Dominant Personality Traits Suited to Running Projects Successfully
(And What Type are You?)

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Introduction

Much discussion and research has taken place over the years attempting to classify personality types and their functionality in an organizational setting. The purpose of this paper is to focus on those characteristics most relevant to a successful project leadership role. It identifies how different types of people might have to be selected to suit different project circumstances. Such circumstances include differences between the major high-level phases of the project life cycle.

By definition, the objective of a project is to produce a once-only product within desired constraints of scope, quality, time and cost. Obviously, a project is a process that requires managing and the objective of this management, i.e. of project management, is to produce the product successfully. In this context, producing the product successfully means not only conducting a successful project but also creating a successful product. This distinction is drawn because too often successful project management is characterized as being "On-time and within-budget'. Unfortunately, simply being on time and within budget does not necessarily mean that the product of the project is also successful - even if the product meets specified requirements.
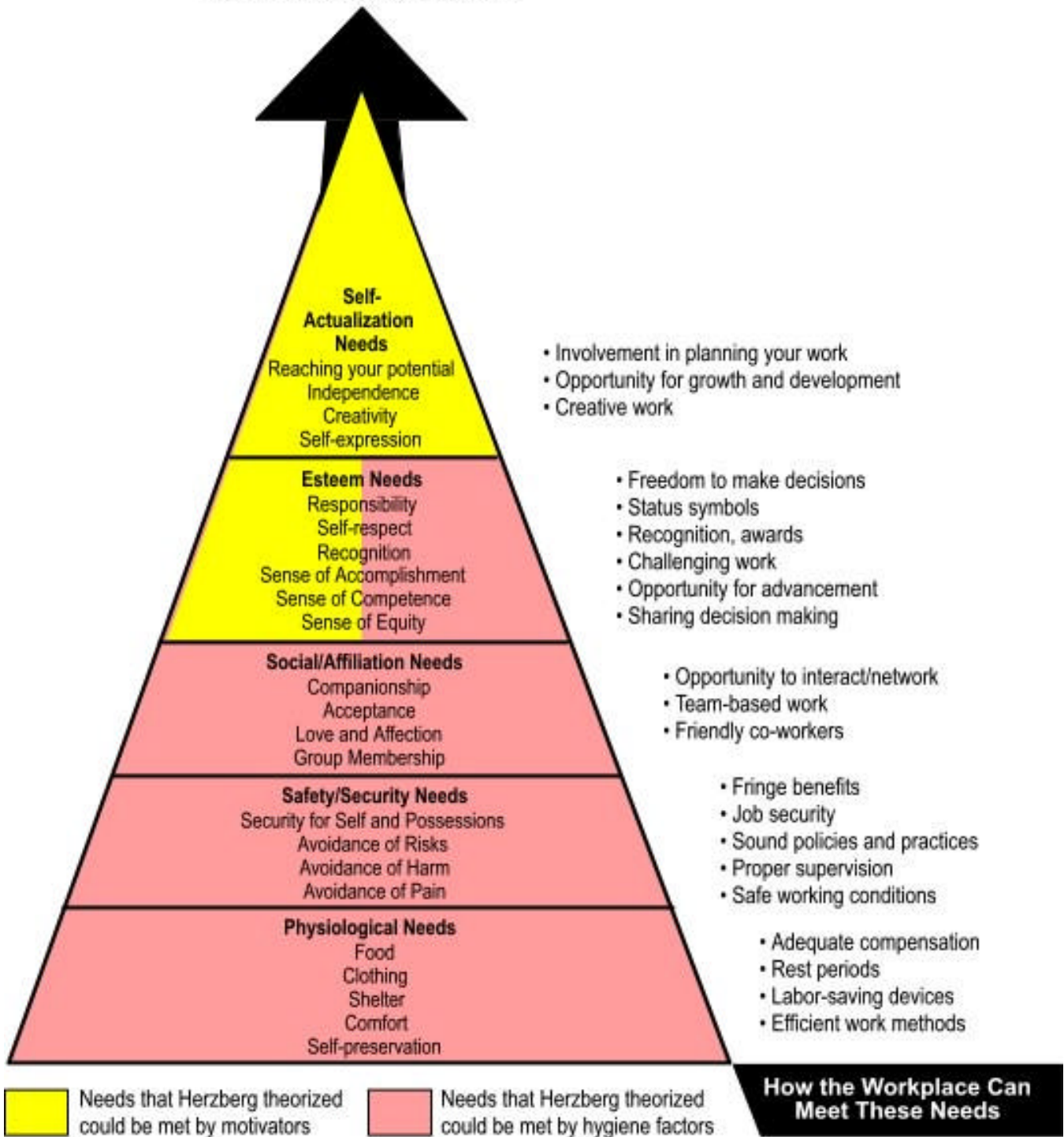
It would appear axiomatic that the success or failure of a project is almost entirely dependent upon the people involved and how they run it. Therefore, this paper focuses on the most relevant people characteristics, especially those of the project leader or manager and how different characteristics might have to be selected to suit the project circumstances.

