

## **Introversion and management – between classical barriers and opportunity of the upgraded perception**

**Andra Crăciun**

*University of Bucharest, Faculty of Psychology and Sciences of Education*

**Nina Maria Sofian**

*Organizational psychology individual practice*

### **Abstract**

*Modern literature brings to attention the tendency of the present society to link success with characteristics which are more likely consistent with the extraverted personality, apparently making room for the talkative, imperative, social and dominant type of persons to prove their potential and rise on the ladder of possibilities. Although this approach is fruitful foremost of the people – as extraversion is found within most of the population – introverts, around a quarter of the total population, seem to face several disadvantages. It has been observed – both in professional literature and in practice – that introverts are less likely to be recognized as valuable within a workplace because they lack abilities (and interest) of affirm. Also, it is more likely to find appraisal of success based on hierarchical positions – hence – more pressure in making most of the people in the work field to prove their abilities to manage as opposed to finding, exploring and maintaining those activities which are most suitable for their personality types. The present paper offers a case of study which – based on personality assessment and structured interviewing – provides the reader with a concrete example of one trying to prove managing skills despite the introverted characteristics and the results of such an attempt. The case of study is destined for human resources specialists, readers interested in personality structures and workplace adaption but also to vocational counselors.*

**Keywords:** *introversion, personality assessment, personality and management*

---

**Corresponding author:** Andra Crăciun

**Phone number:** +040 0736427336

**E-mail address:** andra.craciun.psi@gmail.com

---

## I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary literature (Cain, 2013) suggests an approach of temperamental types which brings to attention the fact that in the present times, the organizational environment values traits such as dominance, efficient team integration, coordinating capacity, all being necessary to both individual and organizational success.

This approach has an effect on the introverted individuals which tend to perceive their analytical capacity, need of strictly communicating based on an exchange perceived as valuable or the need of periodically retreating from social life as being undesirable personality traits, unwanted and which might sabotage a good professional integration (Harbaugh, 2010).

Cain emphasized that this phenomenon is specific to contemporary occidental societies and that there is a need of re-evaluating the approach of influence factors regarding competences, personal and interpersonal aptitudes which are to be valued and stimulated (Cain, 2013).

### 1. The introverted personality and the professional context

We may identify a series of differences which emphasize the specifics of functioning in introverts and extraverts, as the professional literature is reach from this point of view. Thus, Thorne (1987) reaches the conclusion, in one of his studies, that while within a group of discussions, introverts mostly approach aspects related to problem solving, while extraverts bring to discussion a wider area of subjects.

On the other hand, far from representing strictly behavioral or contextual variations, the differences between introverts and extraverts have been described as being of neurological nature. Thus, Fishman (2011) reminds us of the fact that extroverts have a brain rather „programmed” to react based on reward. The researcher also shows that the extraverted people have a preference towards reach social context, as their brain functions select and offer attention mostly to social stimuli – so that the capacity and motivation towards social interaction are wider developed compared to the case of introverts.

As for the correlation to other personality traits, Gudjonsson, Sigurdsson, Bragason & Valdimarsdotti (2004) have concluded that unstable introverts (namely the melancholic from Eysenck and Eysenck’s typologies - 1975) prove higher compliance compared to stable extraverts

(the sanguine) – so we may expect that an introvert would collaborate better than the extravert who is more likely to get distracted with a relational activity or situation (Cain, 2013).

Although many of the introverts are shy, this is not a characteristic of the discussed type of personality (Burruss & Kaenzig, 1999); the authors signal the fact that there is a tendency of erroneously interpreting the introverts' behavior (as a predisposition to pathology and even a type of disorder) because, in a matter of percentage, they are present in a much lower extent compared to extroverts.

The extraverted people, by their nature, cannot explain why somebody would need, for instance, to be by themselves in certain moments (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002). The ulterior effect – signaled both in research and through the observation of relational dynamics – is that extraverts will initiate ways to support the introverts in becoming more sociable, more talkative, to spending their spare time and perceiving the pleasure of gregarious activities according to their own conception – even if there is no objective need in doing so (Burruss & Kaenzig, 1999; Rauch, 2003).

