make a contribution that is thought through and effective, but I balance this by pushing myself out of my comfort zone when needed to ensure my voice is heard."

Learning agility

For any business executive – but for marketers especially – communication is central to competence. Some are more naturally talented at networking or oratory, yet the rest can often bridge the gap by honing their technique with practice and preparation. Corijn, for example, states that people are often surprised when he claims to be an introvert because he is a good public speaker and has even been in rock bands.

He argues the key attribute that dictates someone's potential at work is 'learning agility' – being able to adapt to situations and acquire new skills quickly. Extroverts and introverts are equally capable of succeeding in business if they can demonstrate learning agility. But whereas introverts

may need to inject more emotional cadence into their presentations and public speaking, extroverts may need to try harder to save it for their most powerful statements.

Marketing Academy founder Sherilyn Shackell, whose background is in headhunting and who calls herself an extrovert, says: "An extrovert will be louder, more overtly confident, more willing to be vocal on their viewpoint. The downside is that sometimes an extrovert can almost devalue the power of what they're saying, whereas an introvert speaks more quietly and you have to lean in to understand what they're thinking."

But she adds: "If somebody has something that they need to communicate, you can learn how to do that within a structured framework so it doesn't matter whether you are an extrovert or an introvert."

Self-awareness is key

Whatever your personality type, to have any hope of developing new skills you must first be conscious of your deficiencies and of how others perceive you. According to Corijn, self-awareness is an important ingredient of learning agility, and when recommending candidates to a board for a high-level appointment, headhunters will gravitate towards those whose assessment of themselves is in line with how others see them.

Caroline Silk, head of channel marketing at wearable technology company Jawbone, gives an example of how being self-aware can help you perform more effectively within a team. She says: "My instinct to look at the detail first can sometimes come across as negativity. I have experienced meetings where extrovert colleagues have come out with very broad ideas as talking points and my first instinct is always to look at the detail of how this would work in practice rather than following their big-picture approach."

"Taking into account others' perceptions, I'll try to phrase my

response as an adaptation of their idea rather than a blocker."

Self-awareness is crucial not only to personal career advancement but also to building marketing teams with a balance of skills and personality types, so the members' strengths compensate for another's shortcomings and vice versa. This is important because, while it is possible to adjust your own behaviour when you need to, an individual's inclinations and preferences for ways of working will probably always remain.

An introvert can learn to be a good public speaker but may not find it sustainable having to be in the public eye on a daily basis, Shackell points out. Therefore, if this is required by the organisation, an extrovert with an aptitude for media relations might be needed in the team. In Corijn's case, he says he has a trusting and loyal nature so needs to work alongside someone with a more hard-nosed approach to negotiating.

Complementary personalities

Managers are often hindered in their efforts to assemble a balanced team as they are subconsciously attracted to candidates who are similar to them, creating an insufficiently diverse range of talent.

Although it is tempting to be drawn towards people who share your interests, belief systems or values, the best leaders look out for different personality types when interviewing candidates and consider what is needed at a given time, says Shackell. "They think about how [candidates] would fit within the team, whether they would cause conflict, or whether together they would be more than the sum of their parts. The good [leaders] actively seek balance."

Corijn sums this up best. He recommends thinking of your team like The Beatles. "The argument about whether it was John Lennon or Paul McCartney [who was more important] is a false argument. The magic was that you had those four guys together in a band."



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