Review of Selected Literature, 1950 - 1970

In the 1950s, discussion on the means for "getting things done" centered around "motivation". Many psychologists have established the existence of a prioritized hierarchy of needs that motivate individuals towards satisfactory performance. In particular, Maslow, often quoted in project management literature, put forward a hierarchy depicted as a pyramid. This displayed basic psychological needs at the base and worked up to 'self-actualization' at the top.[1]

Some years later, Herzberg postulated a controversial Motivator-Hygiene theory in which only some of the needs represented a positive motivation. The absence of fulfillment of other needs simply had a negative effect.[2] Verma, in a recent Project Management Institute (PMI) book publication[3], has brought these two positions neatly together by shading that part of Maslow's pyramid which corresponds to Herzberg's positive motivators, see Figure 1. The problem with these approaches is that people are treated as though they are all the same.

Self-actualization is not an endpoint,
but a self-renewing need/drive

Self-Actualization Needs
Reaching your potential
Independence
Creativity
Self-expression

- Involvement in planning your work
- Opportunity for growth and development
- Creative work

Esteem Needs
Responsibility
Self-respect
Recognition
Sense of Accomplishment
Sense of Competence
Sense of Equity

- Freedom to make decisions
- Status symbols
- Recognition, awards
- Challenging work
- Opportunity for advancement
- Sharing decision making

Social/Affiliation Needs
Companionship
Acceptance
Love and Affection
Group Membership

- Opportunity to interact/network
- Team-based work
- Friendly co-workers

Safety/Security Needs
Security for Self and Possessions
Avoidance of Risks
Avoidance of Harm
Avoidance of Pain

- Fringe benefits
- Job security
- Sound policies and practices
- Proper supervision
- Safe working conditions

Physiological Needs
Food
Clothing
Shelter
Comfort
Self-preservation

- Adequate compensation
- Rest periods
- Labor-saving devices
- Efficient work methods

Needs that Herzberg theorized could be met by motivators

Needs that Herzberg theorized could be met by hygiene factors
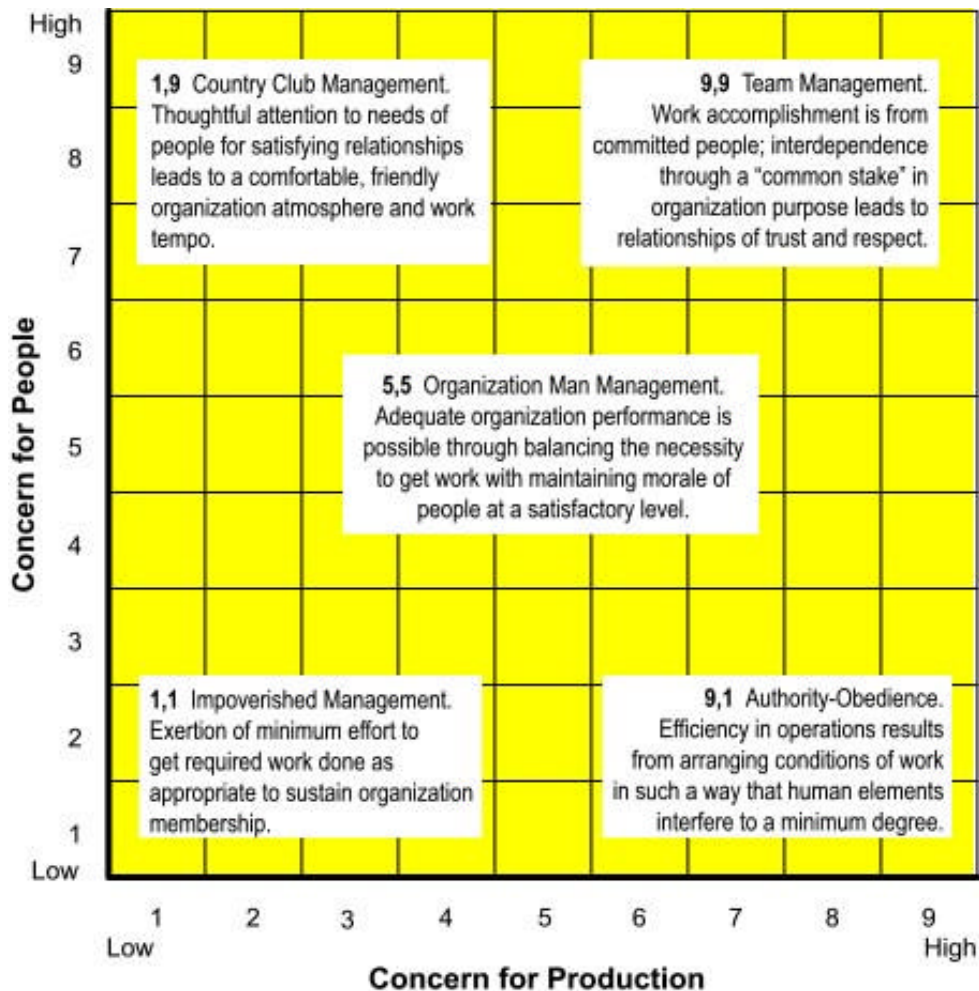
How the Workplace Can Meet These Needs

