Status in the Team: Extraverts Vs Neurotics

Key Concept

How can personality affect your status within a team? Previously, it has often been thought that extroverts are at an advantage through their confident mannerisms, giving the impression that they can get a lot done. But this idea finds that over time, extroverts tend to disappoint and their more neurotic counterparts end up surpassing expectations and, ultimately, raising their status.

Idea Summary

When it comes to personalities and employment roles, extroverts have traditionally done well, as they tend to express confidence, dominance and enthusiasm easily - all traits typically associated with good-performing employees. After all, someone expressing anxiety, emotional volatility and an overall neurotic personality in comparison will hardly make a better employee, right?

Not according to new research from Corinne Bendersky and Neha Parikh Shah; they suggest that extroverts contribute less than is assumed and expected, with the contributions they do make not being highly valuable over time. On the other hand, neurotics make more motivated employees and ultimately end up exceeding expectations.

Some of the qualities that make extroverts seem so appealing in the first place can end up contributing to their downfall when it comes to teamwork. For example, they tend to display enthusiasm and assertiveness, which may lead to positive contributions to tasks, but according to Bendersky this also results in them being poor listeners and unreceptive to other people's input. Neurotics, on the other hand, are motivated to work extra hard, especially in group contexts. This stems from the anxiety they feel about not wanting to disappoint peers and colleagues. “They can even be very generous and supportive and helpful,” says Bendersky.

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Source

Academy of Management Journal

Idea conceived
2013

Idea posted
May 2013

DOI number
10.13007/149

Subject

Interpersonal Skills
Team Building and Teamwork
Organizational Behaviour
Psychology
Over time team members’ assessments of neurotic workers tend to rise, while appraisals of extroverts decline.

**Methodology:** Bendersky and Parikh Shah conducted an experiment in which 299 MBA students took personality tests and were divided into five-person study groups. After the students had worked together for a week, everyone was asked to complete a survey evaluating their teammates, with emphasis on which members had the highest status and were expected to perform the best. The more extroverted the member, the higher their peers rated their expected influence and status. Neurotics, on the other hand, got much lower ratings. In a follow-up 10 weeks later, however, the extroverts had disappointed and lost their status over time. In contrast, the neurotics had exceeded expectations, driving their status higher.

In a second experiment, an online study was set-up with 300 people; they were then told they needed to make an urgent request for help preparing a work presentation from an unknown colleague named John, described as either extroverted, introverted, neurotic or emotionally stable. Monitoring exchanges between the participants and “John”, the researchers found that a lot was expected from the extrovert version of him, who was also evaluated quite critically. On the other hand, little was expected of the neurotic version so his contributions were evaluated very positively.

**Business Application**

So do these findings mean that employers should stay away from extroverts completely? No, not exactly. Extroverts do contribute in teamwork, but what this research shows is it is just not as much as is initially expected of them. However, for roles that require a more ‘charismatic’ team member, such as sales or roles involving on-stage presentations, they may still be best choice. It is when it comes to collaborative tasks that problems arise.

“This work suggests that more of a balance is appropriate,” says Bendersky. “Extroverts tend to be much more risk-seeking, and neurotics tend to be much more cautious and risk-averse. So having a balance of those preferences may, overall, improve decision-making.”

**Further Reading**

