

Project Teamwork, Personality Profiles and the Population at Large: Do we have enough of the right kind of people?

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Introduction

The tools and techniques of project management are sweeping the western world in a frantic race by enterprises to remain competitive in a global market. No doubt this rush has spawned the feeling of "Tides of Change". However, there is also increasing recognition that the art of just drawing bars on charts, however electronically automated, is not enough. The people that work in project teams together with their leaders are the ones that count. The question is, what sort of people make for successful teams — and do we have enough of them in the typical organization?

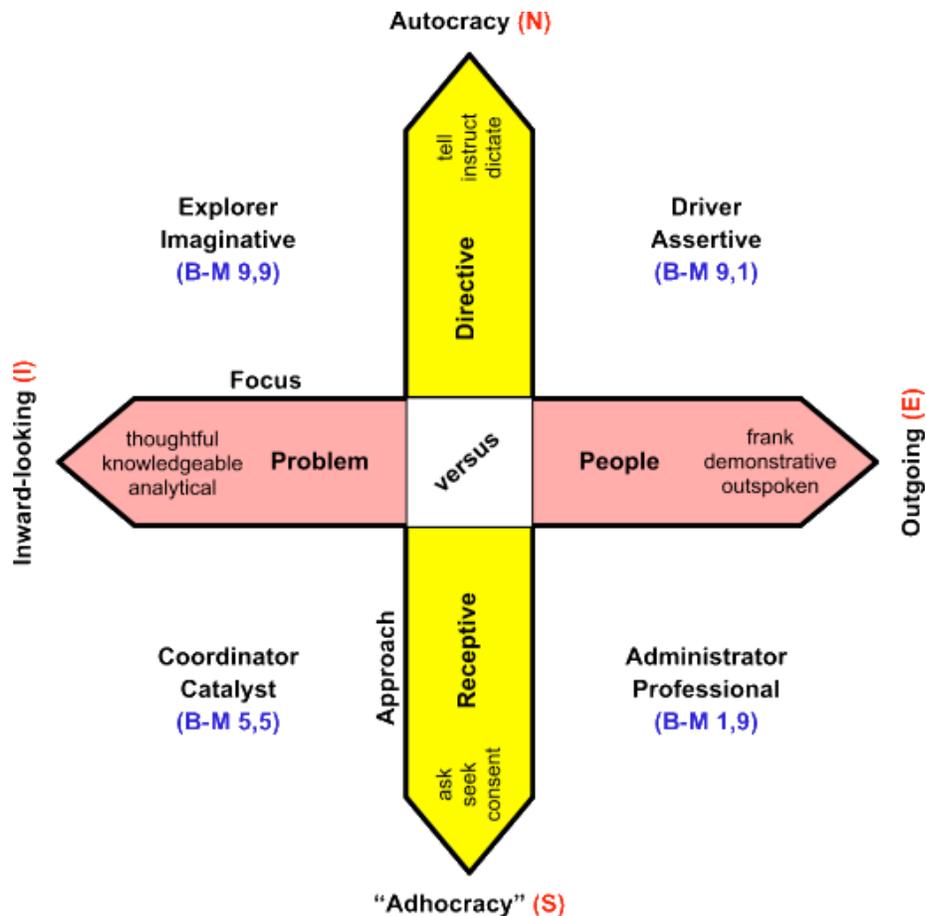
Over the years, many efforts have been made to classify different types of people, especially according to their effectiveness and suitability in a corporate organization. The tacit assumption that everyone belongs somewhere is often made, and it is just a question of finding where. This is not necessarily true of the project world. This environment generates stress in meeting specific goals often within severe constraints, plus the conflicting stresses of serving across organizational boundaries, to say nothing of a frequent overlay of multiple projects. Not everyone is comfortable in this atmosphere.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to focus on those characteristics most relevant to a successful project management team and how these people compare to the population at large. Four project leader profiles have been identified in a previous working paper using the Myers-Briggs typology as a structural basis but using vocabulary more appropriate to project work.¹ While the project leader profiles are very distinctive, the attributes that make up these profiles are more generally spread throughout the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) matrix.² We make the usual assumption that people with these same attributes are more likely to be compatible while working together on a project team.