From Verma, V. K., Human Resource Skills for the Project Manager: The Human Aspects of Project Management, Volume Two, Project Management Institute, 1995, p61.

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Figure 1: Maslow's Modified Hierarchy of Needs

In the 1960s, Huber attempted to move the discussion of motivation towards "on-the-job development" through the work of behavioral scientists. He chose to categorize and document professional attitudes and abilities in terms of what he called general and specific motivation and interpersonal and professional competence.[4] Huber recognized that the numerous combinations, when applied to particular situations, could give rise to both functional and dysfunctional consequences.

Blake and Mouton moved the discussion to the issue of management style. They proposed a 9x9 "Management Grid" in which "Concern for Production" is set against "Concern for People", two elements of a manager's job characterizing the manager's leadership role.[5] Positions on the grid show five essentially different management styles ranging from Impoverished Management (1,1) to Team Management (9,9) as shown in Figure 2. The problem with this is that everyone wants to be an "ideal" manager at "9,9", and there appears to be no question of matching style to situation. Indeed, anyone placed at "1,1" would appear to be bereft of any good reason to be a manager at all, let alone a leader!

From Blake, R. R., and J. S. Mouton, The Managerial Grid, Gulf Publishing, Houston, 1964.

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Figure 2: Blake-Mouton Managerial Grid

In the 1970s, Hersey and Blanchard observed that " . . . the evidence of research clearly indicates that there is no single all-purpose leadership style. Successful leaders are those who can adapt their behavior to meet demands of their unique situation."[6] They proposed a line chart comparing Task Behavior, i.e., providing direction, low to high, against Relationship Behavior, i.e. providing support, low or high. They show four levels of "direction" appropriate to four levels of 'maturity of the followers', the higher the maturity the lower the direction required. This phenomenon is often clearly evident in a corporate setting as "team building" progresses.

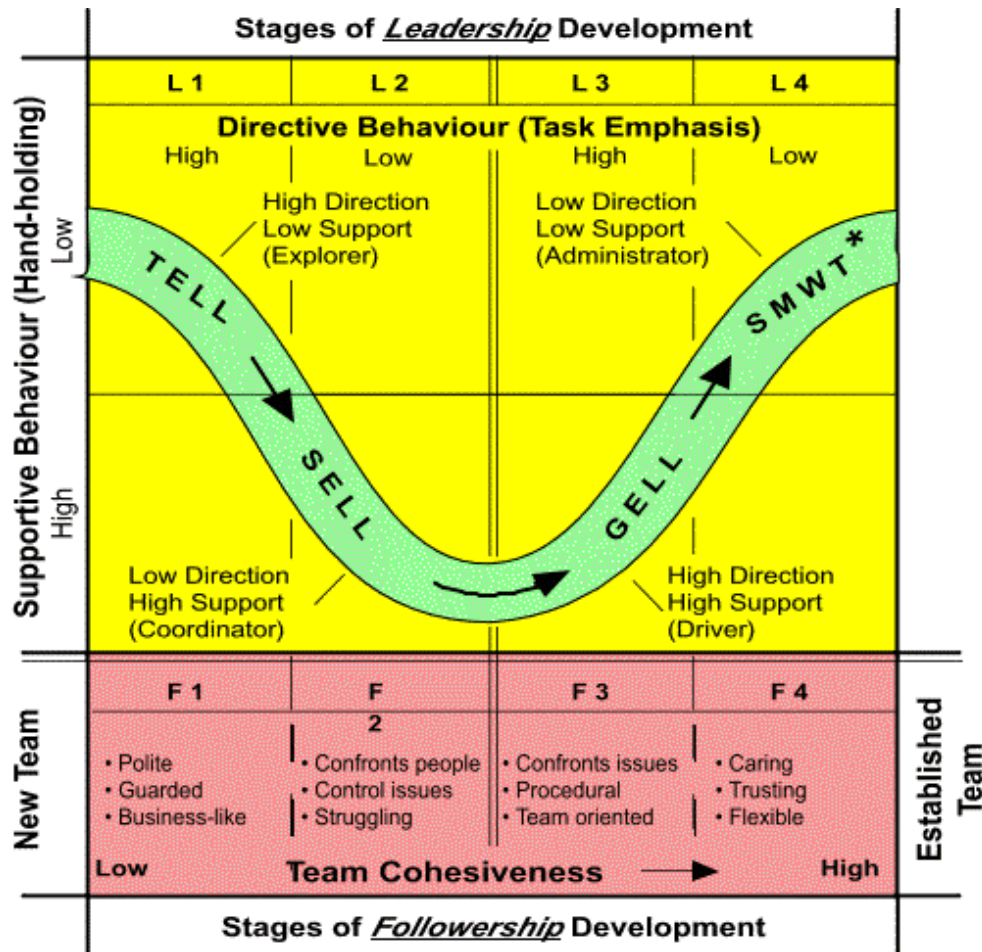**Review of Selected Literature, 1980 - 1990**