Such effect can also be extrapolated on an organizational level, where management and recruiting policies are mostly oriented towards building an environment which includes high extraversion persons, as the importance of teamwork is presented as a crucial key to success (West & Markiewicz, 2008).

Also, studies show that at the moment, the probability to be promoted in organizations is mostly based on being social, flexible, motivated, taking action and communicating – being therefore more likely to meet extraverted people among the promoted personnel even in the presence of lower consciousness (Stacey, 2007; Hartmann, 2006; Stenmark, 2003).

On the other hand performance is mostly correlated to being organized, owing a good analytical capacity and being specialized in your domain – characteristics which are mostly met among the introverts (Robertson, Gibbons, Baron, MacIver, Nyfield, 2002). In other words, establishing relationships with others in an efficient manner is a better predictor of the possibility of being promoted compared to being performing in one's domain (Gollwitzer, 1999).

It is possible that an individual's extraversion might indeed be more valuable for a company compared to, for example, the competences in a domain which are more likely to be held by an introverts who on the other hand, by their nature, will not make these known so easily.

We should also consider the hypothesis that an introvert is less likely to desire being promoted as a manager as considering that such occupation implies behavioral characteristics almost opposed to the introverted personality manifestations (as it seems to be much easier for extraverts to lead, confront and guide change - Alkahtani, Abu-Jarad, Sulaiman, & Nikbin, 2011).

On the other hand an introvert might perceive the social pressure which apparently dictates the need of behaving similarly to an extravert (x) and reaching out for the same purposes – as being a higher form of validating one's contributions to an organization (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2013).

## **II. CASE OF STUDY**

The proposed case of study is based on the experience of a 22 year old subject in the situation of occupying for the first time a managing position. The subject is member of a non-governmental organization (NGO) who after several years of being part of one of the NGO's projects decides to extend both the accessibility and visibility.

Based on the experienced she has gathered within the project, she considers knowing well its specifics and identifies a request from the clients to offer a wider version on it. Being one of the first NGO members involved in the project and based on the trust on her own approach she assumes the position of project manager.

In order to obtain a clearer view of the way in which she adapted to the given situation we will discuss a series of results obtained as a result of applying a semi-structured interview and also the application of DECAS (Sava, 2011), a personality assessment based on the Big Five personality model (proposed by Costa & McCrae, 1992).

We should mention that the Big Five model of personality is one of the most utilized in the domain of personality assessment and has been shown to offer good predictability in assessing personality fit towards several types of professional requirements (e.g. Barrick & Mount, 1991).

DECAS, the utilized instrument, assesses the following personality factors based on the Big Five Model: Openness, Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Agreeability and Emotional Stability. Along with these factors, the instrument also evaluates answer distortions in order to identify tendencies such social desirability bias, randomness of answers and answers based on need of approval; the obtained profile shows no modifications of these parameters, therefore the results are reliable.

The obtained profile shows the highest scores for the factor of Openness (T score = 61.20, percentile = 87.00 - described consistently with high creativity and imagination, preferences towards progress) and Agreeability (T score = 60.80, percentile = 86.00, consistent with being understanding towards others and cooperative), followed by Emotional Stability (T score = 58.00, percentile = 79.00, describing low vulnerability in facing stressful situations). The lowest scores were obtained in the case of Extraversion (T = 48.80, percentile = 44.00) showing preference for quiet and intimacy, being reflexive and Consciousness (T = 42.90, percentile = 24.00).

Along with the mentioned personality factors, DECAS (Sava, 2011) uses specific traits and their tableau to obtain more detailed information regarding competencies and personal tendencies of the subject.

