



Working from Home – How your Personality is affecting your Performance

Over the past month many of us have been delivering “business as usual” from a home rather than an office base.

As people get over the sudden change, it is worth considering the fact that some people adapt to working from home more quickly than others, simply because of differences in personality. The Myers Briggs Indicator (MBTI), a personality questionnaire I’ve worked with for over 20 years provides us with some helpful insights. The MBTI sifts and sorts people into 16 personality types based on 4 sets of preferences: how they derive their energy, how they take in information, how they come to decisions and how they like to implement things. The result is a set of 4 letters which best describe you as an individual and the characteristics you share with other people of the same type.

The first pair of MBTI preferences are Extroversion (E) and Introversion (I). In MBTI-speak, they indicate how people derive their energy. I’m going to concentrate on this pairing, because it has an impact on how colleagues will maintain their motivation and focus during lockdown. I’ll describe some of the characteristics of introverts and extroverts and provide some pointers about managing yourself and working remotely with team members. There are also some pointers for managers who undoubtedly will have both extroverts and introverts in their team.

You can make an educated guess about your own or other people’s preferences, even if you’ve never been near the MBT just by observing how they “operate”. Put simply, extroverts appear to be the noisier, gregarious ones, and introverts the quieter ones who may appear a little reserved or shy.

Introverts

On the face of it, if you have an introverted preference you would appear to adapt to home working more quickly than your extroverted colleagues. In fact, in some ways you may welcome a move to a home office where you have more control over your working environment. You’ll probably enjoy having a quiet, dedicated space at home for concentration. Fewer distractions enable you to become really absorbed in what you’re doing.

If you’re an introvert, you’ll probably like to think deeply about ideas. For that reason, you’d appreciate having an agenda in advance of virtual meetings so you can think about things beforehand. You’re rarely the first to put your point across in team meetings; your noisier extrovert colleagues will normally beat you to it.

You can become deeply involved in a project without interruptions and may be quite content to work alone for extended periods of time. You’ll also prefer communicating in writing as you

like to marshal your thoughts clearly and you'll learn by reading. It's not that introverts, like you, dislike people contact; they just are less reliant on it to maintain their motivation.

Many an introvert feels they are more focussed and efficient working from home away from the hustle and bustle of office life.

Consider these pointers to be more effective:

- If you're an introvert, it doesn't mean you're a social recluse. Because you're human you still have a need for interaction with others, just not as much as extroverts. Particularly if you live and work alone make sure to plan some people time with friends and family/your network.
- Work is important so impress on others in your home the need to respect your work boundaries and not to disturb you while you're working. Establish some set hours so others in the household know when you are and are not available.
- Create a workspace where you can concentrate, be it in an outhouse, garage or other room.
- You won't be overly distracted by music so select your play-list; it will help you get in the zone.
- After all that concentration and sitting in a chair, which isn't really designed for prolonged office use anyway, get moving, stretch, jump up and down, enjoy music and podcasts, read, do a jig saw and pamper yourself!
- If you're managing an introvert, be sure to ask them for their opinions in meetings and ask them how best to communicate with them. Allow them time to think about things and really listen to their views as you can be sure they will have given them deep consideration before airing them clearly and concisely.

Extraverts

If you have an extroverted preference you may already be feeling the pressure of not going out to connect with friends. Everyone will miss contact with their colleagues but especially you, because you are energised by office banter and interactions with others. You will think "aloud", formulating your ideas and views as you speak, and you really need other people to help you generate your best ideas.

You tend to need action and variety to feel motivated. As such, you can bring considerable energy to projects, once harnessed and tend to work in bursts of activity. You can, however, be easily distracted by more interesting things. You'll probably have lots of plates spinning, moving between various tasks, rather than spending a long time on one thing. Looking back to the days in the real office, you were the one who was physically moving around the place a lot more than your introverted colleagues.

You may take some time to settle to a long or slow task and will welcome the distraction of the telephone ringing (oh good, someone to talk to!) or ping, a new email arriving. You probably prefer to communicate by speaking rather than sending emails or writing long reports. Deprive you of contact with people and life suddenly becomes more stressful for the extrovert and your mood and productivity may suffer.

Consider these pointers to be more effective:

- Work with a clear desk – clutter will distract you and make you feel less organised.
- Avoid procrastination - establish the key things you need to achieve the night before and focus on completing them the next day. Ticking something off your “to do list” gives extraverts a sense of achievement.
- Create some structure – set your working hours and take breaks at set times. Finish work at a set time. Don’t fall into the trap of allowing work to fill the available space or you will become inefficient and tired.
- Take regular short breaks to move around. Use your previous commuting time to go for a walk or run before you start work.
- Meet for a virtual lunch with a colleague or friend/have lunch together with other family members:
- Try and resist the tendency to react to the arrival of each and every email or ping of a text – silence alerts.
- If you’re managing an extrovert, talk to them more than you might normally, ask them how they’re getting on; it will keep them motivated and performing.

Bear in mind that stress (and there’s plenty of it around) can make people, whatever their personality type, act out of character, for example extroverts may withdraw. In this climate of uncertainty and generalised anxiety, managers and leaders need to strike the right balance between the well-being of the individuals in their team and the task. For managers, you need to work out your own preferred way of working and adapt it to the needs of your team. Above all, be a good listener. For workers, your MBTI type is not an excuse for not doing something. Work is important and adopting some of the tips here will help you be more focussed and efficient, to survive and thrive.

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