

## Accommodating Introverted Nursing Faculty in the Work Environment

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### Abstract

Due to a nursing faculty shortage, many are employing strategies to recruit and retain nursing faculty. Work environments that are accommodating to the diversities of the targeted workforce increase work performance, comfortability, and job satisfaction. More people are extroverted and typically nursing faculty work environments are extroverted-oriented. Designing a work environment that is not only inclusive of extroverted nursing faculty but also introverted nursing faculty is one strategy to retain faculty. The purpose of this paper is to give an overview of introversion and extroversion, discuss the typical nursing faculty work environment and the challenges it presents to introverted nursing faculty, and present strategies for creating work environments in nursing education where introverts can perform at their maximum potential.

### Introduction

The nursing profession is not only challenged by a nursing shortage, but also by a nursing faculty shortage. As a result of the nursing faculty shortage, approximately 69,000 qualified students were turned away from graduate and undergraduate nursing education programs in 2014 [1]. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing also reported that 56.4% of the 714 nursing schools surveyed reported full-time faculty vacancies [2]. It has been increasingly important to recruit and retain nursing faculty. With an increased focus being placed on retaining nursing faculty, more emphasis should be placed on creating positive work environments. When considering the work environment, it is important to consider the personality type preferences of introversion and extroversion. Workplaces should be inclusive to both introverted and extroverted personality types.

In a nation of predominantly extroverted people, most work environments are tailored to extroverts and are often impractical for introverts [3]. The typical work environment in nursing education is no different. Li, Chen, Yang, Liu [4] noted that 58% of nurses in the United States were extroverted. Frequent large group meetings, constant interaction with nursing students and other faculty, many presentations, and numerous collaborative projects are all situations best suited for extroverts. While introverts can perform well in these situations, their energy is depleted if they do not find time to retreat. The purpose of this paper is to give an overview of introversion and extroversion, discuss the typical nursing faculty work environment and the challenges it presents to introverted nursing faculty, and present strategies for creating work environments in nursing education where introverts can perform at their maximum potential.

### Overview of Introversion and Extroversion

Extroversion and introversion are two types of personalities. The difference in the two personality types is the preference in which each engages the world and gets energy. Extroverts get energy from interacting with people and introverts get energy from being alone with their thoughts [5]. Often we move along the personality spectrum and exhibit traits from both personality types, depending on our situations. Many of us have a preference and this preference may be subtle or obvious. Extroverts find their energy from being actively involved in many different activities, sometimes simultaneously. They are often described as outgoing, sociable, energetic, assertive, and friendly [5-7]. In the workplace, extroverts often dominate discussions and work best in group situations. Extroverted people are comfortable with making quick decisions and spend little time between reflection and action.

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Introverts, on the other hand, prefer being alone and may be seen as reflective or reserved. They are often described as good listeners, keen observers, shy, and quiet [5-7]. In the workplace, introverts work best alone or in small groups. Introverted people are often uncomfortable with making quick decisions and need more time to reflect before taking action.

### Literature Review

There is a wealth of scholarly and anecdotal information available from many professionals with extensive backgrounds and expertise related to personality types. A search for research that studied nursing faculty personality types and workplace preferences, however, did not yield much information. The literature that is available focuses on the personality types of nursing students and the correlation with learning styles, leadership skills, explanatory style, and academic performance. Alluchin, Dzurec, and Engler [8] conducted a pilot study using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and found that most nursing students in the study were extroverted and the majority of faculty were introverted. Similarly, the students in Waite and McKinney's [6] study of prelicensure nursing students' personality preferences were predominantly extroverted. The researchers from these studies concluded that assessment of faculty members' and students' personality types was important to the learning environment. The personality types affect how each group performs, communicates, and responds to the environment.

Other researchers took a different aim and focused on the learning styles and academic performance of nursing students. One particular descriptive exploratory study conducted in Taiwan [9], found that introverted nursing students performed better academically than extroverted students. The nursing students in this study had primarily introverted personality types. The researchers asserted that the MBTI could be used to develop learning environments that were appropriate to the different personality types to increase academic performance. Another study, in Taiwan, on the relationship between learning styles,

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age, and personality types [4] yielded similar results. The researchers discussed the importance of educators being aware of learning styles and generational differences when developing curriculum, implementing teaching strategies, and working with nursing staff. The review of literature found studies that emphasized the value of examining personality types in nursing education. It also revealed a need for more research that examined the relationship between nursing faculty personality types and job satisfaction, burnout, and job performance.

### **Typical Nursing Faculty Work Environment and Issues Presented to Introverts**

A typical nursing faculty work environment is dominated by extroverted tendencies and people. In a faculty meeting, an announcement was made by an extroverted faculty leader: "All faculty should keep their doors open to be available to students at all times". There was silence, and the introverted faculty thought- "How will I ever get any work done?" Introverted faculty can describe many situations similar to this where a work request or task evoked anxiety or dismay.

It is perceived that nursing faculty are extroverted because of the collaboration required between students and colleagues on a daily basis. However, this is a myth. Stephen-Craig, Kuofie, and Dool [10] believed that society has "forced" introverts to live in an extroverted world (p. 63). Being forced to live in an extroverted environment hinders introverts from performing at their maximum potential [10].

