Developing Tomorrow's Introverted Leader: Exploring Discrimination, Leadership Aptitude, and Strategic Development

Rachel Harless
Middle Tennessee State University

ABSTRACT

When it comes to leadership opportunities, introverts are commonly dismissed due to qualities that seem ill-fitting when compared to extroverted candidates. In truth, introverts possess many leadership-suited traits, but these are often unnoticed in the workplace because many organizational practices, standards, and selection measures are designed with extroverts in mind. By shaping development, success, and advancement around extroversion, introverted employees – including those from cultures that value introverted traits – are systemically disserviced, creating disparate impact. To further understand these issues, an extensive literature review was conducted to explore the relationship between leadership and introversion from multiple cultural and industry perspectives. The takeaways from this research affirmed that introverted leaders can be powerful but that employers tend not to see this potential. More interestingly, the study revealed the serious issue of discrimination that introverts face, as well as the roots of such treatment. This revelation, in turn, confirmed that organizational practices have created unfair leadership roadblocks for introverts. On the bright side, the literature review confirmed that successful leadership development methods for introverts exist but have generally been unutilized because they have not been strategically wielded together. To begin rectifying this oversight, those development methods were summarized into a basic developmental framework of best practices for effectively identifying and developing introverted leaders.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most woefully underutilized resources in any organization are its introverted employees. These individuals work hard but their efforts tend to not be acknowledged at the same rate as their extroverted counterparts, despite being just as committed and successful. Even more concerning than this lack of recognition is the unquantifiable number of potential introverted leaders who never get the chance to spread their wings because they are overlooked in favor of extroverted peers (Colley, 2018). There is no question of the value of an extroverted leader, but the value of the introverted leader is largely doubted. Compared to extroverts, introverts do not appear as interested in or well-suited for leadership roles, which frequently leads to the assumption that introverts do not care, and therefore should not be seriously considered. This is erroneous thinking that deprives many introverts of enriching experiences and many organizations of impactful leaders. Considering that 33% to 50% of the population is introverted, the sidelining of potential introverted leaders becomes more problematic (Wisser & Massey, 2019; Colley, 2018).

For some time, there has been a negative bias surrounding introversion that has led many to believe that introverts are unfit to be leaders and prefer to be followers (Wisser & Massey, 2019). A sound argument against this can be found in the multitude of introverted leaders who have had a resounding impact on our society, including Abraham Lincoln, Eleanor Roosevelt, Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, Doug Conant, and Herb Kelleher. Despite these and many other such examples, introverts continue to be dismissed when it comes to leadership. This treatment can, in part, be credited to the many decades of research and discourse that focused on the positive traits of extroverts and the negative traits of introverts, slowly placing them into the category of 'other.' This phenomenon has resulted in the discrimination and marginalization of introverts and had a direct impact on how introverts are considered in relation to leadership (Blevins, et al., 2021).

While introverted leaders are not always the obvious choice, this does not make them the lesser option. In fact, introverted leaders are great at connecting with followers, empowering employees, generating innovative solutions, and developing strong cultures of respect, collaboration, service, and commitment (Stephens-Craig, et al., 2015). Organizational leaders must develop an accurate understanding of introversion and an appreciation of what introverts have to offer so they can maximize the leadership potential of their introverted workforce.

Plenty of studies have explored the topic of introversion/extroversion, but many of those discussions were led by extroverts and therefore did not portray introversion accurately due to bias. The present study is unique in that it is one of the few guided by an introvert, resulting in a more fair and insightful evaluation of introverts and their experiences. Also of note is the consideration of historical context to understand how modern views of introversion/extroversion and leadership came to be. Furthermore, the struggles of introverted employees and leaders detailed throughout are a collection of representative experiences that are not likely to be reported or publicly discussed, so their inclusion here is an invaluable opportunity to gain insight into the unique challenges introverts face when striving toward leadership, as well as the impact organizational processes and manager attitude can have on that journey. Similarly, the enclosed developmental framework is a collection of best practices gleaned from a number of sources and experiences, which will hopefully be more effective when harnessed as a strategic process rather than as individual activities. Altogether, this paper aims to provide a fresh, balanced perspective on introversion as it relates to leadership by examining the ways in which introverts are frequently overlooked and disadvantaged, evaluating the qualities that make introverts effective leaders, and reviewing a practical guide for identifying and developing introverted leaders.

OVERLOOKING THE INTROVERT: MISCONCEPTIONS & DISCRIMINATION

In the simplest and neutralist of terms, introverts are individuals who gain their energy through alone time and reflection, whereas extroverts gain their energy from interacting with others (Geisler, 2020). The opposite of these circumstances is, generally speaking, what wears them out; socialization tires introverts and extroverts find alone time unfulfilling (Wisser & Massey, 2019). The predisposition for introversion or extroversion has been linked to stimulation sensitivity levels; introverts are more sensitive to stimuli, so they prefer space and time to themselves whereas extroverts are less sensitive, so stimulation does not bother them and in fact, they seek it out (Collins & Ting, 2010; Eysenck, 1967).

