

Off to a Quiet Start: Discourse on Introversion and Virtual Onboarding

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to review literature pertaining to best practices for virtual onboarding and to encourage discourse about employees with introverted tendencies who must onboard remotely. Accounting for these domains is relevant considering the increase in remote work and, subsequently, the increase in virtual onboarding. Of additional relevance is the importance for organizational leaders in position to influence culture and common practices to employ inclusive practices that consider new employees with introverted tendencies. Encouragement for further study of intersectional aspects, such as various dimensions of diversity, are also included within.

KEYWORDS

Diversity, Introversion, Onboarding, Organizational Socialization, Organizational Support, Personality, Remote Work

INTRODUCTION

For generations to come, the year 2020 will be surely remembered as a year of tumult. With it came COVID-19, the coronavirus that was at the root of a world pandemic and civil unrest in response to racial injustices. Individuals and families were shaken as it became necessary to adapt to these societal changes. Though it was a practice unfamiliar to many, mask-wearing became a norm, seemingly overnight (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2020a); conversations about social justice and patriotism flooded social media platforms, and many people began to work from home (WFH), if they had a job that made it possible to do so (Kendzior, 2015). Public health concerns, social unrest, and remote work are not new concepts, but the intersections of these events and the sudden changes experienced by so many people, undoubtedly played a part in the businesses and organizations being forced to face issues that, until recently, were not commonly addressed in the workplace.

The murder of George Floyd, in addition to other tragic incidences of racial injustice re-ignited discussions on diversity management and was the catalyst for organizations launching or bolstering diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, largely focused on race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation (Cheung, 2020; Carrega & Ghebremedhin, 2020; McCoy, 2020; Weitzner, 2020; Yuan, 2020). While race, gender, and sexual orientation are commonly the main focus of many DEI programs and activities, it would benefit leaders and their organizations to recognize other aspects of their employees' identities (Mercer, 2020). Personality is an invisible dimension of diversity, and as such, often not considered in the discourse of DEI in the workplace (Cathey, 2021; Cody, 2021).

Personality should not be overlooked. Some personality traits have been historically marginalized and thus seen as negative. Extroversion, for example, has historically been preferred and rewarded in western cultures (Lawn et al., 2019). Leaders wishing to have inclusive organizations in line with DEI

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best practices must aim to understand different social behaviors which are attributed to personality traits, just as they would with any other dimension of diversity (Scandura, 2019). This includes understanding how identity, namely introversion and extroversion, can influence the experience of onboarding to a new organization.

Social scientists have studied the correlation between organizational socialization and the rates of retention (Holtom & Darabi, 2018; Kowtha, 2018), but, given the rise of virtual onboarding in association with remote work, the discussion should be expanded to include considerations for new hires with various personality traits that may be at risk for retention if not given a strong start at their new place of work. This paper is intended to illuminate the intersecting concepts of introversion and virtual onboarding and to highlight possibilities for future research.

INTROVERSION AS A TRAIT

Those with stronger tendencies towards introversion are contemplative and prefer to think about and reflect on concepts inwardly while problem solving (Jung, 1991). Rather than engaging in small talk or superficial conversation, introverts appreciate deep conversations, focusing on specific topics at a deep level, rather than many topics broadly (Luse et al., 2013). When it comes to forming ties, those who are introverted tend to focus on a few deep and meaningful relationships, rather than developing many weak ties.

People who are introverted are not necessarily shy, though they are often thought to be (Cain, 2012). In her book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, Susan Cain (2012) drew a distinction between shyness and introversion. She describes introversion as a preference for a calm and mellow setting or environment. This means that someone could be both shy and introverted, simultaneously being concerned with whether people judge them negatively and preferring a quiet atmosphere or neither of these. An introverted person could also prefer calm and quiet without caring at all how people perceive them.

Those who identify as or are perceived to be introverts are often misunderstood due to the many stereotypes attached with introversion (Blevins et al., 2021; Luse et al., 2013; McCord & Joseph, 2020). Extroversion, in fact, is a favored trait around the world (Ching et al., 2014). This negative connotation is a disservice to people who are more introspective than others (Gregoire, 2017). They are also thought to be less happy than people who are seen as extroverts (Fishman et al., 2011), making relationship building and team building a challenge. Biases impact the way in which people automatically attribute behaviors or actions to stereotypes (Hays-Thomas, 2017).

What does this mean for situations in which an outgoing colleague or supervisor subscribes to the negative stereotypes of introversion and interacts with a new employee who exhibits introversion? Considering the spectrum of introversion and extroversion as it relates to new employees can be useful to organizational leaders and those who are responsible for onboarding activities to support new employees and mitigate biases that may impact successful organizational socialization. Remembering that newly hired employees likely have few, if any, ties already formed when they join an organization, leaders should keep focus on the opportunities provided for all employees to build relationships and strengthen ties, whether work will be done in the offices or remotely, as is the growing trend.

THE INCREASING INTEREST IN WORKING REMOTELY

Requests to WFH have increased in recent years, illustrated by the 83%-98% of surveyed employees expressing a desire to regularly telecommute at least one day per week (Buffer, 2019; Owl Labs, 2019; [PwC], 2021; Roberts, 2021; Saad & Wigert, 2021). Working remotely allows employees to experience a better balance between their work and home lives, serve as caregivers, avoid long commutes, and save money along the way (Owl Labs, 2018, 2019). Most employees who work remotely (75%-79%) report being more focused when they WFH and list this as one of their top reasons for wanting to telework (Owl Labs, 2018, 2019). This flexibility has leveled the playing field for those who are

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