

The difference between you and me...

UNDERSTANDING THE INTROVERT/EXTROVERT DISTINCTION IS FUNDAMENTAL TO GOOD MANAGEMENT. YET TOO FEW OF US FAMILIARISE OURSELVES WITH PERSONALITY TRAITS. VANESSA HARWOOD-WHITCHER DELVES INTO THE DETAIL

In September's *The Treasurer*, I wrote about the perfect storm brewing for treasurers where the skills demanded by employers are becoming much broader, with a particular emphasis on the need for strategic influencing skills.

This article explores some well-known personality types and looks at how they impact the way that treasurers communicate, influence and behave in the workplace.

The introvert/extrovert myth

Many people, when asked to describe introverts and extroverts, describe a very narrow view of both personality types. Usually extroverts are described as the kind of people you'd find at a party, dancing on the tables and being very noisy, while introverts would prefer not to be at the party at all, and if they really had to go, they'd be quietly sitting in the corner thinking what idiots the extroverts at the party were.

There is some element of truth in these descriptions, but in reality, being an introvert or extrovert is much more complex and subtle than this.

As employees, we are often asked to go through personality tests at work. Many of these are based on Carl Jung's studies of personality, with some of the more common ones being Myers-Briggs and i6PF. All will highlight the person's preferences towards intro- or

extroversion, but what does that actually mean?

Introverts and extroverts clearly relate to the world in very different ways. In any management role, it is important to consider our own preferences as well as those of our teams and peers. Understanding how people relate to the world can give real insight into why people behave in certain ways and say the things they do.

Research varies on the proportion of introverts to extroverts in society, with the split ranging from 50:50 to one third introverts to two thirds extroverts. When asked which personality type it was better to be, people will generally cite being an extrovert as better.¹

Much of this favouring of extrovertism comes down to

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our perception that being sociable, and therefore popular, is important right from school age. Western business culture also tends to praise and exemplify extrovert behaviours over introvert behaviours. For example, people who are decisive or can work in a team or have confidence to lead (all extrovert behaviours) are likely to be the ones who get noticed and promoted.

But is that really right? The flip side of that decisive, people-orientated leader is an individual who might make decisions without weighing them up properly and tend to be so dominant and overconfident that they railroad people rather than lead them. The point here is that both personality types are equally important and to favour one style of behaviour over the other is a mistake.

Susan Cain, who wrote *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, explores this obsession with extroverted behaviour

and makes a strong case for the contribution of the introvert. She talks about the current trend for 'group think' in business, which favours extroverts' ability to have quick, vocal thoughts. She explains, however, that introverts have their place in creativity, but need to be given independent time and space for thoughts and ideas to evolve. Indeed, research has shown a direct link between solitude and the ability to be creative.

Influencing depending on your style

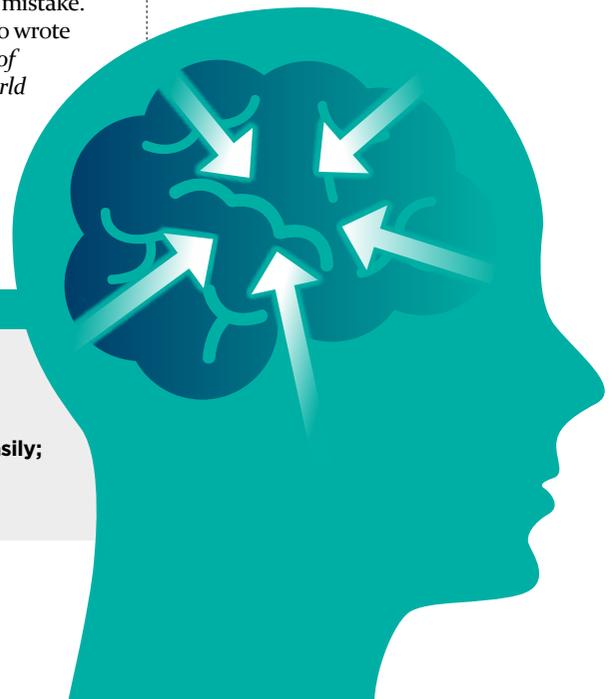
Treasurers' roles demand a high level of influencing skills, not only with internal stakeholders, the board and senior management, but also with external relationships with the markets, banks and investors.

When it comes to influencing skills, treasurers need to think about how they can affect the behaviours and actions of others in order to meet a certain objective or agreement.

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INTROVERTS:

- ✓ Are energised by their inner world;
- ✓ Will reflect on things before acting;
- ✓ Prefer to work independently;
- ✓ Are quiet in nature and won't do small talk easily;
- ✓ Prefer writing to speaking; and
- ✓ Like depth in thinking and discussions.



To be able to influence successfully, treasurers need to:

- Listen to and understand others;
- Build rapport;
- Choose appropriate times to be assertive;
- Handle objections;
- Be able to back up their arguments;
- Communicate effectively; and
- Negotiate and/or know when to compromise.