A variety of terms are frequently associated with this dichotomy, with the terminology tending to favor extroverts. Common comparisons include 'loud and talkative/quiet;' 'outgoing/shy and timid;' and 'friendly/reserved and distant.' While the essence of these terms is technically accurate, if a bit unfair, there is another common distinction between introverts and extroverts that is definitively incorrect: Extroverts are leaders and introverts are followers. While many introverts default to followership out of ease, this does not mean that they are incapable of leadership. Rather, they take this path because they tend to be more accommodating and therefore are unlikely to step up when there is the option for an extrovert to lead. Unfortunately for many introverts, this quiet, obliging nature leads managers to believe that the introvert is not capable of or interested in leadership. As one introverted leader was told by an extrovert, "You're more of the 'do what other people tell you to do' kind of people" (Hotz, 2021, p. 75).

The Extrovert Ideal

There are many misconceptions surrounding introverts which subconsciously affect how they are treated, how their abilities are valued, and how their potential is evaluated. These misconceptions include being: unable to give a speech or presentation; uninterested in or scared of leadership opportunities; poor communicators; uninterested in making connections; lost without a leader to follow; not confident in or proud of their work, organization, or themselves; and afraid of conflict. This paradigm can be traced back to the negative introversion bias that Freud (1920) established in the early 20th century, which set off a chain reaction of discourse that repeatedly glorified the qualities of extroverts while shaming the qualities of introverts (Blevins, et al., 2021). This mentality slowly crept through society, resulting in the promotion of the Extrovert Ideal that all should aspire to (Needle & Mallia, 2021). The U.S., in particular, embraced the notion of extroversion and asserted the superiority of its traits (Wisser & Massey, 2019). Naturally, these standards spread into organizational cultures, as well as the social sphere.

As a result of this progression, extroverted qualities like being outspoken, active, assertive, and sociable became associated with health, success, power, influence, and ambition (Blevins, et al., 2021). Furthermore, extroversion quickly became associated with leadership because its traits align with the facets of transformational leadership, which requires a leader to inspire and guide others, primarily through charisma and persuasive speech (Wisser & Massey, 2019; Blevins, et al., 2021). Transformational leadership, in turn, became the most praised and sought-after form of leadership, causing introverts to be largely unconsidered for leadership because they seemingly did not have the proper personality (Wisser & Massey, 2019).

Research relating to introversion and extroversion is primarily conducted with a focus on extroversion, so the studies affirming the value of extroversion over introversion are countless and have repeatedly confirmed the superiority of extroversion in areas such as interpersonal relationships (Cullen-Lester, et al., 2016), helping others (Gonzalez-Mule, et al., 2014), employee health (Oreg & Berson, 2015), employee satisfaction (Wille, et al., 2014), group performance (Hu & Judge, 2017; Oh, et al., 2015), and

leadership (Reichard, et al., 2011; DeRue, et al., 2011; Blevins, et al., 2021). These affirming studies, while numerous, are not wholly representative of extroverted leaders' success, or rather, lack thereof. Some studies have found that CEO charisma and compensation are not necessarily linked with organizational performance (Agle, et al., 2006; Tosi, et al., 2004) meaning that an extroverted leader's ability to sway others through speech is not indicative of their ability to produce long-term, measurable results from their followers (Atamanik, 2013). In fact, research by Collins (2001) revealed that the most influential leaders who lead their organizations to success are those who are humble, strong-willed, modest, uninterested in public attention, and, more specifically, "are timid and ferocious, shy and fearless. They are rare and unstoppable" (Collins, 2011, p. 67). Put together, these results indicate that, contrary to popular belief, introverts may be naturally situated to be influential leaders, and extroverts may possess some inherent roadblocks.

Despite these findings, the history surrounding this aspect of personality has culminated in a definitive bias in favor of extroverts in most aspects of society, resulting in the celebration and enrichment of extroverts while introverts are either overlooked or viewed as something that needs to be fixed. Furthermore, this mass celebration of extroverts is cyclical as extroverts in power seek out and uplift other extroverts, believing that individuals who are similar to themselves must have potential. Geisler explains this phenomenon as the similarity/attraction effect in which qualities similar to one's own are overvalued, therefore swaying one's judgment and biasing decisions (2020). This series and cycle of events have resulted in the current state of things in which it is assumed that extroverts have the desire and ability to lead while introverts are uninterested in and poorly suited to leadership.

Biased Language & Underrepresentation

Unfortunately for introverts, they are almost always defined within the context of extroverts. As a result, the language used to describe introverts tends to have negative connotations (Blevins, et al., 2021). The negatively valenced vocabulary surrounding introverts feeds into an unfavorable perception of them, their performance, and their potential, which, in turn, influences how they are treated. Managers who refer to or think of their introverted employees with words like 'weird,' 'timid,' 'antisocial,' 'loner,' 'shy,' 'reclusive,' 'awkward,' or 'fearful' are developing a skewed image of those individuals, and this unflattering perception has a direct impact on how they make decisions regarding hiring, promotions, and handing out opportunities (Blevins, et al.; Wisser & Massey, 2019; Colley, 2019; Hotz, 2021).