In a paper to the 1994 PMI Annual Seminar/Symposium, Verma and Wideman adapted the concept to correlate with the natural progression through the four generic phases of the project life cycle.[7] Figure 3 shows the concept with terminology modified to suit the project environment. Given that the first two phases of the four-phase project life cycle are concerned with planning and the second two phases with execution, Verma and Wideman differentiated between "leadership" and "managership", as they defined them, and asserted that each is more appropriate to each of the two sets of phases respectively. However, this does not take into account the possibility of different types of project requiring different approaches to be successful.

In the 1980s, Keirsey and Bates revived interest in the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI, 1956) with their book "Please Understand Me: Character and Temperament Types".[8] The MBTI is based on the work of Jung (and others, circa 1920) and, as Keirsey and Bates show, bears a marked similarity to Hippocrates ideas promulgated some twenty five centuries earlier.

Essentially, Jung disagreed with the twentieth century notion that people are fundamentally alike. Rather, he suggested that people are different in fundamental ways and therefore what is important is their preference for how they "function". Hence, their temperaments should be "typed" accordingly. By latching on to the four temperaments of Hippocrates, the MBTI has developed into a useful personnel tool and a lucrative consulting business.

For our purposes later on, it is worth describing the MBTI in a little more detail. The MBTI postulates that the four "temperaments" give rise to four separate but interrelated ranges of personal preferences, or natural tendencies, in a given situation. These ranges may be characterized as "information gathering", "focus', "decision making", and "orientation". The combination of these four give rise to sixteen possible "characteristic types".

Presentation is typically in the form of a 4x4 grid, each cell containing descriptive text. Underlying this layout is a primary X-Y cruciform formed by the first two ranges with each quadrant containing a secondary x-y cruciform formed by the second two ranges. The two sets together, as shown in Figure 4, give rise to the sixteen "types" just referred to. Since the MBTI is intended to encompass every possible type of individual, it is not unreasonable to suppose that it may be too detailed for project management purposes.
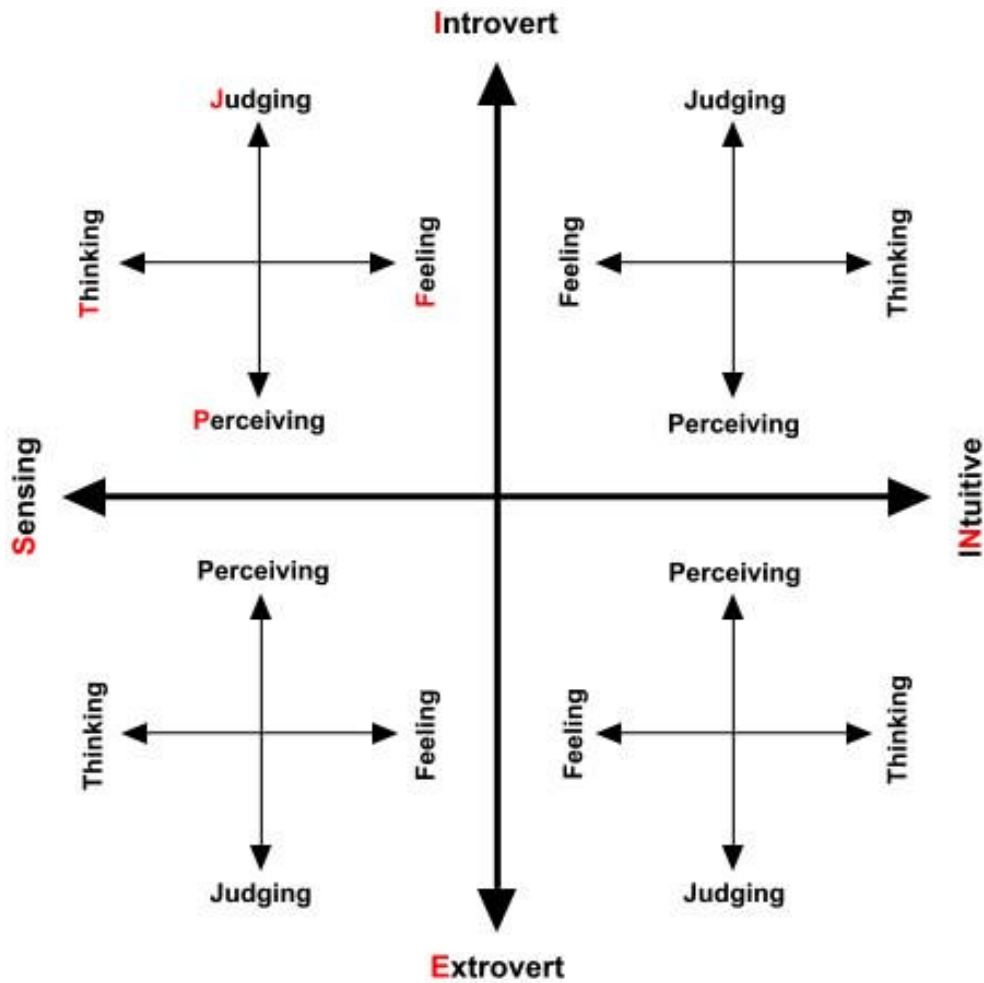
Figure 3: Stages of Leadership and Followership Development