Keirsey and Bates have identified the distribution of personality types through the sixteen cells of the four-by-four MBTI grid.³ By using this as a basis for comparison, we can gain an interesting insight into the availability of people suited to various roles in project work. By deduction, we may also infer which personality types are not at all suited to project teamwork.

General Personality Characteristics Suited to Successful Project Management Work

In our 1996 paper "Dominant Personality Characteristics Suited to Running a Successful Project (And What Type are You?)", we described four types of project leader we considered best suited to different project circumstances. These types were derived from a 2x2 grid formed by two axes consisting of "Focus" and "Approach". Focus reflects the choice between "Problem" versus "People", while Approach reflects the choice between being "Receptive" versus "Directive". These axes, their general descriptions, and the four consequent project manager styles of "Explorer", "Driver", "Coordinator" and "Administrator" are shown in Figure 1, Identification of Project Manager's Style.



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 1. Identification of Project Manager's Style

You will see that we use the term "Adhocracy". This is a label coined by Robert Waterman to describe a particular type of loose and flexible project team environment. According to Waterman, under certain project conditions, it is necessary to lend some semblance of structure to travel the apparently unknown route towards the project's destination.⁴

The four project leader profiles were 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 Driver - Drivers are distinctly action-oriented and are both hard-working and hard driving. They are pragmatic, realistic, resourceful and resolute, and their focus is on project mission and precise project goals. They are generally well planned and self-disciplined, so for those who have similar traits, they are easy to work with. Conflict is likely with those who are not so inclined. Their power is derived from authority and they are quite prepared to use it.

The Coordinator - Coordinators are just as important when the project phase or situation calls for "facilitation". They generally take a more independent and detached view of their surroundings. Coordinators are responsive to the views of project team members who must take responsibility for their own decisions. Therefore, their 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 Administrator - Administrators recognize the need for stability, typically in order to optimize productivity through maximizing repetition to the extent possible on a project and to get the work finished. Often, requisite information must be assembled and carefully analyzed, with thought given to the trade-offs and how conflicts and problems can be resolved and disposed of in advance. Work must be carefully scheduled and procedurized if potential gains are to be realized and "all the pieces are to be carefully put in place". The Administrator's power derives from intellectual logic and organizational achievement.

Characteristics required by all four leader types include being "credible, confident, committed, energetic, hard-working, and self-starting."

Remarkably, few project leaders have ultimate project responsibility in practice. More likely they report to some higher authority such as the sponsor of the project. Conversely, team members reporting to a project leader typically have responsibility for leading their own groups of supporting co-workers. Therefore, in terms of successful project personality characteristics no major distinction need be drawn between those in either position. Nevertheless, some team members may show a stronger disposition to "lead", while others are more disposed to "follow".

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)

For those not familiar with the MBTI, it is based on the work of Jung (and others, circa 1920). However, Keirsey and Bates show that the concepts bear a marked similarity to Hippocrates' views some twenty five centuries earlier. Hippocrates spoke of the four gods Apollonius, Dionysus, Epimetheus, and Prometheus, each having distinct personality temperaments.⁵

Thus Jung, reverting to Greek mythology, diverged from the twentieth century notion that people are fundamentally alike in their motivation, and postulated instead that people are fundamentally different in their personalities. What is important, he suggested, is people's preference for how they "function" and so may be "typed" accordingly.

Interestingly, by latching on to Hippocrates' four temperaments, the MBTI has developed into a lucrative consulting business. The consulting literature dealing with MBTI team building seems to suggest that every personality type has a contribution to make to teamwork. From a consulting practice perspective, this is no doubt highly prudent. However, common knowledge of certain undesirable types in society who, by definition of the MBTI must be found somewhere in the classification, suggests that universal contribution to teamwork is patently unreal.

For purposes of this paper, it is worth describing the MBTI structure in 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 ranges results in 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 primary quadrants are mirror images of one another. The two sets together result in the sixteen types as shown in Figure 2.

The personality styles and their preferences represented by each cell in the grid reflect the interaction of various combinations of temperaments, rather than the individual temperaments on their own. The descriptions provided by the MBTI give valuable insight into the differences between normal, healthy people. These differences can be the source of much difficulty in understanding and communication, attributes that are so important in project teamwork.