This type of language also downplays the many positive and valuable characteristics that introverts possess and perpetuates a distinction of 'us versus them' that relegates introverted employees to the 'other' category (Colley, 2019). Colley explains that this mentality not only feeds into stigmas but also discourages introverts from considering leadership opportunities "by failing to emphasize the strengths associated with introversion" (2018, p. 225). Many organizations are missing out on the benefits of introverted leaders because the skills of introverts have been unfairly surmised based on the negative characteristics associated with their introversion – a practice that creates what Prichard describes as "an unnecessary gulf" between introverts and extroverts (2015, para. 10; Farrell, 2017).

The unfair treatment and inaccurate view of introverts are especially worrying when taking into consideration the fact that 33% to 50% of people, and therefore employees, are introverts (Colley, 2018). This means that 33% to 50% of the employees in a given organization are likely being misunderstood, marginalized, and underutilized (Colley, 2018). Cognitive diversity is just as important as any other form of diversity, so the lack of effort being made to improve upon the stigma surrounding introversion is alarming (Needle & Mallia, 2021). Even more concerning is the fact that the majority of organizational leaders, especially top-level leaders, are extroverted (Grant, et al., 2010). This means that a large portion of the workforce is unrepresented in leadership and that there is little input at the organizational level that represents the needs or unique perspectives of introverts (Needle & Mallia, 2021). Finally, it is important

to note that not all cultures value extroversion the way that the U.S. does, so the disparate treatment of introverts also amplifies the discrimination of minority cultures that value more introverted qualities (Cain, 2013).

STRENGTHS OF THE INTROVERTED LEADER

The introverted leader, while perhaps a bit atypical, can be incredibly effective. Many of the qualities that make introverts seem ill-fitted for leadership are actually the traits that make them successful. Being quiet, introspective, slow to act, and wary of the spotlight allows many introverted leaders to excel at servant leadership. A servant leader is someone who utilizes personal connection and service to aid in the development of others, rather than themselves, and then encourages others to do the same (Greenleaf, 1991). This style of leadership complements many of the traits of introversion, similar to how transformational leadership complements extroversion. The primary dimensions of servant leadership have been defined by Ehrhart (2004) as (1) relationship building, (2) empowering others, (3) developing followers, (4) promoting followers' success, (5) strong ethical standards, (6) conceptual skill, and (7) creating value through service. An effective introverted leader is similar to a servant leader in many ways and is introspective and analytical, down-to-earth, dedicated and empathetic, a skilled listener and observer, and an example to others.

Connection and Development

Introverted leaders primarily lead through relationship-building by soliciting input from followers and getting to know them on a personal level (Hunter, et al., 2013; Farrell, 2017). Introverts are very good at listening, which enables them to establish relationships with their followers, making them feel valued (Wisser & Massey, 2019; Vien, et al., 2016). One introverted leader explained: "I think as you [get to] know me, you appreciate that…while I may not be the loudest, I'll always be the first one there and the last one to leave. That's how I show up" (Hotz, 2021, p. 83). Servant leaders are empathetic, authentic, and without a personal agenda, which generates an environment of trust and connectivity with followers that is conducive to problem-solving, collaboration, employee development, and community (Wisser & Massey, 2019). This environment, combined with their listening skills, allows introverted leaders to manage groups of people with varying personalities (Blevins, et al., 2021; Collins, 2021).

While introverted leaders may be comfortable as followers, they can become leaders when in situations where they have more knowledge or experience or are leading others who are more introverted (Vien, et al., 2016). Introverted leaders have an advantage when working with introverted followers because they understand one another better than an extroverted leader would, which grants the leader more insight and makes the follower more at ease. Introverts also have an easier time leading when they are passionate about the project or organization. In these instances, they tend to be more knowledgeable and experienced, so they have an easier time speaking with others and taking charge (Vien, et al.). Active listening, empathy, common ground, and passion enable introverted leaders to be considerate, and effective managers who are keen to develop their followers' skills, celebrate their accomplishments, and help them achieve their ambitions (Hunter, et al., 2013; Vien, et al., 2016).

Reflection and Analysis

Due to their introspective nature, introverted leaders tend to be effective observers and deliberate decision-makers (Vien, et al., 2016). These qualities cause many introverted leaders to be systems thinkers who look at the big picture and consider how smaller systems and variables interact with one another (Hotz, 2021). They spend time analyzing information from a variety of people and sources, which enables them to develop well-rounded interpretations and diverse solutions (Farrell, 2017; Wisser & Massey, 2019). Their reflection and intuition incline many introverts to creativity in some capacity, making them great, innovative problem-solvers who think outside the box, take holistic perspectives, and meditate on solutions before suggesting them (Dannar, 2016).

When it comes to group work, introverted leaders manage collaborative discussions through their ability to listen to and process multiple opinions and lines of thought (Farrell, 2017). This skill allows introverted leaders to take on larger, more complex issues, and because introverts enjoy working alone and acting intentionally, they are not put off by the amount of time needed to evaluate information and develop solutions (Blevins, et al., 2021; Colley, 2019). Introverts also plan, or at least meditate, more extensively before taking action, which usually results in a higher level of success because they anticipate problems and generate contingencies (Hotz, 2021).