Turning to the "project context", Cleland, in his book Project Management: Strategic Design and Implementation, discusses project leadership and illustrates a continuum of leadership behavior.[9] This ranges from "Boss-centered leadership" to "Subordinate-centered leadership". However, there is no discussion of how this might be affected by the project environment, specifically, the phases of the project life cycle. Indeed, in recent years much has been written on leadership style, but mostly in the context of enterprise management, not project management.

In 1992, Kezsbom and Donnelly reported on a survey to identify practical qualities of effective project leadership.[10] Data was collected from 224 managers, project managers and specialists working in a corporate environment. Interestingly, they chose to report their findings under two major headings labeled "competencies" and "know-how". The competencies or aptitudes, which encompassed several sub-categories, was described as "Augmentable dimensions of leadership which appear to be personality constructs, but are capable of modification via skills awareness and development."[11]

Introvert

Judging

Thinking — Feeling

Perceiving

Judging

Feeling — Thinking

Perceiving

Sensing — **INtuitive**

Perceiving

Thinking — Feeling

Judging

Perceiving

Feeling — Thinking

Judging

Extrovert

Note: The red capitals in the main and first quadrants refer to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicators (MBTI)

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Figure 4: The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator 4x4 Grid Structure

In the March 1996 issue of the PMI Journal, Kliem and Anderson discuss the project manager's style or approach toward team-building as a key variant in managing projects successfully.[12] They observe that "Only recently has the influence of the project manager's personality on project performance received recognition."[13] They go on to discuss a tool known as "Decide-X" which aids in identifying four primary styles in how a person approaches relevant work situations. They then apply this to the project management orientation criteria of planning, organizing, controlling and leading. The four styles map closely to the four primary styles of the MBTI, but unfortunately they use descriptors that are not terms familiar to the project management community. However, Kliem and Anderson do conclude that "Knowing the type of [project] environment and the team-building style [required] of the project manager increases the opportunities for selecting the right person for the position . . ."[14]

For the sponsors and directors of projects, who must select project managers for their projects,

the issue is which of these concepts, if any, are suited to aiding in making selection decisions.