### **Shared or Small Office Spaces**

Cain discussed how the average office space has decreased from 500 square feet to 200 square feet with an increased emphasis on group interaction [3]. Shared office spaces can distract introverted nursing faculty. A lack of private office space creates an environment with visual and sound challenges [11]. Shared office spaces can hinder an introvert's ability to creatively think.

### **Constant Interactions in Classroom and Clinical Teaching**

In the classroom and clinical settings, introverted nursing faculty are overwhelmed by interacting with a large group of students. The clinical environment involves one of constant observation and listening. Constant interaction requires a lot of energy and leads to over exhaustion after a certain period of time. Often in academia, nursing faculty are barraged by students needing mentoring. Student mentoring can be scheduled or nonscheduled. The faculty member can spend countless hours counseling or tutoring students about lecture content and study strategies. Also, other students may join the sessions, thus leading to a social gathering. This continual interaction requires the introverted nursing faculty to take a much needed mental break in order to unwind and recharge.

### **Numerous Large Group Meetings and Collaborative Work**

Nursing faculty often focuses heavily on the team approach with frequent group meetings such as committee and course team meetings. Kahnweiler [12] asserted that emphasis on the team approach for much of the workday creates a challenge for introverts who find themselves depleted of energy and looking for a place to escape. Kahnweiler labeled this feeling as people exhaustion [13]. Additionally, introverted faculty prefer as few meetings as possible [10].

Many faculty members are encouraged to interact with students and communities of interest via social media. Many educators have received requests or recommendations to create profiles and pages on sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. Social media presents yet another venue for introverts where they are interacting with the outer world and sharing their personal space [12].

### **Ideal Work Environments for Introverted Faculty**

Although there are more extroverts in the nation, we need to be mindful of introverts' needs in the workplace. This is especially important at a time where there is a nursing educator shortage. The first step is assessing faculty members' personality types and preferences. There are multiple personality assessment tests. Our school of nursing participated in workshops and completed many tests to reveal faculty strengths and personality preferences. It was determined that, out of 20 faculty members, 18 were introverts. This finding was significant to the function and organization of our school of nursing. Although introverts were in the majority, our work environment had most of the characteristics of an extroverted-oriented workspace. The next steps involve implementing strategies that will create an ideal work environment that will promote optimal performance of introverts. These strategies are important to maximize the productivity and creativity of all faculty.

### **Private Space**

One important strategy involves examining the office floor plan. Open plan offices have been found to reduce productivity and impair memory [3]. Kahnweiler [12] called introverts quiet influencers. Introverts prefer a private space to deliberate and brainstorm. This environment is needed in an effort to complete tasks such as lectures, committee assignments, and other assigned duties. A private office space will provide introverts with a place to retreat when suffering from people exhaustion. It is in this environment that the introverted faculty feels comfortable with themselves [10]. This environment allows the introverted faculty to logically think about their thoughts and ideas before making important decisions. "Introverts prefer to work independently, and solitude can be a catalyst to innovation" (p. 74) [3].

### **Individual or Small Group Work**

Another strategy is to combat exhaustion from work involving the team approach. Introverts should be given opportunities for individual work on collaborative projects. Cain [3] discussed the phenomenon of New Groupthink where the emphasis on collaboration and team approach hinder creativity and intellectual achievement. Introverts prefer environments that involve one on one or small group interaction instead of large group interaction, which can lead to sensory overload [10] and energy depletion. Our School of Nursing often divides large group projects into small group assignments.

### **Time for Reflection**

Introverts are deep thinkers and require more time to process ideas and think about things in a logical manner before making a decision [10]. "Introverts often work more slowly and deliberately. They like to focus on one task at a time and can have mighty powers of concentration" (p. 11) [3].

Kahnweiler [12] noted that introverts often prefer to communicate and express themselves via writing. A strategy to maximize this strength is to provide time for introverted faculty to reflect prior

to group discussion and voting. In the past, our School of Nursing has used anonymous online discussion forums to discuss a topic of interest before a meeting. Our committee chairs would create discussion topics related to items due for faculty vote. Summaries of the online discussions were then presented during the next faculty meeting. The online discussions allowed introverts time to research and reflect on the topic before formulating a decision.

### Focused Group Meetings

To maximize introverted faculty members' potential in large group meetings, limit the number of meetings and meeting length, focus the meeting on the planned agenda, prevent meetings from becoming social events. Introverted faculty prefer deep conversations and are often uncomfortable with small talk. To avoid these uncomfortable situations, try to schedule social events or set aside time for "small talk" and socialization.

### Conclusion

Introverted nursing faculty are important members to the faculty team yet are often required to function in a work environment that is extroverted oriented. Nursing faculty work often requires constant student interactions, numerous group meetings, and frequent collaborative work. It is important to retain nursing faculty in nursing education to prevent worsening the current nursing faculty shortage. A few strategies can be employed to retain introverted nursing faculty in the faculty workforce and maximize their performance potential. These strategies include providing introverted faculty private space and time to reflect and recharge from people exhaustion, incorporating individual or small group assignments, and focusing on deliberate work to reduce frequency and length of meetings. More research is needed on this topic as it pertains to nursing education and nursing faculty.

### Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests with the work presented in this manuscript.

### Author Contributions

All authors participated in drafting editing, and approving of the manuscript.

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