Contexts of Successful Introvert Leadership

While introverts require alone time, this does not mean that they are incapable of or cannot enjoy leading other people but means that they do so differently from their extroverted peers. Introverted leaders prefer to work with lots of one-on-one and small-group configurations because they find them less draining and more engaging (Collins & Ting, 2010). These interactions provide the opportunity to develop deeper, more authentic relationships with followers and allow for more natural monitoring and mentoring. Because introverted leaders gain and maintain authority through sincere relationships and mutual respect, they lean towards employee empowerment rather than micromanagement which makes them well-suited for proactive employees (Collins & Ting, 2010; Grant, 2010).

Furthermore, a Finnish study revealed that both low-context and high-context cultures have a fairly equal preference for both introverted and extroverted leadership (Vanajas, 2023). Of the countries represented in the study, 6 were low context and 17 were high context. For reference, the United States is a low-context culture, meaning that there is a preference for greater individualism, facts, and direct, verbal communication, rather than the preference for collectivism, intuition, and nonverbal, indirect modes of communication that high-context cultures lean towards (Reynolds & Valentine, 2004). These results indicate that there is a need for a fairly equitable mixture of introverted and extroverted leaders to effectively connect with the variety of employees that are found in the workplace.

Effects of Successful Introvert Leadership

The servant leadership of introverted leaders can affect a team or organization in a variety of ways. As servant leaders help their followers, their mentality tends to rub off on others. They will lead by example, demonstrating the value of ethics, organizational citizenship behavior, and service in the community (Hunter, et al., 2013). Servant leaders are reflective and hold themselves to a higher level of responsibility for the success and well-being of those around them, as well as their organization (Hunter, et al., 2013; Greenleaf, 1991). These behaviors can transform the culture of a team or organization as followers begin to serve in ways they have seen their leader serve (Hunter, et al., 2013). This transformation can result in increased employee satisfaction, engagement, commitment, and harmony, which will increase

organizational performance and customer satisfaction (Wisser & Massey, 2019; Hunter, et al., 2013; Blevins, et al., 2021).

While currently unfounded, there is a possibility that introverted leaders get more results from their followers than extroverted leaders, depending on the situation. Some studies have shown that the charisma of an organizational leader does not indicate their ability to generate long-term success (Agle, et al., 2006; Tosi, et al., 2004). It is possible that charisma is ineffective because it does not have a lasting effect beyond the moments when the leader is interacting with the employees in some capacity, such as in-person engagements or videos. Successful introverted leaders, on the other hand, have a much more substantial impact on their employees because they connect with them on a deeper level. This is a connection that can leave an impression on the employees long after an interaction with the leader because they become more than just an authority figure or figurehead to the employee.

According to Polychroniou and Trivellas (2018), for organizations to be successful they must have a balanced culture, which is achieved through consensus among organization members. Organizational environments determine how strong a culture is, and since organization leaders are the individuals with the most influence over organizational environment and culture, it is important to have people in leadership positions who are good at unifying those around them. Introverted, and especially servant, leaders are very good at achieving consensus through listening, empowerment, and collaboration. These qualities make the employees more invested in the organization and better aligned with the organization's goals. With these findings in mind, it stands to reason that organizations with multiple introverted leaders are more likely to have stronger, more balanced cultures and to experience the benefits of that status: financial success, flexibility, innovation, and higher performance.

DEVELOPING TOMORROW'S INTROVERTED LEADER

Leadership training is often ineffective for introverts because it is designed to force introverts into an extroverted mold, rather than working with the introverts' strengths. Current practices tend to demotivate and demoralize introverts, treating them as if they are broken in some way and need to learn how to be extroverted so that they will be recognized and valued (Colley, 2018; Stephens-Craig, et al., 2015). These patronizing, out-of-touch trainings cover topics such as how to act caring to others, how to be social, and how to say "thank you" (Colley, 2018). While it is true that introverted employees who act extroverted tend to gain more attention and respect, this is not the standard that employees should have to conform to (Stephens-Craig, et al., 2015). Introverts should not have to change who they are to be considered good employees with potential. Instead, management's interpretations of introverts are what need to change so that both introverted and extroverted employees are given fair opportunities.

To begin reversing this disparity, there are two phases that managers must complete: (1) identifying introverted employees with leadership potential or interest and (2) orchestrating the development of leadership-inclined introverted employees. The following recommendations are designed to make introverted employees feel accepted and empowered so that they can recognize and capitalize on their leadership potential. The goal is never to train an introverted employee to be an extrovert, rather, the aim is to strengthen their latent abilities so that they can be confident and effective in their own leadership style (Farrell, 2017). While these suggestions can initially be executed in the order presented, managers should ultimately treat these exercises as a repetitive process that utilizes aspects of both phases simultaneously to achieve the best results.