Comparison of the Two Sets of Descriptions

From Figure 1 it will be noted that the "X" axis, marked "Focus", corresponds to the Introvert-Extrovert axis of the MBTI grid. Similarly, the "Y" axis, marked "Approach", corresponds to the Intuitive-Sensing axis. Keirsey and Bates have indicated approximate percentages of the population that correspond to each of the sixteen MBTI types. Possibly these percentages represent only the North American

population, but still the data provide a useful distribution.

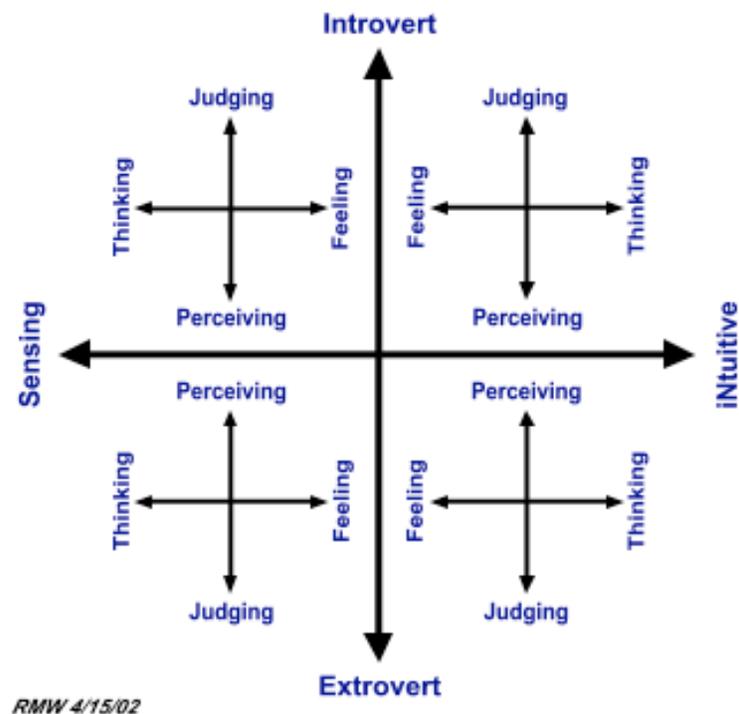
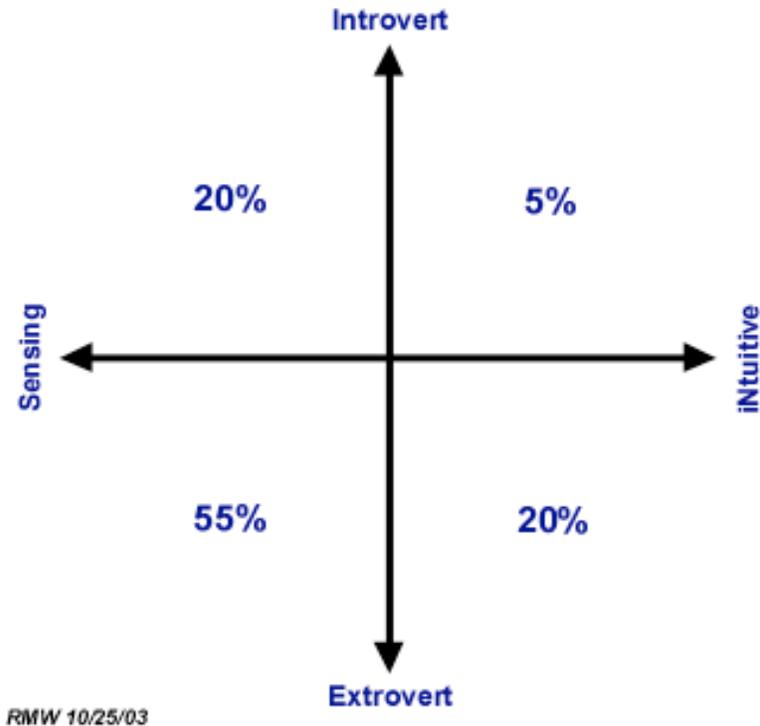


Figure 2. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator 4x4 Grid Structure

On this basis, the distribution of the population on the four axes are as follows: Sensing - 75%, Intuitive - 25%; Extrovert - 75%, Introvert - 25%; Thinking - 50%, Feeling - 50%; and Perceiving - 50%, Judging - 50%. Just examining the four major quadrants of the grid is instructive. As shown in Figure 3, the distribution of population in the primary quadrants of the MBTI grid is heavily weighted towards the Extrovert-Sensing type (about 55%). These people are sometimes disparagingly referred to as the "touchy-feely" types. This compares with the opposite quadrant containing a much smaller number of Introvert-Intuitive types (only about 5%) recognizable as thoughtful but generally unsociable loners. The remaining two quadrants are about equally divided at 20%.

