

Four Reasons CEOs Should Understand Introversion

As the leader of your organization, it behooves you to be fully and actively informed about introversion as it relates to your organization. You may or may not have become aware of the recent discussion about introversion in the American workplace. For most of the last century, we have existed under a cultural assumption that Susan Cain has called the “extrovert ideal,” the idea that real leadership = extroverted leadership. In 1996, Peter Drucker commented that he saw no connection between good leadership and the charismatic aspects of extroversion.

The one and only personality trait the effective ones [leaders] did have in common was something they did not have: they had little or no “charisma” and little use either for the term or what it signifies.

You probably also noticed that in 2001 Jim Collins saw no correlation between extroversion and his “level 5 leaders.” In the last few years, the conversation has greatly expanded.

Here are four extremely pertinent reasons why you need to understand introversion and its connection to leadership in your organization:

1. You are one.

Contrary to popular mythology, forty percent of today’s CEOs are introverted. This means that there is a forty percent chance that you need to understand introversion because it is part of your personal makeup. If you’re a forty-percenter, you are likely aware of the challenges resulting from a leadership ideal that differs from your natural strengths.

2. They're in your c-suite.

Look at your executive team. Whether you are an introvert or not, those you work closely with likely are. Consider the typical temperaments of others in the c-suite:

- **CFO** – Because of the need for attention to detail that goes with the territory, a high percentage of CFOs will likely be classified as high C introverts (compliance-oriented according to the DISC assessment). They may have the D side (drivenness) of extroversion, but often lack the I (outgoingness) and will behave more like introverts than extroverts.
- **COO** – Because of the need for attention to detail and management of organizational processes and function, a high percentage of COOs will likely be classified as D and C task oriented introverts or ambiverts that again often lack the high I charismatic aspect of extroversion.
- **CIO / CTO** – By definition, the IT field is dominated with introverts. The odds are highly stacked that your technology officer is one.
- **CMO** – This is the exception. A high percentage of marketing officers would be classified as more extroverted. Interestingly, Daniel Pink in *To Sell Is Human* recently showed evidence that the best salespeople tend to be ambiverted.

3. Half of your work force is introverted.

For many years we have been victims of misinformation, thinking that introverts only constituted twenty-five to thirty-three percent of the U. S. population. We now know better. The best estimate of introversion versus extroversion is between 51 and 57 percent. Half or more of your employees would be classified as introverted. Are you content misunderstanding and/or failing to support and get the best results out of half of your workforce?

4. Diversity matters.

Introversion is a facet, perhaps one of the most powerful, of diversity. For many years now, we have been rightly focused on valuing diversity in the workforce. We have made some progress around the need for diversity in regard to gender, ethnicity and other easily identifiable issues related to leveraging the unique strengths of everybody on the team. This latest issue of diversity has even a greater potential impact. Can you afford not to affirm this aspect of the wonderful diversity on your team?

CEOs who understand and affirm this critical aspect of those they work with (and for forty percent, an important piece of understanding themselves) will have a definite advantage over the competition in the new global economy.