Phase 1: Identify Leadership Potential

The first step towards identifying introverted employees who may be interested in leadership is for managers to look for hurdles that may be impairing the visibility of viable employees (Figure 1). This visibility should be assessed on a personal and organizational level to pinpoint areas of personal bias and systemic discriminatory practices.
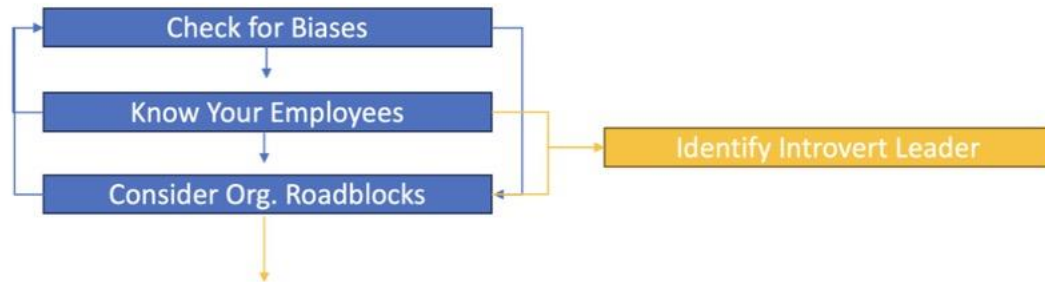

Figure 1. Phase 1: Identify Leadership Potential

Check for Biases

Managers should begin by considering how they view their introverted employees and how their perceptions of those employees compare to their views of their extroverted employees. Valuable questions to ask include: *Do I have positive interpretations of my introverted employees? Do I interact with them often? What type of language do I use when thinking of, describing, or referring to my introverted employees?* Terms like 'reclusive,' 'shy,' 'timid,' 'slow,' 'weird,' 'loner,' 'withdrawn,' 'afraid,' 'cold,' 'unfriendly,' 'robotic,' 'uninterested,' 'bored,' 'fearful,' 'weak,' 'pushover,' 'lazy,' 'pretentious,' 'haughty,' 'secretive,' 'antisocial,' 'unhealthy,' and 'not a team player' are often inaccurate and unflattering descriptions of introverted employees that generate a negative image. Managers should watch out for these terms when speaking to employees or others in management and in evaluations and records.

Sometimes these words are appropriate, but managers should be careful to only apply such terms in instances where the behavior clearly impairs the employee's effectiveness and fulfillment of their job description. Even then, managers should be mindful of biases and proceed with the benefit of the doubt, keeping an eye out for patterns that may be indicative of a systemic imbalance or personal prejudice. For example, if multiple introverts are flagged for inadequate participation while very few, if any, extroverts are accused of the same behavior, then this could be indicative of an unfair management bias and/or organizational practice. It is the manager's responsibility to monitor for such patterns and make changes accordingly. Failure to do so perpetuates unfair practices and perceptions that can contribute to discrimination and a toxic work environment.

In relation to introvert recognition and promotion, language again plays an important role. Managers who provide feedback to their introverted employees and define them in their evaluations with negative terms (e.g., 'timid,' 'loner') establish an unfair, negative record of the employee. These assessments are later used when considering what promotions, raises, and other opportunities an employee should receive, which can hinder an introvert's case for leadership. As a result, more opportunities, rewards, and praise go to extroverted employees while the introverts appear to be underachieving or less invested. Essentially, evaluations have the power to gatekeep leadership roles from introverted employees.

The use of negative language can also be incredibly damaging to the employee's motivation and confidence. Some introverted employees are even told that their introversion is a "debilitating weakness," they are "too shy to do the job," or that there is no place for them in leadership positions (Hotz, 2021, p. 79, 72). Introverts are reflective, which means that whatever negative feedback they are given (especially when it is personal) will remain in their heads for a long time (Wisser & Massey, 2019). Introverts who receive too much unconstructive feedback early in their lives or careers are unlikely to even consider their leadership capabilities because they lose confidence in their abilities.

There are many negative misconceptions surrounding introversion that can impair a manager's perceptions of their introverted employees. Just because someone is quiet or keeps to themselves does not mean that they are uncommitted, unmotivated, uninterested, or uncaring. More often than not, these interpretations are incorrect and the introvert is actually (1) conserving energy, (2) reflecting, or (3) listening and observing (Colley, 2019). In some instances, they may even be purposefully quiet out of deference to someone else (likely an extrovert) who feels more inclined to speak than the introvert does (Wisser & Massey, 2019). There are many reasons an introvert may be silent that have nothing to do with fear, not caring, being unprepared, or being unwell. Managers must understand that there are multiple ways to be engaged in an activity or discussion and that an introvert's silence is not a reflection of their commitment or engagement, despite that same behavior being a cause for concern when studying an extrovert (Colley, 2019).

If a manager is an extrovert, it is especially important for them to consider these misconceptions because they are more likely to misinterpret their introverted employees. Managers should also consider any biases they may have regarding leadership that may be swaying their judgment, such as thinking that the best form of leadership is the type that they personally display. These types of biases can cause a manager to dismiss an employee's qualities that indicate a style of leadership that they are not familiar with.