Thus, other specific results obtained by personality assessment show the following: the subject has a preference for progressive activities which she finds relevant to a social impact (more from the idealistic point of view), is centered towards the needs of others but on the other hand is perceived as being cold and rather a loner; also, shows a good capacity of overcoming stressful situations – the two latter traits being consistent with Eysenck’s description of the phlegmatic temperamental type (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975). The idealistic views are consistent with the better capacity of thinking projects through and being less likely to succeed in implementing them (a characteristic which we find consistent with the introverted type of personality; also see Cain, 2013).

We find good analytic and information restructuring capacities, high tolerance towards different opinions and ideas but also actions of other people; creativity and intuition are highly differentiated by the instrument from the capacity of implementing ideas – the latter being one of the main requests when it comes to managing activities.

The profile also describes the following developed competencies: stress management, flexibility and innovative spirit, work independence, in spite of the less developed competencies such as leadership, motivating others, entrepreneurial spirit, teamwork.

Along with applying the personality assessment tool, we have utilized the semi-structured interview in order to consolidate the obtained results and place the information into context.

Hence, the subject’s self-descriptions imply that she perceives herself as being an introvert finding it sometimes difficult to interact to the others (“I feel like I continuously have to break barriers”, “Other people seem to communicate and connect much easier than I do”, “I don’t mind

taking a break from the world from time to time, I do have the tendency of avoiding social context sometimes”).

The results showing low Consciousness have been understood by both the subject and the interviewer rather as a consequence of the fact that she needs to feel highly connected to the given task or activity (show interest towards it) in order to complete it efficiently and to offer quality – otherwise, tasks considered less important or interesting are rapidly abandoned.

Discussing other results of the assessment, the subject seems surprised by the high Agreeability score as she suggests that it is difficult for her to evaluate the way people perceive her and that most of the time social relationships are experienced with insecurity (“I analyze myself a lot when it comes to relationships, I ask myself whether or not I am adequate, but I am able to obtain and maintain valuable, very close relationships which bring me joy, provided they give me the opportunity of exchange and develop ideas”) – description which, again, is consistent to modern views regarding the introverted personality (Cain, 2013).

The information provided by the interview, self-description and results obtained through assessment such as analytical capacity, tendency to withdraw, creativity and intuitive capacity, ability to find solutions and conceive projects enable us to describe the subject as being mostly characterized by an introverted type of personality.

We briefly analyze the way in which the personality profile and its indicators might explain the way in which the subject adapted to the managing position. Based on the subject’s descriptions, we find out that although the need of implementing the project was correctly identified (based on the high number of clients who were interested and benefited from the project), the subject experienced the situation of being a manager as being a highly challenging one and which requested a very high use of energy and resources (“I remember sleeping for about 15 hours after the project was done”) and that the effort sometimes came to compensate the perceived lack of interest from the coordinated team (both the interview and the personality profile showed a low ability in directing others and giving tasks). Moreover, the subject declared to have been much more satisfied with the stage of developing and writing the project compared to managing its implementation.

We may assert that these descriptions of the subject’s experience may be explained by correlating the assessment results to the situation of being a manager. Thus we notice that the progressive, idealistic tendency of finding innovation is more likely consistent with creativity and

conceiving projects and less with implementing them (respectively, being focused on results and giving attention to productivity – competences which also are specific to managers and have been reported as low in the present case).

Also, the mean score of Extraversion is, in the case of managing, translated to a weak presence of the dominance trait; also high Agreeability (associated to tolerance) is an indicator which may explain the person's incapacity to give tasks to others and make sure they accomplish them – fact which in our case has led in the subject to assume responsibility towards those tasks and accomplish them, replacing the team in several moments, as reported within the interview.

The final conclusion of the analysis conducted with the help of the interviewer, the subject was able to identify the personality traits and factors which potentially have led to dissatisfaction towards the manager position but also helped to identify strong points such as creativity, analytical abilities, independent work which in future will support more suitable career choices for the subject.

### **III. CONCLUSIONS**

The present case has been brought to discussion in order to consolidate several ideas which are being stipulated in the modern psychological literature regarding introversion (Cain, 2013): pressure is being held regarding being productive, standing out of the crowd, being part of the team and becoming a coordinator or manager (aspects assimilated, at least on a common sense, as being signs of success) – pressure which is reported in the present case and which is the engine behind the subject's choice of assuming the role of a manager.

