

The perils of a leader who is too extroverted

May 6 2019, by Jeff Grabmeier



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Extroverts are often seen as natural leaders in organizations. But a new study suggests that some leaders may have too much of a good thing.

Researchers found that informal leaders were better liked and more

sought after for advice when they hit a middle "sweet spot" on levels of assertiveness and warmth, two facets of extroversion.

Team members reacted less favorably to leaders who were high on assertiveness or warmth.

"Overly extroverted leaders can come across as too pushy or too annoying," said Jia (Jasmine) Hu, lead author of the study and associate professor of management and human resources at The Ohio State University's Fisher College of Business.

"A moderate amount of assertiveness and warmth may be optimal."

The study did find one factor that helped highly extroverted leaders receive better marks from their peers: prosocial motivation, or the desire to look out for others' welfare.

The study appears online in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* and will be published in a future print edition.

The researchers did two related studies. The first involved 260 business undergraduate students who were randomly assigned to 78 self-managed teams. The students worked in their teams on a variety of projects through a full semester.

At the beginning of the semester, students rated themselves on two facets of extroversion. One was assertiveness, which is the desire to be dominant and forceful. The second was warmth, which is how friendly and outgoing they were.

The students' prosocial motivation was measured by asking them how much they agreed with statements like "I care about benefiting others through my work."

Later in the semester, students rated each member of their team on how much they showed leadership in their group activities. Based on these ratings, the researchers chose the person on each team who was seen by most of their peers as the leader.

Team members also rated how much they liked each of their [team members](#) and how much they went to him or her for advice in solving problems related to their tasks.

A second, nearly identical study involved 337 employees on work teams in a large retail company in China. Like with the students, these were self-managed teams without formal leaders.

Both studies had very similar results.

Leaders who were extroverted tended to be better liked and more sought after for advice by their team members—but only up to a point.

Leaders who rated themselves as very assertive or very warm tended to see a drop-off in how much their fellow team members liked them and sought their advice.

Hu said it was a case of too much of a good thing.

"If you're too assertive as a team member, people think you're pushy and they don't like that," she said.

"And if you're too warm and friendly, that can be overwhelming for others who feel pressured to respond in the same enthusiastic way."

But fellow employees can put up with more extroversion if they think you're doing it for others.

"If you're prosocially motivated, people see more benefits to your assertiveness and warmth. They know you're not doing it just to promote yourself, but have a genuine interest in the whole team. That means a lot," Hu said.

While this study was done with informal leaders, Hu said she believes the results could also apply to formally chosen supervisors. And she noted that even in teams with formal bosses, informal leaders like those in this study often emerge and play a key role in a team's success.

Provided by The Ohio State University

Citation: The perils of a leader who is too extroverted (2019, May 6) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-05-perils-leader-extroverted.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.