Know Your Employees

A great way for managers to counteract their biases is to put extra effort into getting to know their employees. Managers should endeavor to know at least 5 skills or qualities of each introverted employee that make them good employees. They must make an effort to look for the good qualities of each employee, especially those they have a negative perception of. Because introverts are quiet, they are often overlooked, so a manager's introverted employees likely have valuable qualities that they have not noticed. This exercise will help managers recognize their employees' potential as well as their skills, which could reveal leadership qualities.

When learning about their employees, managers should look for more than just how often they speak, volunteer, initiate collaboration, or participate in extracurriculars, as these are activities typically better suited for extroverts. Introverted employees who have leadership potential are likely to demonstrate it silently through thoughtfulness, effort, and helping others. These employees do not speak as often, but when they do speak it is worth considering: *Who tends to have well-thought-out suggestions? Who pays attention to others when they speak, takes notes, and asks insightful questions? Who has been performing (or increasing in performance) consistently? Who helps others with their work or performs other organizational citizenship behaviors? Who shows up early or stays late?* Employees who perform these activities demonstrate valuable leadership traits like commitment, listening, critical thinking, support of others, and high-quality performance. Many of these leadership indicators are silent and may be performed by employees who seem like they are not participating, but perhaps managers have been looking out for the wrong behaviors when evaluating leadership potential.

Managers should also study the relationships that their introverted employees have with others. These may not be evident in meeting settings, but a manager must make an effort to determine who their

introverted employees interact with and how they behave with those individuals. A manager will likely see a different side of their employee because introverts prefer one-on-one connection. This will take time, but understanding one's introverted employees in this way will reveal hidden qualities that can be enriched. Through this exercise, a manager will also be able to develop a stronger, positive relationship with their introverted employees and gain a sense of their goals. They should begin building a positive record of the employees' commendable qualities and performance to boost their confidence and set them up for opportunities later on (Colley, 2019).

Consider Organizational Roadblocks

There are many organizational practices that make it difficult for introverts to break into leadership and it is a manager's job to use their power to ease the employees' way. It is time to contemplate the procedural roadblocks introverts encounter. *How are meetings being conducted? Are they designed in a way that benefits both the introverted and extroverted employees?* It is important to remember that while extroverts may find a meeting or verbal discussion energizing because they think through speech, introverts find this activity exhausting and overwhelming (Geisler, 2020; Culp & Smith, 2005). Especially in meetings or other gatherings that require more critical thought, introverts will wait a long time before contributing to the conversation, if they say anything at all, because they are busy analyzing the situation and determining the value and accuracy of what they have to say (Mauroner & Zschau, 2021). Because of this, introverts perform better in meetings when they have an opportunity before and/or during the meeting to think about the topic and perhaps prepare a response.

Another example of organizational participation expectations disadvantaging introverts is the matter of collaboration. Teamwork is a highly celebrated exercise that extroverts find exciting and more effective than operating alone, but the opposite tends to be true for introverts (Mauroner & Zschau, 2021). Logically, this indicates that collaboration is not necessarily as productive as it seems, since it is not preferred by, and is even detrimental to, a significant portion of the workforce, yet such participation is often extolled and encouraged (Smith, 2018). Unfortunately, introverts are expected to participate similarly to their extroverted peers in these situations, despite possessing different skills and methods of work and thought. An introverted employee's failure to participate in collaborative activities at the same level as their extroverted coworkers can result in a reputation and evaluations that are not reflective of the employee's effort, commitment, or even their tolerance of collaborative work.

Furthermore, due to the draining nature of socialization, introverts are generally less inclined to participate in extracurriculars, such as social clubs, volunteer opportunities, networking and development opportunities, etc. (Stephens-Craig, et al., 2015). This, combined with their quieter participation in group settings, often leads to the misinterpretation of an introvert's behavior as not being invested in their job, coworkers, or organization; not being engaged in their work; not caring about personal or career development; or not caring about the community (Geisler, 2020). Many extracurricular activities are opportunities for a leader to establish relationships and a reputation, and in many organizations, participation in such events is an indicator of interest in and fit for a management position. Therefore, introverts who skip these events, or do not participate as enthusiastically, fall into the category of those who must not be interested in leadership or managerial opportunities because they are not involved enough (Smith, 2018). These assumptions are unfair, especially once one takes into consideration the fact that the majority of the aforementioned activities are extrovert-oriented, even though many introverted leaders could also benefit from such opportunities if they played to their strengths instead of primarily calling on their weaknesses.

Managers must consider: *When it comes to evaluations am I reviewing my employees objectively without any bias? Am I judging their performance based on the frequency of their speech and charisma or on their effort, performance, and support of the team? How am I awarding opportunities? Who has not been*

considered and why? Do the employee trainings treat introverts as a problem or build them up? Are meetings, trainings, collaborative projects, and extracurricular activities selected, designed, and facilitated in a way that caters to the strengths and interests of all group members? A certain amount of collaboration, development opportunities, and other such activities may be necessary, but managers should orchestrate such events in ways that take the preferences and skills of introverts into consideration. Every activity should be designed to bring out the best in both introverted and extroverted employees, so a pattern that favors extroverts is a sign that something needs to be changed (Colley, 2018).