Search for a Project-Management-friendly Personality Classification

In an attempt to bring more recognizable and practical utility to the issue of project manager selection, a six-step analysis was undertaken. The first step consisted of a review of the last ten years [1985-1995] of PMI publications to abstract familiar words or phrases used to describe a project manager's required personal characteristics and skill sets. The selection excluded words that depicted technological experience or know-how. The result was a list of some 200 words or phrases which, together, suggested that the project manager should be an impossible paragon of virtue!
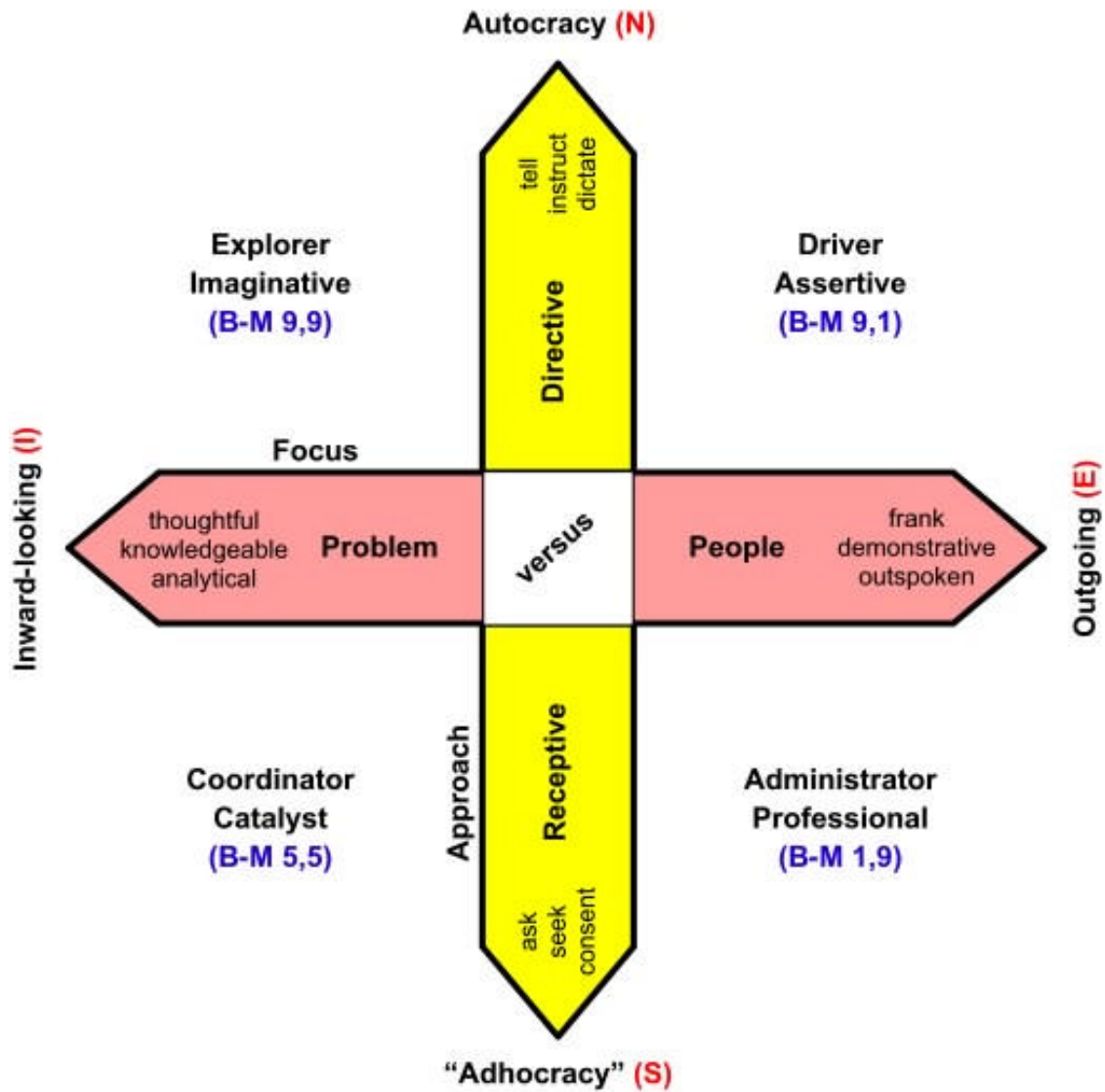
The second step consisted of selecting familiar but differentiated headings into which the words could be sorted. The review of the literature described earlier suggested that with appropriate changes in terminology the primary X-Y axes of the MBTI grid would be appropriate and sufficient as separators for a 2x2 grid. This would give rise to four recognizable project leader types. This result appears to be confirmed by the work of Kliem and Anderson referenced above. It is also supported by the observation that the four cells at the extreme corners of the MBTI 4x4 grid describe characteristics most often found in project leaders. This in itself was an important finding.

Thus, a horizontal (X) axis was chosen to show a "Problem versus People focus" and end-labeled "Inward-looking" to "Outgoing". This equates to the "Introvert" to "Extrovert" axis of the MBTI grid. A vertical (Y) axis was chosen to show a "Receptive versus Directive Style" and end-labeled "Autocracy" to "Adhocracy". This equates to the "Intuitive" to "Sensing"' axis of the MBTI grid.

The label "Adhocracy" needs some explanation. It is a term coined by Robert Waterman to describe a particular type of loose and flexible project team environment. In this environment it is necessary to lend some semblance of structure to travel the apparently unknown route to the project's destination, that is, until its final phase.[15]

The arrangement thus described is shown in Figure 5. Examination of the figure's axes suggests that a person in the top-left quadrant might be described as an "Explorer" or entrepreneur. A person in the top-right could be described as a "Driver"; in the bottom-right as a "Coordinator" or catalyst; and in the bottom-left as an "Administrator" or stabilizer. These titles also fit reasonably well with the MBTI character descriptions.

In the third step, the list of words were assigned to one of the four headings as seemed most appropriate. They were then subdivided into "Personal Characteristics" and "Personal Skill Sets". Personal characteristics are those aspects of a person's temperament that determine their natural tendencies or preferences, though these tendencies may be honed by experience. Skill sets are the project manager's personal "kit bag" of capabilities that can be developed through training and experience. A number of the words were deemed to be applicable to all four types of project leader. The result was approximately twenty five phrases in each of the four columns under each of the two main headings.

