Extroversion/Introversion Communication Patterns: A Determinant of Success in Business

by

Edward C. Brewer

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*Edward C. Brewer (**ed.brewer@murraystate.edu**) is an Associate Professor and Graduate Director in the Department of Organizational Communication at Murray State University.*

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role extroversion or introversion plays in potential success, especially in terms of career achievement. Fortune 1000 Executives were surveyed, and the results indicate that extroverted communication patterns are somewhat necessary for career success. This extroverted expectation also has implications for classroom teaching and corporate training.

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Recently, a student in the senior seminar course at Murray State submitted his final paper that, in essence, concluded that one must be an extrovert to be successfully socialized into an organization. My disagreement with his conclusion that one must be extroverted to be successful in organizational life sparked some interesting conversations, a revision of his

paper, and a shift in both of our attitudes about the role introversion/extroversion plays in career success. Because of that encounter, I decided to look further into the relationship.

Personality assessments have been used for a number of decades, but little has been done to make specific application of the findings to precise communication patterns that either promote or hinder organizational success. Recent research has examined personality and cognitive ability as predictors of job search (Boudreau et al., 2001), but that is more in relation to exiting an organization than developing success within an organization. It has been found that introversion is more related to realistic and investigative occupations and extroversion is more related to social and enterprising occupations (Broday and Sedgwick, 1991), but specific communication patterns that might lead to success or failure for each category are not addressed.

Personality plays a role in job performance and learning (Reio and Sanders-Reio, 2006; Turner, 2005; Egan, 2005). Personality has also been considered in relation to anti-social behavior (Bergman, 2005; Lee, Ashton, and Shin, 2005; Henle, 2005) and workplace aggression (Judge, Scott, and Ilies, 2006; Osif, 2005; Heisel, France, and Beatty, 2003; Douglas and Martinko, 2001). Effective organizations desire to create high functioning work environments, and the role personality does or doesn't play in creating such an environment has also been recently examined (Enhance Team Performance, 2005; McDonald, 2005; Slowikowski, 2005; Effective Teams, 2005). We live in a rapidly changing world, and organizations must adapt quickly. Conflict is inevitable, but personality conflicts may provide information as to what is not working organizationally (Lipcamon and Mainwaring, 2004) and personality may help indicate the value placed on voice in the work environment (Avery, 2003). Diverse personality types are needed for good problem solving and decision making (Hill, 2005) and diverse personalities in work teams will more likely yield good results (Kravitz, 2005).

Because personality plays such a strong role in job search (Boudreau et al., 2001) as well as performance and learning (Reio and Sanders-Reio, 2006; Turner, 2005; Egan, 2005), it is important to examine one of the most obvious aspects of personality – extroversion versus introversion – in an effort to better understand the effects on career success. Extroverts, of course, demonstrate a preference for being around others. They are associated with traits such as sociability, talkativeness, activeness, and assertiveness. The missing elements are the specifics of the communication patterns of the extrovert. This study seeks to bridge that gap by examining the role of extroversion or introversion in potential success (in terms of career achievement) and analyze not only the personality trait, but also some of the specific communication patterns that accompany that trait in terms of individual organizational success (potential career advancement).

Surveying Corporate Leaders

The objective of this study is centered on examining, describing, and analyzing the effects of introversion and extroversion on career success (advancement), paying specific attention to the communication patterns that characterize these traits. The study sought to answer two research questions and offered two hypotheses:

RQ1: To what extent is extroversion or the perception of extroversion necessary for career success?

RQ2: What specific communication patterns coincide with career success?

H1: A significantly larger number of Fortune 1000 CEOs and Executives (an indicator of career success) will be extroverted than introverted.

H2: Of those introverted CEOs, a significant number will demonstrate extroverted communication patterns in the workplace.

Surveys were sent to Fortune 1000 CEOs and Executives. Names and addresses were purchased from a current data bank. Most were sent by email with a link to the web site where the survey was located. For those where no email account was available, a letter was mailed to them with instructions explaining how to access the survey.

An established instrument from the International Personality Item Pool (2001) that measures extroversion was used to survey the executives. One form of the instrument was used to determine general inclinations (at home) and another form of the instrument was used to ask for responses related to workplace interactions. Any difference between the two could indicate the ability to adapt within the organization to achieve success. The two instruments were from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) website (2001), have established reliability, and allow public domain use (see appendix). While the 20-item scales are slightly more reliable, the 10-item scales were used in an effort to increase the likelihood that busy CEOs would respond to the survey.