After completing the exercises in this phase, a manager will likely have identified at least one introverted employee with leadership potential or interest. While the manager should proceed to Phase 2 with this employee, they should continue to repeat Phase 1 to identify other biases, roadblocks, and introverted leaders. By establishing these matters as ongoing focuses of review, managers can continuously improve their workplace culture and practices, making it increasingly easy to identify introverted employees and execute Phase 2.

Phase 2: Develop Leadership-Inclined Introverts

Once a manager has identified an introverted employee who is interested in leadership and has leadership potential, it is time to develop that employee's natural abilities so that they can achieve their goals. While leadership training is popular, the following suggestions take a more personal approach that caters to both the strengths and weaknesses of introverted leaders (Figure 2).
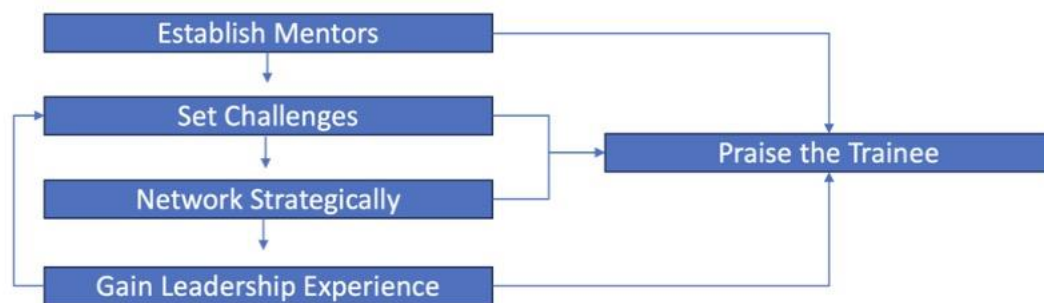

Figure 2. Phase 2: Develop Leadership-Inclined Introverts

Establish Mentors

Mentoring is the key to developing introverted leaders. This can be a formal mentorship program or one-on-one meetings, as long as the connection is often and consistent. Through this relationship a manager will build a connection with their employee that will empower them to step out of their comfort zone and develop their skills, making the subsequent recommendations much easier to employ and more successful.

After completing Phase 1, a manager should have a strong sense of their employee's goals and this knowledge will deepen throughout the mentorship. A manager should build their employee's development around their goals to keep them motivated and to contextualize their growth and learning. Finding conferences, trainings, work opportunities, and service events that relate to the employee's interests will

keep them committed and help them fight through the discomfort that those events naturally generate (Vien, et al., 2016).

Managers should also incorporate peer mentoring by pairing introverted leaders together. These employees can learn from and relate to one another and can even go to events together. This will build the employees' confidence and make it easier for them to participate in things that they would normally avoid. If a manager is extroverted, they should try to get their introverted employee connected with an introverted manager. This will give their employee someone to connect with who is knowledgeable, experienced, and has dealt with the same struggles. These relationships will build the introverted leader's network, visibility, confidence, and skills.

Set Challenges

This leadership development process should include specific goals for the introvert's progress and career. As they grow more confident and experienced, a manager should begin to set challenges for them to enhance their skills and visibility. These challenges will vary for each employee but can include things like casually speaking to 3 people every day, speaking in the first 10 minutes of a meeting, or talking to 5 people at a conference (Wisser & Massey, 2019). These challenges can eventually escalate to incorporate actual leadership opportunities and positional goals, even if the employee is applying for something that they are not quite ready for.

While uncomfortable in the moment, these exercises build the employee's confidence and slowly prepare them for a real position. When the employee is feeling discouraged, insecure, or overwhelmed, it is the manager's job as their mentor to encourage them. Recontextualize the challenge around the employee's goals, whether personal or professional, and remind them of their growth. This encouragement can also be based on the employee's leadership style; an introvert who favors servant leadership will be bolstered by reminders of how their efforts are contributing to the well-being of their coworkers, clients, and family.

Network Strategically

Alongside the previous recommendation, a manager should work with their introverted employee to develop a strategic approach to networking that is less daunting. One way to do this is to facilitate lower-pressure opportunities that are at a familiar location, with a smaller group of people, or for an event that relates to the employee's interests (Vien, et al., 2016). These strategies reduce the factors that make networking unpleasant for introverts and increase the likelihood of their enjoyment. If the introvert can find enjoyment in these events, then they will be more willing to repeat the exercise.

Additionally, before attending events, a manager should work with their introverted employee to determine who they should connect with. If the employee can go into the event with 5 to 10 people in mind that they should speak to then they have a goal to focus on achieving rather than walking around aimlessly (Wisser & Massey, 2019). Another strategy for these events is for the employee to connect with other attendees who look uncomfortable or are standing to the side. This technique allows the introvert to fall back into their preferred approach of building deeper connections with a small number of people, but in a way that successfully develops their network. This is especially effective for servant leaders because this provides them with an opportunity to utilize their skills and knowledge to make others feel better.