Autocracy (N)

Explorer
Imaginative
(B-M 9,9)

Driver
Assertive
(B-M 9,1)

Inward-looking (I)

Focus

tell instruct dictate

Directive

thoughtful knowledgeable analytical **Problem**

versus

People frank demonstrative outspoken

Outgoing (E)

Approach

Receptive

ask seek consent

Coordinator
Catalyst
(B-M 5,5)

Administrator
Professional
(B-M 1,9)

"Adhocracy" (S)

Notes: "Adhocracy" describes a loose, flexible, exploratory project environment.
The bracketed words refer to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Grid.
"B-M" refers to the Blake-Mouton Managerial Grid descriptions

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Figure 5: Identification of Project Manager's Style

The fifth step involved matching the four leader-type columns horizontally, and augmenting the phrases if necessary, to provide a cross check and comparative representation. Finally, the resulting rows were further sorted into the generally accepted project management functions of "Planning, Organizing, Executing and Controlling". (Note: Cleland describes five functions: Planning, Organizing, Motivating, Directing and Controlling.[16] Motivating and Directing are taken as being part of Executing. Kliem and Anderson use the term Leading, but their description better fits the function of managing execution.[17])

Findings of the Research

It will be appreciated that much of the sorting described above was subjective and, of course, the propensities and skills of individuals never fit these descriptions exactly. Nor, for that matter, are projects ever that simple. But the arrangement does begin to show a correlation between personal characteristics and the realities of the project management environment.

The results of the process described above are shown in Appendices A and B. The data is also available in the form of a two-part questionnaire for purposes of self-examination.

The resulting four types of project leader may be characterized as follows.

The Explorer - Explorer or entrepreneur type project leaders have a vision of the future and projects are the stepping stones. They are bold, courageous and imaginative. There is a constant search for opportunities and improvements. They are comfortable in the lead, and exude confidence and charisma. They are good at networking and selling. They may, however, have little time for day-to-day problems which are delegated to others. Their project power derives from past experience, enthusiasm, and superior ability to communicate.

The Coordinator - Coordinator types are just as important when the project phase or situation calls for "facilitation". Coordinators generally take a more independent and detached view of their surroundings. They are responsive to the views of project team members, who must take responsibility for their own decisions. Therefore, the Coordinator's role is to ensure that team issues are surfaced, discussed and resolved to the team's mutual satisfaction. These individuals tend to be humble, sensitive and willing to compromise. The Coordinator's power is derived from his or her ability to persuade others to compromise.

The Drive - Driver type project leaders are distinctly action-oriented and are both hard-working and hard driving. Their focus is on project mission and precise project goals. Their power is derived from authority and they are quite prepared to use it. At the same time they are pragmatic, realistic, resourceful and resolute. They are generally well planned and self-disciplined, so for those who have similar traits, they are easy to work with. However, conflict is quite likely with those who are not so inclined.

The Administrator - The Administrator recognizes the need for some degree of stability, typically in order to optimize productivity through maximizing repetition, to the extent that this is possible on a project, in order to get the work finished. Often, requisite data must be assembled and carefully analyzed, with thought given to the trade-offs and how conflicts and problems can be resolved and disposed of. Work must be carefully scheduled and procedurized if potential gains are to be realized and 'all the pieces carefully put in place'. The Administrator's power is derived from intellectual logic and organizational achievement.

From the foregoing and Figure 5 it may be observed that the "Concept" phase of the four-phase high-level project life cycle should start out with the "Explorer" type; then proceed with a "Coordinator" type in the "Development', definition or planning phase; move to an assertive ":Driver" type in the "Execution" phase; and conclude with the "Administrator" type in the clean-up "Finishing" phase. In reality, experienced and skilled project managers often find

themselves "shifting gears" to suit particular circumstances during the course of a project. Nevertheless, these descriptions should help to match style to circumstances. Conversely, failure to match an appropriate style to project circumstances can quickly demoralize the project work force and lead to unsatisfactory project results.

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this paper has been to identify different project manager styles and suggest some correlation with different project circumstances. Selected previous work on management style has been summarized to provided a basis for establishing four basic project leader characteristics and skill set groupings. These four styles have been labeled Explorer, Driver, Coordinator and Administrator. The detailed descriptions of these four distinctly different styles can provide a basis for better understanding of what style is appropriate and when.

Failure to match project manager style to project circumstances, particularly in matching to the phases of the project life cycle, can lead to less than satisfactory project results. In extreme cases, it can lead to project failure. Therefore, selection of appropriate project management style is essential to project success. Obviously, select your project manager carefully!

Correlation of project manager style with different types of project will be the subject of a later paper.