Many of the emails came back undeliverable because they were blocked in some way or because the executive had moved on. A number of emails and some phone calls were received from secretaries indicating that executives were too busy to take the survey or that company policy was not to participate in surveys. However, 44 executives did respond to the surveys. Forty respondents were male, 3 were female, and one did not identify gender.

Age
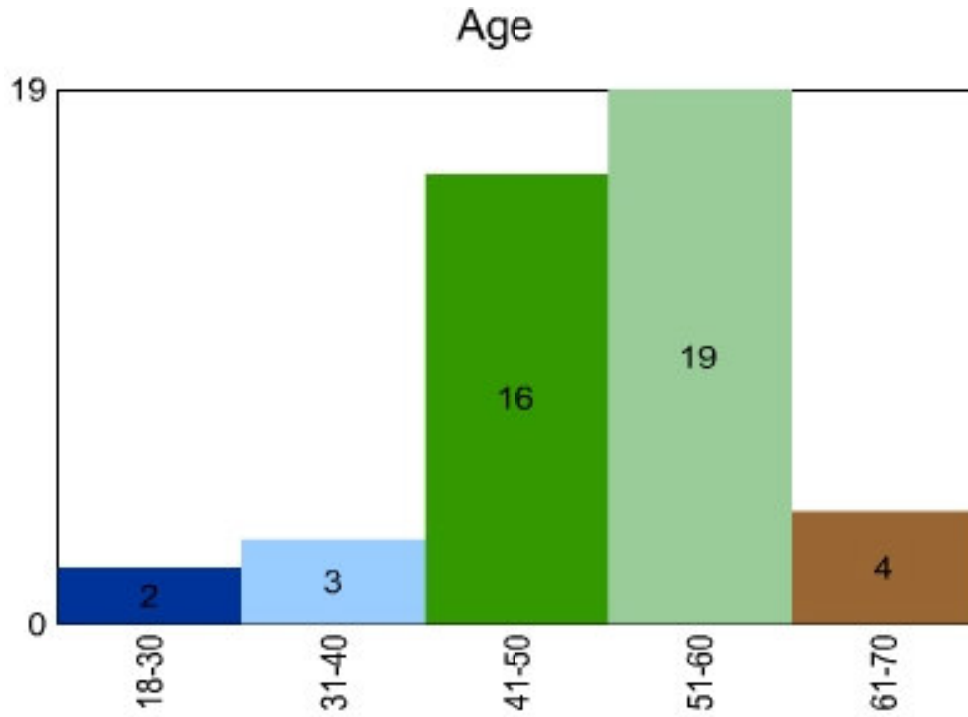
The ages of the respondents varied, but most (35) were 41-60 years old. All were top executives in fortune 1000 companies.

Position
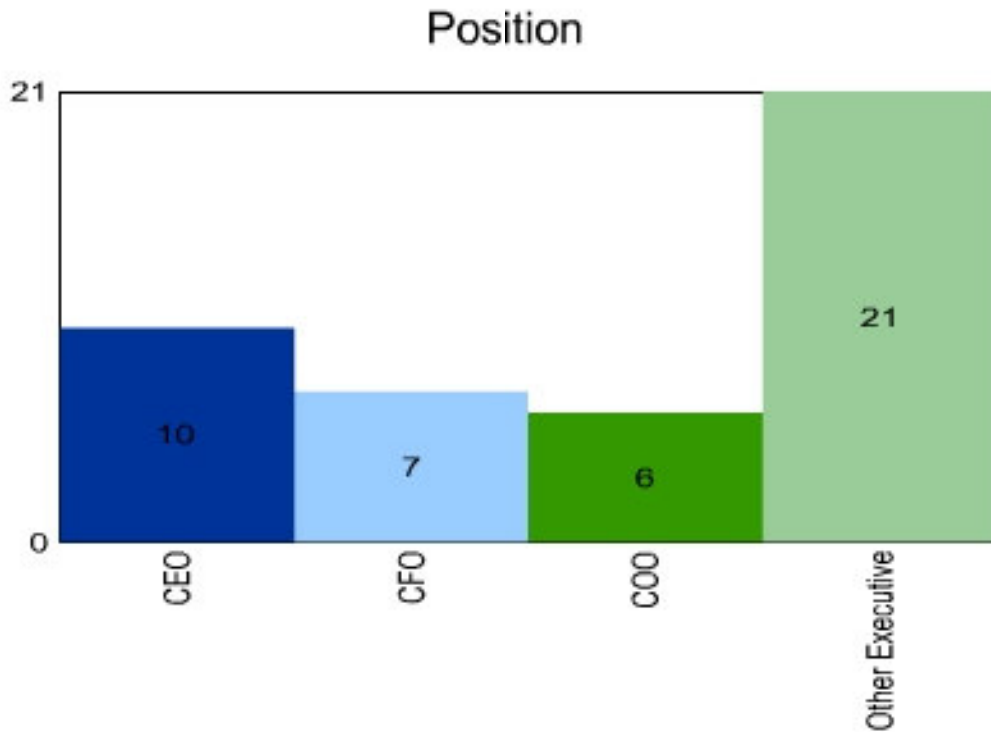
Because the sample size is so small, a correlation analysis was not done. Access to top executives is not easy to obtain, especially when many have policies against participating in surveys. A better response rate would