Gain Leadership Experience

Eventually, the introverted employee will need to build experience in leading others, but this does not have to be an overcomplicated or scary event. Start by assigning the employee extra responsibilities or a leadership role on a project that they are experienced in or passionate about (Vien, et al., 2016). Introverts are much more confident and comfortable speaking when they have authority on a subject, so a manager should use this to their advantage when developing their employees. If possible, place the employee in a role above other introverted employees who are inclined to follow (Vien, et al., 2016). This will immediately make the leader-in-training the most extroverted in the group, giving them confidence. Of course, whenever possible these opportunities should be related to the employee's goals and should be documented.

In the workplace, managers should orchestrate ways for their introverted leaders to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and participation in the way that those qualities are traditionally assessed. For example, in meetings, ask the introverted leader a question and make sure that when they speak others listen. Such events may also require some training or one-on-one coaching with the employee to help them communicate more effectively in these situations; they do not necessarily have to speak quickly or loudly, but they must speak confidently (Wisser & Massey, 2019; Vien, et al., 2016). This practice will develop the employee's skills but will also change the way that others perceive them, which will hopefully gain the employee more respect and recognition.

Praise the Trainee

Finally, and most importantly, a manager should praise the introverted leader and do so often – but only in public if it will not shift direct attention to the employee. Introverted employees are rarely praised enough, so be sure to recognize them for big and small victories. Even if they fail at something, be sure to commend them for their effort and point out what they did well. Praise can be something as simple as thanking them for what they say in a meeting, stating that they are smart and paying attention, or complimenting the skill with which they do something. Recognition can also come in the form of publicly mentioning that the introverted employee was the person who completed a particular task, project, etc. as this will casually draw others' attention to the fact that the introverted employee is a valuable contributor.

Recognition can come from anyone, not just the employee's primary manager – other managers, others in the industry, clients, or the employee's peers. As long as the praise is genuine, it is welcome and valuable. Again, whenever possible, record these commendations to build proof of the employee's commitment, growth, and aptitude, particularly as a leader. This will bolster the employee, helping them to push through challenges and reach their full potential.

To achieve maximum results, Phase 2 should be treated as an ongoing, repetitive practice, with adjustments made in accordance with the leader's progress, confidence, and goals. Alongside this, Phase 1 should be repeated to readily identify emerging leaders as well as new and unseen biases and roadblocks. Simultaneously running both phases of this development program will address the needs of current and future leaders by mentoring them in a timely manner and improving the environment in which they develop.

CONCLUSION

When properly utilized, introverted leaders have the potential to create a sustainable competitive advantage by generating a culture that is conducive to employee participation, satisfaction, commitment, collaboration, service, and unity (Polychroniou & Trivellas, 2018). As more introverts are given opportunities to lead, the benefits of their leadership will multiply, resulting in ever-increasing

organizational flexibility and creativity due to employee empowerment and collaboration and the integration of introverted decision-making practices.

Furthermore, as this representation and support grow, other introverts in the organization will feel more confident in themselves, more content, and therefore satisfied with their jobs, teams, and organizations, and their performance and commitment will improve. This will result in increased introverted employee participation, which will lead to greater innovation and success and will also empower more introverted employees to pursue leadership opportunities. If properly supported, introverted leaders have the potential to revitalize the modern organization.

Much like the discourse on extroversion, there is, of course, a bias in favor of introversion that pervades this study. For the sake of a clear argument, the introverted attributes, organizational qualities, and best practices for leadership development have been generalized and are not wholly representative of introverts and extroverts, their experiences in the workplace, or the perfect development methods. Certainly, not all introverts want to be leaders, not all introverted leaders are servant leaders, and not all introverted leaders need an extensive development program to be successful. These generalizations are not made to assert a skewed, introvert-flattering depiction of introverts, extroverts, or their leadership aptitude; rather, the goal is to simplify the issues and variables enough to reveal the larger concepts and relationships at work. Since this paper employs generalizations, it would be quite beneficial for future research to confirm (or negate) these generalizations. This is especially true for claims regarding the positive impact of introverted leaders, the contexts in which introverted leadership is most effective, and the efficacy of the suggested development strategies, since research in these areas is sparse. Additionally, a study on the impact of the presence and development of introverted leaders could be beneficial for understanding how that representation influences other introverts towards greater performance and/or leadership.

It is time for organizations to begin truly utilizing their introverted employees by giving them the opportunities and leadership they deserve. Yes, introverts have weaknesses when it comes to leadership, but so do extroverts. When it comes to defining and promoting leadership, organizations must look beyond the surface of an individual's obvious flaws and strengths to consider their potential, commitment, and character. These are the variables that are truly indicative of an employee's capacity for leadership. Ultimately, organizations must learn how to appreciate and promote different styles of leadership and different types of leaders if they hope to remain successful. The organizations that will achieve sustainability are those that learn to harness the aptitudes of all their employees – and utilize leaders who reflect the diversity of their workforce. There is still much work to be done when it comes to achieving diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace, but finding, developing, and celebrating introverted leaders is a powerful step in the right direction.

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