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Appendix A

Project Manager's Personal Characteristics
(i.e. natural tendencies or preferences)

Explorer (Imaginative)	Coordinator (Responsive)	Driver (Assertive)	Administrator (Organized)
Planning			
vision oriented	mission oriented	goal oriented	objective oriented
bold, courageous	empathetic	resolute	precise
seemingly-chaotic	free-wheeling	well-planned	systematic
stakeholder oriented	people oriented	compliance oriented	situation oriented
risk-taker	risk avoider	risk resolver	risk mitigator
ideological	follows tradition	objective	sensitive to personal goals
Organizing			
solution seeker	conflict mediator	solution enforcer	conflict solver
opportunity-driven	team-driven	management-driven	information-driven
shrewd	sensitive	realist	rational
pioneering	loyal	resourceful	reliable
team player	thought provoking	results-oriented	weighs alternatives
idealistic	helpful	emphatic	evaluative
Executing			
inspiring	understanding	hard-driving	analytical
charismatic	democratic	autocratic	bureaucratic
good leader	good facilitator	good director	good manager
comfortable in lead	comfortable on side lines	comfortable with authority	comfortable administrating
opportunist	probing	pragmatic	professional
individualist	spontaneous	decisive	reserved
Controlling			
determined	free-form	rigid	flexible
creative	resilient	disciplined	organized
value oriented	process oriented	policy oriented	procedure oriented
tenacious	in-tune	strong-willed	prudent
information generator	information sharer	information distributor	information collector
power from enthusiasm	power from persuasion	power from authority	power from intelligence

Characteristics required by all: credible, confident, committed, energetic, hard-working, self-starting.

Appendix B

Project Manager's Skill Sets
(Developed through training and experience)

Explorer (Imaginative)	Coordinator (Responsive)	Driver (Assertive)	Administrator (Organized)
Planning			
focus long range	focus on participation	focus short range	focus on solutions
produce a vision	produce feedback	produce results	produce stability
innovate, generates ideas	probe	elaborate	deliberate
envision	brain-storm	clarify	analyze and rationalize
conceptualize plans	build consensus plans	create plans	work with information/data
workaround problems	advocate self-correction	confront problems	generate solutions
Organizing			
evoke dedication	obtain willing effort	get early results	harmonize effort
enthuse, excite	encourage	enforce	build confidence
achieve	compromise	coordinate	collaborate
inspire	challenge	direct	administer
delegate	interact	execute	administer
motivate	negotiate	integrate	summarize
Executing			
lead by example	develop commitment	drive using partnerships	reinforce commitment
map out direction	promote self-managed teamwork	give direction	give encouragement
foster personal growth	foster team building	foster healthy competition	foster team work
attract the best followers	coach available people	demand the best people	use available people
win stakeholder support	listen to stakeholders	cultivate stakeholders	keep stakeholder contact
use politics	sidestep politics	recognize politics	manage conflict
Controlling			
take major decisions	reach decision closure	make most decisions	implement decisions
empower	guide	constrain	converge
get things recognized	get things agreed	get things done	get things accepted
use power by networking	use power by persuasion	use power by authority	use power by consent
unify by enthusiasm	unify by ownership	unify by authority	unify by agreement
minimize reporting	encourage responsive reporting	optimize reporting	institute effective reporting

Skills required by all: ability to communicate well, plan, prioritize, organize, exercise control and be resourceful

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[1] Maslow, Abraham, Motivation and Personality, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1954.

[2] Herzberg, Frederick, One more Time: How do you motivate employees? Harvard Business Review 46(1), 1968, pp53-62.

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8   Keirsey, David and Marilyn Bates, Please Understand Me: Character and Temperament Types, Prometheus Nemesis Book Company, CA, 1984.

9   Cleland, D. I., Project Management: Strategic Design and Implementation, TAB Professional and Reference Books, PA, 1989, p260.

10   Kezsbom, D. S., & R. G. Donnelly, Managing the Project Organization of the Nineties: A Survey of Practical Qualities of Effective Project Leadership, PMI Annual Seminar/Symposium Proceedings, Project Management Institute, PA, Sept 1992, pp415-421.

11   Ibid, p417.

12   Kliem, Ralph L. and Harris B. Anderson, Teambuilding Styles and Their Impact on Project Management Results, PMI Journal 27(1), 1996, pp41-50.

13   Ibid, p41.

14   Ibid, p50.

15   Waterman, R. H., Adhocracy: The Power to Change, W W. Norton & Co., NY, 1992, p16 & 59.

16   Cleland, D. I., Project Management: Strategic Design and Implementation, TAB Professional and Reference Books, PA, 1989, p24.

17   Kliem, Ralph L. and Harris B. Anderson, Teambuilding Styles and Their Impact on Project Management Results, PMI Journal 27(1), 1996, p46.