It is really important to understand influencing styles in any business discussions. Not only is it important that the influencer understands their own style, but also that they understand that of the person or people they are working with. Flexibility is key in adjusting communication styles depending on the circumstances.

Influencing as an extrovert

Firstly, remember that not everyone being negotiated will be an extrovert, so being aware of your blind side is important. The person sitting across the desk from you could be an introvert and be picking up on all of the extrovert's annoying traits.

On the positive side, extroverts are generally comfortable in social situations, even tough ones, and are responsive to others, which helps them build rapport quickly. They are generally proactive in building relationships, have good communication skills and will happily take the lead in negotiations. They tend to be decisive and can think on their feet, which means negotiations will be open and flexible.

EXTROVERTS:

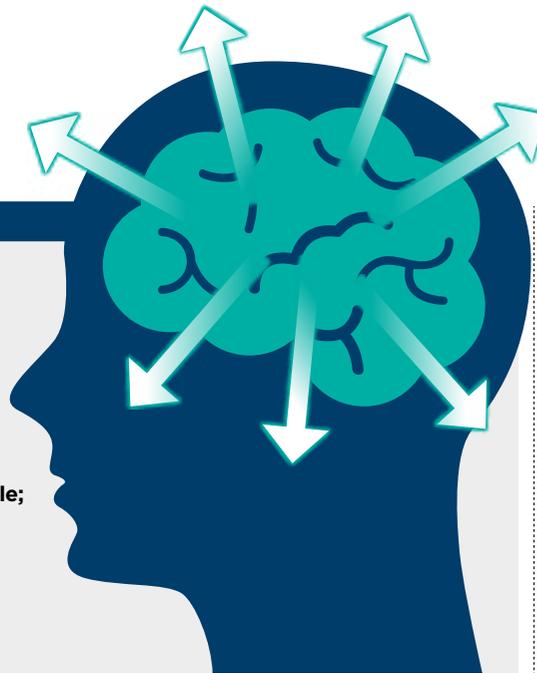
- ✓ **Are energised by being with others;**
- ✓ **Will talk their thoughts out loud to aid thinking;**
- ✓ **Tend to be spontaneous: act first, think later;**
- ✓ **Know a lot of people;**
- ✓ **Like working in teams/groups; and**
- ✓ **Like breadth in thinking and discussions.**

These traits have downsides, of course. We need to be aware that extroverts can be seen as overconfident, loud or pushy. They can look shallow, or even insincere, if relationships are formed too quickly. In negotiating situations they can come across as aggressive and they may overlook negotiating positions in their haste to promote their own agenda. Finally, there can be a tendency in extroverts to take decisions too quickly.

Influencing as an introvert

As with extroverts above, introverts need to be aware of their strengths and blind spots, and remember that the person they may be trying to influence might not be the same as them.

On the positive side, introverts will be well prepared for discussions and calm and methodical in communicating their agenda. They tend to be even-tempered and less likely to get rattled under pressure. They tend to be reliable and will follow through on their position. They are likely to come up with creative solutions to problems



encountered and can back up ideas with detail.

The flip side of these qualities include the fact they may over-prepare, only to find themselves wrong-footed by a left-field comment or idea they hadn't anticipated. They can come over as calculating or unemotional and may also seem reserved and perhaps trying to hide something, a factor that can lead to mistrust in negotiations. Their reliability can make them predictable, which may, in turn, limit their influence. And they may take too long to get to ideas, losing the opportunity to use them at the right moment.

Putting it altogether

Now that the positives and negatives of each personality style have been explored, it is important to revisit how treasurers can become true strategic influencers in their organisations.

The key to this is self-awareness. Most people will say that they know what makes them tick as individuals, but this isn't always the case. All of us have blind spots, after all.

Use the following as a checklist to help you develop your sense of self-awareness, so the next time you need to influence something important, you will be ready:

- Keep an open mind – remember that not everyone

- is the same. And if they are different to you, value the difference, as it may just make up for your own shortfalls.
- Know your personality profiles. Take an online test or get feedback from colleagues – how do they perceive you?
- Take time to reflect on what impact your style has on situations (but not too long, introverts!). Think of a recent situation that really mattered; what went well and what could you have done differently?
- Know what pushes your buttons emotionally – is that quiet reflector driving you crazy because they never talk to you? Be mindful of how you react to them and how it changes your behaviour.
- Set yourself some personal goals – if you know that you never let anyone else speak because your ideas are the quickest and the best, just try listening and see what happens.
- Visit the ACT's Career Hub where there are a range of videos and e-learning, as well as a personality test to try out.

Being introvert or extrovert is neither right nor wrong; they are just different. Valuing these differences and flexing communication styles accordingly can work wonders in business. Who knows, it could lead you to a whole new place. ♥

1 www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-17510163

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