Such pressure makes that abilities such as generating ideas, being “behind the action” while conceiving projects, the analytical capacity to be considered as “secondary” qualities (as previously discussed - (Robertson, Gibbons, Baron, MacIver, Nyfield, 2002), not only by employers but inherently by those who are preparing themselves for a career direction.

Progress and enhancing the true potential of human resources thus become “shadows” compared to chasing record-results and leading positions, race in which the slower, more prudent rhythm of the introvert may slide only to de-motivation and losing interest for professional evolution.

We strongly support the promotion of utilizing evidence-based methods in human resources assessment, both in processes of selection and recruiting but also in career guidance, for the benefit of those employees who wish to make choices regarding their future paths.

### References

- Alkahtani, A. H., Abu-Jarad, I., Sulaiman, M., & Nikbin, D. (2011). The impact of personality and leadership styles on leading change capability of Malaysian managers. *Australian Journal of Business and Management Research*, 1(2), 70-98.
- Barrick, M. R., & Mount, M. K. (1991). The big five personality dimension and job performance: a meta-analysis. *Personnel psychology*, 44(1), 1-26.
- Burruss, J. D., & Kaenzig, L. (1999). Introversion: The often forgotten factor impacting the gifted. *Virginia Association for the Gifted Newsletter*, 21(1), 1-4.
- Cain, S. (2013). *Quiet: The power of introverts in a world that can't stop talking*. Broadway Books.
- Costa, P. T., & McCrae, R. R. (1992). Four ways five factors are basic. *Personality and individual differences*, 13(6), 653-665.
- Diener, E., Lucas, R. E., & Oishi, S. (2002). Subjective well-being. *Handbook of positive psychology*, 63-73.
- Eysenck, H. J., & Eysenck, S. B. G. (1975). *Manual of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (junior and adult)*. Hodder and Stoughton.
- Fishman, I., Ng, R., & Bellugi, U. (2011). Do extraverts process social stimuli differently from introverts?. *Cognitive neuroscience*, 2(2), 67-73.
- Gollwitzer, P. M. (1999). Implementation intentions: strong effects of simple plans. *American psychologist*, 54(7), 493.
- Gudjonsson, G. H., Sigurdsson, J. F., Bragason, O. O., Einarsson, E., & Valdimarsdottir, E. B. (2004). Compliance and personality: The vulnerability of the unstable introvert. *European Journal of Personality*, 18(5), 435-443.
- Harbaugh, E. R. (2010). The effect of personality styles (level of introversion–extroversion) on social media use. *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications*, 1(2), 70-86.

- Hartmann, A. (2006). The role of organizational culture in motivating innovative behaviour in construction firms. *Construction Innovation*, 6(3), 159-172.
- Pfeffer, J., & Sutton, R. I. (2013). *The knowing-doing gap: How smart companies turn knowledge into action*. Harvard Business Press.
- Rauch, J. (2003). Caring for your introvert. *The Atlantic*, March.
- Robertson, I., Gibbons, P., Baron, H., MacIver, R., & Nyfield, G. (1999). Understanding management performance. *British Journal of Management*, 10(1), 5-12.
- Sava, F (2011). *Inventarul de personalitate DECAS. Manualul Utilizatorului*, Editia a IIa Timisoara, Art Press.
- Stacey, R. D. (2007). *Strategic management and organisational dynamics: The challenge of complexity to ways of thinking about organisations*. Pearson education.
- Stenmark, D. (2003). Knowledge creation and the web: Factors indicating why some intranets succeed where others fail. *Knowledge and Process Management*, 10(3), 207-216.
- Thorne, A. (1987). The press of personality: A study of conversations between introverts and extraverts. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53(4), 718.
- West, M. A., & Markiewicz, L. (2008). *Building team-based working: A practical guide to organizational transformation*. John Wiley & Sons.