certainly be more desirable; however, this group of respondents offers enough information to begin making assessments.

Understanding Successful Executive Communication

For the most part, the hypotheses were found to be true; and in answer to the research questions, it is clear that extroverted communication patterns are somewhat important for career success. However, introverts can adapt their communication style to fit the extroverted expectations. The scores had the potential to range from −20 (extreme introvert) to +20 (extreme extrovert). The scores for the respondents to the survey ranged from −18 to +18. Twenty-nine executives scored as extroverts at home. Ten executives scored as introverts at home, and five executives had a score of 0 at home, which put them right in the middle. Thus, 65.9% of the executives indicated that in the home environment they were extroverted, while 22.7% indicated they were introverted. If we divide the 11.4% who scored in the middle between the two, there were 71.6% extroverts to 28.4% introverts. That is pretty close to the national average, which runs about 75% extroverts to 25% introverts.

However, the scores in the workplace environment were different. Only 4 respondents (9.1%) did not score as extroverts in the workplace environment. Two of those actually scored a 0, placing them right in the middle. Thus, only 2 (4.55%) of the respondents scored as introverts in the workplace environment (scores were −3 and −8). Thirty-nine of the respondents (88.6%) scored as more extroverted (or less introverted) in the workplace than in the home. Clearly there is something to the importance of extroversion in the workplace. Of the five who did not score more extroverted at work, three scored the same for both environments. The other two were extroverts at home and did not have significant differences for the workplace environment (9 at home and 8 at work, 10 at home and 8 at work). To be successful in one's career, then, it appears necessary to be flexible with the ability to adapt to the environment, especially if one is introverted. One respondent put it this way:

> Leadership demands visible leaders who are adroit at keeping quiet in order to learn and engaging in order to provoke further thought and performance. Good leaders, of whom I have personally known a few, are not intimidated or embarrassed by their own mistakes or lack of thorough understanding. They are constantly redefining their own strategies. I believe good leaders move between extroversion and introversion depending upon the subject, the setting (work/outside work) and the need to settle conflict and choose a course.

A respondent (a college dean) to the pilot study, which basically indicated the same results, stated, "I am an introvert who achieves goals interacting with

people, but it always tires me and I am increasingly withdrawing from such efforts." Another participant in the pilot study, who is president of a credit union, stated:

> There are really 4 environments….at work….at gatherings and meetings related to work (could be divided further into gatherings where you've established an identity vs. new group)….at home with family and friends….socially within your community (again, within a group in which you're already comfortable vs. a new group). My answers, comfort level and social interactions would vary greatly within each group.

Perhaps the key is that socially skilled introverts do not look that different from extroverts. Because 70-75% of Americans are extroverted, however, the burden is on the introvert to adjust. Extroverts and introverts alike must be able to adapt to the environment, but the introvert has seemingly more adaptation to make if he or she is to be successful in the work environment.

