



## Leadership Personalities: Extrovert, Introvert or Ambivert?

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**Abstract:** *This paper endeavors to expand the idea put forth by practitioners and some scholars that a leader must be an extrovert to be a good leader. It will provide examples of very successful and well-known leaders that have excelled as leaders even though they are introverts. Finally, the paper endeavors to educate the reader on the importance of understanding why introverts can be successful leaders, and why there are some situations in which introverts are more capable leaders than their extroverted counterparts. In addition, the concept of ambivert will be introduced and how ambiverts fit a model of good leadership based on their personality type.*

**Keywords –** *Leadership, personalities. Ambivert, extravert, introvert*

The proposition within the context of this manuscript and concepts will be presented to further expand the theory of extroverts make the best leaders and the personality traits of extroversion is the primary factor to leadership success. This paper endeavors to expand the idea put forth by practitioners and some scholars that a leader must be an extrovert to be a good leader. It will provide examples of very successful and well-known leaders that have excelled as leaders, even though they classified as introverts. Finally, the paper endeavors to educate the reader on the importance of understanding why introverts can be and are successful leaders, and why there are some situations in which introverts are more capable leaders than their extroverted counterparts. Finally, the paper proposes and presents empirical evidence that introverts can be successful leaders and ambiverts are more well-rounded and fit the model of a successful leader.

Many people believe that extroverts, defined as an outgoing and overtly expressive person (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.), are the type of people best suited for leadership. Many view an extrovert's abilities to be sociable, outgoing, and overtly expressive as key personality traits that are required to excel as a manager or leader. Gareth Jones and Jennifer George, in their textbook *Essentials of Contemporary Management*, further elevate extraversion as one of their "Big Five" personality traits defining extraversion as, "The tendency to experience positive emotions and moods and to feel good about oneself and the rest of the world" (2014, p. 48). They go on to state:

Managers who are high on extraversion (often called extraverts) tend to be sociable, affectionate, outgoing, and friendly. Managers who are low on extraversion (often called introverts) tend to be less inclined toward social interactions and to have a less positive outlook. Being high on extraversion may be an asset for managers whose jobs entail especially high levels of social interaction. Managers who are low on extraversion may nevertheless be highly effective

and efficient, especially when their jobs do not require much social interaction. Their quieter approach may enable them to accomplish quite a bit of work in limited time (Jones & George, 2014, p. 48).

The definitions and explanations used by Jones and George and other scholars do not completely ring true. They are oversimplified and lack the nuance of what makes up the extrovert and the introvert personality type. Further, they would likely insult most introverts who would consider themselves affectionate, friendly, and possessing positive emotions and outlooks. Their definitions also completely ignore the presence of a third personality type, that of the ambivert, a person with a balance of extrovert and introvert features (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.).

### THE POWER OF INTROVERTS

When people are asked to name successful leaders the mentioning of names like Jack Welch from GE, Larry Ellison of Oracle, Richard Branson (Nobel, 2010), Mark Cuban (Mueller, 2015), and Bill Clinton (Cain, 2012) would likely not surprise anyone. The general public applauds these individuals for their extroverted, outgoing, loud, and gregarious personalities. All have been successful in their endeavors, and that success is in no doubt partially related to their extroverted personality type. Within that same list of successful leaders, people might also list the names of Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, and Abraham Lincoln (Schocker, 2013). The people providing the latter list of leaders might not realize that all three men are introverts. Their introversion did not hinder their success. In many cases, their introversion likely helped bring about their success. Extroverts process information externally and must have an audience to process and rationalize. Introverts process information internally and do not need others in the process. Both can come to rational and logical decisions, but they just take different routes.



Bill Gates is currently the most financially successful person in the history of the world. He is currently ranked number one on the Forbes World's 2016 Billionaires list with a net worth estimated to be \$79.2 billion (Dolan & Kroll, n.d.). Susan Cain, an increasingly well-known writer on the subject of introverts and leadership, noted that "Bill Gates is quiet and bookish, but apparently unfazed by others' opinions of him: he's an introvert, but not shy" (Schocker, 2013, para. 6). When prompted, few people would list "quiet" and "bookish" as key personality traits that would assist a person in creating Microsoft and amassing the world's largest personal fortune. Gates was able to build Microsoft by applying other introvert associated skills. In an interview with Tony Jones, Bill Gates stated:

Well, I think introverts can do quite well. If you're clever you can learn to get the benefits of being an introvert, which might be, say, being willing to go off for a few days and think about a tough problem, read everything you can, push yourself very hard to think out on the edge of that area. Then, if you come up with something, if you want to hire people, get them excited, build a company around that idea, you better learn what extroverts do, you better hire some extroverts, like Steve Ballmer I would claim as an extrovert, and tap into both sets of skills in order to have a company that thrives both as in deep thinking and building teams and going out into the world to sell those ideas (Jager, 2013, para. 4).

Further, Mr. Gates discussed the importance of leaders finding the strengths of others that compliment differences in themselves. In this quotation, the reader can see how the "bookish" nature, as noted by Cain, is a personality trait that Mr. Gates relied on while building Microsoft and is very likely a trait he uses today with the Gates Foundation, which endeavors to solve some of the world's most challenging problems. This ability to be honest with one's strengths and weaknesses results in the formation of teams that can operate more efficiently and effectively as the sum of complementary parts.

To further illustrate this point, consider Warren Buffett. Mr. Buffett, the incredibly successful CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, is currently listed as number three on the Forbes list having amassed wealth estimated to be around \$72.7 billion (Dolan & Kroll, n.d.). In her book, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, Susan Cain wrote:

Warren Buffet, the legendary investor and one of the wealthiest men in the world, has used exactly the attributes we've explored in this chapter -- intellectual persistence, prudent thinking, and the ability to see and act on warning signs -- to make billions of dollars for himself and the shareholders in his company, Berkshire Hathaway. Buffett is known for thinking carefully when those around him lose their heads. 'Success in investing doesn't correlate with IQ,' he has said. 'Once you have ordinary intelligence, what you need is the temperament to control the urges that get other people into trouble in investing' (2013, p. 176).

These often associated introvert skills, "intellectual persistence, prudent thinking, and the ability to see and act on warning signs" (Cain, 2013, p. 176), are being expertly utilized by Mr. Buffet to benefit not only himself and the shareholders and employees of his company.

#### THE NATURE OF INTROVERT AND EXTROVERT

It is imperative that today's business leaders understand why introverts excel as leaders in the modern business climate. Organizations must maximize the effectiveness of their organizations with fewer workers to produce required results and ensure a higher return on shareholder capital. It is important for a company's leaders to understand the components of the team to ensure the proper leader is in charge of that team. In Harvard Business Schools' Working Knowledge publication, Carmen Nobel wrote:

A new study finds that extroverted leaders actually can be a liability for a company's performance, especially if the followers are extrovert, too. In short, new ideas can't blossom into profitable projects if everyone in the room is contributing ideas, and the leader is too busy being outgoing to listen to or act upon them.

An introverted leader, on the other hand, is more likely to listen to and process the ideas of an eager team. But if an introverted leader is managing a bunch of passive followers, then a staff meeting may start to resemble a Quaker meeting: lots of contemplation, but hardly any talk. To that end, a team of passive followers benefits from an extraverted leader (2010, para. 5).

By understanding the nature of the introvert and the extrovert, one can ensure that the most appropriate leader is assigned to improve a team's efficiency and effectiveness. It follows that if every person aspired to be an extrovert by



embodying the outgoing, overtly expressive, and gregarious features that make up an extrovert, very little work would get done. Similarly, if each person was an introvert as everyone would be reserved and thinking instead of working the problem to successful completion.

Referring to the earlier quotation made by Jones and George, the reader may have noticed that at no point was the introvert mentioned as being unaffectionate, unfriendly, and possessing negative emotions and outlooks. It is rare to see a picture in which Mr. Buffet does not have a warm, friendly smile on this face. Mr. Gates is proving that he has a positive outlook on the world by working hard through the Gates Foundation to make the world a better place. Mr. Gates and Mr. Buffet, both successful leaders, have taken a pledge to give away the majority of their wealth to philanthropy (The Giving Pledge, n.d.). The actions of these two introverts provide a strong counterpoint to the definition that Jones and George established in their textbook.

#### THE AMBIVERT AS A LEADER

Recent literature is introducing the idea that people are rarely solely introverted or extroverted as defined by Jung. Instead, the concept of the ambivert is beginning to come more widely discussed. Vipul B. Patel, in the article *Five Factor Personality Model of Leadership*, described the ambivert as a person who can, "Move easily from working with others to working alone, have moderate threshold for sensory stimulation, and may tire of it after a while" (2014, p. 22). Further, Piece Howard and Jane Howard note in their paper, *The Big Five Quickstart: An Introduction to the Five-Factor Model of Personality for Human Resource Professionals*, state "In between these two extremes [extrovert and introvert] are the Ambiverts, who are able to move comfortably from outgoing social situations to the isolation of working alone. The stereotypical ambivert is the Player-Coach, who moves upon demand from leadership demands of Coach to the personal production demands of the Player" (1995, p. 5). Thus, the ambivert oriented individual can act as a chameleon adjusting to the make-up of the team as needed. When a team is made primarily of introverts, the ambivert can utilize the extroverted portions of their personality in an attempt to, as Nobel (2010) noted, dissuade the team from lapsing into a team that is heavy on complementation and absent of conversation.

Conversely, when leading a team of extroverts, the ambivert can comfortably shift into a more introverted role

allowing the team to innovate and then execute those ideas by quieting the outgoing, extroverted traits for the more contemplative introverted traits. Understanding the non-binary reality of the Jungian personality model is important as it is rare to find individuals that are solely on either side of the model. As Grant (2012) infers there is no such thing as a pure introvert or extrovert. The fluidity of the ambivert provides the team with the leader they need at that very moment who can adjust the mix of their introvert and extrovert personality over time as needed.

#### CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the effectiveness and efficiency of a team or an organization does not come down to how extroverted nor how introverted the leader is. It is the complex combination of the leader, the team, their experiences, their motivations, and a host of other attributes that will determine the success of a team. The wise leader must feature the traits of a true ambivert by being able to be the extrovert when the team needs a talkative leader and the introvert when the team needs quiet, thoughtful leader. It is this ability to harness the power of the introvert or the power of the extrovert as needed that can propel a team to new heights.

Further research and using Myers-Briggs personality assessment, The BIG 5 and Kersey's temperament assessment, will demonstrate there are different levels of extrovert and introverts (using a sliding scale). Where one person may be on the far end of the spectrum of extrovert, others may be further down the scale. Same with introverts. Then through the concept of ambivert, who are predominantly either extrovert or introvert (on the scale 49/51 or 51/49) and who can adjust to either based on the situation, does not create a causal connection of which more likely will be a better leader or could take on the role of leadership successfully. For further research and thought, maybe ambiverts make better leaders? But, we also have to consider the other contributing factors of Myers-Briggs and the other three personality elements and also Kirsey's temperament indicator which can have a direct impact on personality. Finally, the attributes one has developed and emotional intelligence need to be explored and factored into equation. Attributes and emotional intelligence are developed based on training and experiences. Overall, one cannot state and inequitably support that extroverts are at the top of the order for leadership qualities and abilities.



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