Communication that Leads to Success

The results were quite clear that the expectation is one must be extroverted or demonstrate extroverted communication patterns if one is to be successful (at least in terms of advancing and achieving executive positions) in business. An examination of some resent studies helps make clear what constitutes extroverted communication. LaFrance, Heisel, and Beatty (2004) searched for a nonverbal profile of extroversion, but found little evidence for such a profile. However, Paulsel and Mottet (2004) found extroversion was not correlated with control, but was positively correlated with pleasure, affection, inclusion, escape, and relaxation. These are certainly emotions that can be displayed nonverbally. Tidwell and Sias (2005) found a relationship between extroversion and covert information seeking. Thus, more extroverted employees use a larger variety of methods and tactics to seek information, which in turn helps lead to success. In addition, Tidwell and Sias (2005) found that conscientiousness played a role in information seeking. It is possible, then, that more conscientious employees will employ more extroverted communication patterns. This would seem to verify several of the respondents' suggestions that good leaders are ambiverts – able to switch between introversion and extroversion when the situation calls for it. Barrick and Mount (1993) found that conscientiousness and extroversion are significantly related to job performance. Perhaps, then, the more conscientious an employee is, the more likely he or she is to exhibit extroverted characteristics in order to accomplish the task at hand.

Hecht, Boster and LaMer (1989) discovered that the more extroverted one is, the more he or she exhibits listener-adapted communication. Again, this corroborates the emphasis on adaptive abilities the executives indicated in the survey. Also, Opt and Loffredo (2003) found that extroverts tend to have a

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higher communicator image. "The introvert can be expected to be less physically expressive and hence likely not to reflect qualities such as dominance, openness, and relaxedness when interacting with others, qualities that are important determinants of communicator image" (Opt and Loffredo, 2003, p. 566). Certainly, there are different understandings of what individuals consider to be representative of extroversion, and we all know someone whose extroversion is so overwhelming as to be repugnant.

Thus, further research might look deeper into the specifics of what would be considered acceptable or desirable extroverted communication. In the meantime, introverts should be aware that their natural tendencies, while not wrong, may not get them noticed and accepted as executive material. Therefore, introverts need to adapt to the more gregarious expectations of their extroverted counterparts. Several respondents to the survey commented on the importance of adaptation in their social and communication environments. In order to communicate in a more extroverted manner, introverts must be more aware of how they are being perceived externally by those around them. It may simply be a matter of putting voice to their internal thoughts so that the extroverts around them can tell that they are thinking and are participating in the event. Extroverts, on the other hand, might do well to look beyond the veneer of the less expressive communication patterns of their introverted colleagues and seek to draw out the insight that might very well be hidden within.

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Appendix

SURVEY

Male __   Female __
Age: 18-30___   31-40___   41-50___   51-60___   61-70___   Over 70
Position: CEO   COO   CFO   Other Executive

Following are phrases describing people's behaviors. Please use the rating scale below to describe how accurately each statement describes you in your workplace environment. Describe yourself as you generally are now, not as you wish to be in the future. Describe yourself as you honestly see yourself in relation to other people you know of the same sex as you are, and roughly your same age. So that you can describe yourself in an honest manner, your responses will be kept in absolute confidence. Please read each statement carefully, and then fill in the bubble that corresponds to the number on the scale.

1:      Very Inaccurate
2:      Moderately Inaccurate
3:      Neither Inaccurate nor Accurate
4:      Moderately Accurate
5:      Very Accurate

Feel Comfortable around people.
Have little to say.
Make friends easily.
Keep in the background
Am skilled in handling Social situations.
Would describe my experiences as somewhat dull.
Am the life of the party.
Don't like to draw attention to myself.
Know how to captivate people.
Don't talk a lot.

Following are phrases describing people's behaviors. Please use the rating scale below to describe how accurately each statement describes you in your home environment — away from work. Describe yourself as you generally are now,, not as you wish to be in the future. Describe yourself as you honestly see yourself, in relation to other people you know of the same sex as you are, and roughly your same age. So that you can describe yourself in an honest manner, your responses will be kept in absolute confidence. Please read each statement carefully, and then fill in the bubble that corresponds to the number on the scale.

Am the life of the party.
Don't talk a lot.
Feel comfortable around people.
Keep in the background.
Start conversations.

Have little to say.
Talk to a lot of different people at parties.
Don't like to draw attention to myself.
Don't mind being the center of attention.
Am quiet around strangers.

http://www.westga.edu/~bquest