To determine which types of people would be suited to some form of project work, we must understand each of the cell type descriptions. Fortunately, Keirsey and Bates provide extensive and detailed descriptions of those in each cell. Of course, few people fall neatly and exactly into each, and even if they do, they probably have a significant bias one way or another. However, for purposes of a broad population analysis such as this, the distribution is still instructive.



Note: The capital figures in the labels above are the MBTI reference letters

Figure 3. Population Distribution in the Primary Quadrants of the MBTI Grid

So, for our analysis, we abstracted from these descriptions key phrases that appear to be most relevant to the project management team environment. We then made a subjective and coarse assessment of whether the population in the cell is strongly inclined towards project management leadership (i.e. 100%); more likely suited to a mixture of leader-follower (50%/50%); probably a mixture of project and non-project oriented people (50%/50%); or unsuited to project management team work at all (100%). A sampling of the abstracted descriptions and percentage assessments for each MBTI type is shown in Appendix A.

Observations

From this analysis, we are now in a position to make some assessment of the numbers of different types of project-suited people in the population at large. Figure 4 shows an MBTI grid with a few key words from the appendix to reflect the "project management flavor" of those in each cell, and their approximate percentage in the population at large. For ease of reference, each cell in the grid is referenced according to its position on each of the four basic MBTI axes shown in Figure 2. However, the grid has been re-oriented to match the orientation of our Figure 1.

Explorer	N	Driver		
INTJ 1% compelling vision self-confident strategic creative drive	INTP 1% vision concentrated analytical impatient not a builder	▲	ENTP 5% alert to next move analytical good judge too many projects restless	ENTJ 5% drive to lead harnesses people structured pushes hard enjoys responsibility
INFJ 1% strong contributor consistent looks to future enjoys problems good at public relations	INFP 1% idealistic prefers values, not goals perfectionist impatient with detail		ENFP 5% has influence skilled with people likes drama emotional gets team off track	ENFJ 5% good leader charismatic cooperative organized good follower
← I				E →
ISFJ 6% service oriented works hard dependable/responsible likes stability down-to-earth	ISFP 5% hedonic impulsive not a planner spender, not saver insubordinate		ESFP 13% adept at selling excellent at PR enjoys entertaining impulsive conceals problems	ESFJ 13% sociable interacts well orderly conscientious needs appreciation
ISTJ 6% practical, thorough persevering patient decisive not a risk taker	ISTP 7% impulsive thrives on excitement hunger for action irresponsible dislike of authority	▼	ESTP 13% resourceful manipulative ruthlessly pragmatic no follow through antisocial	ESTJ 13% responsible dependable highly organized loyal, in tune pillar of strength
Coordinator	S	Administrator		

Note: The percentages show the approximate proportion of the type in the total population

Figure 4. The MBTI Grid as seen from the Project Management Perspective

Figure 5 shows the same grid used previously but shaded to reflect six different "project personality" types relative to suitability for project management teamwork. If our analysis is reasonably correct, then we may deduce that the "project" population is distributed as follows. The Explorer (entrepreneur) type makes up only about 1-2% of the population. Rather more, some 5-10%, are of the Driver (marshal) type. A similar number of Coordinator (catalyst) people are available for facilitative type duties. There are considerably more, 25-30%, Administrator (stabilizer) "professional" types. Another 20-25% are probably more suited as "followers". That still leaves about a third of the population who are most likely uncomfortable and unsuited to working on projects at all.

If you consider a traditional, "established technology" project, Shenhar and Wideman have suggested that the "Concept" phase of a four-phase generic life cycle should start out with an "Explorer" type; proceed with a "Coordinator" in the "Definition" or planning phase; move to an assertive "Driver" type in the "Execution" phase; and conclude with an "Administrator" type in the clean-up "Finishing" phase. They have further suggested that failure to match an appropriate style to project circumstances can quickly demoralize the project team and lead to unsatisfactory project results.⁶

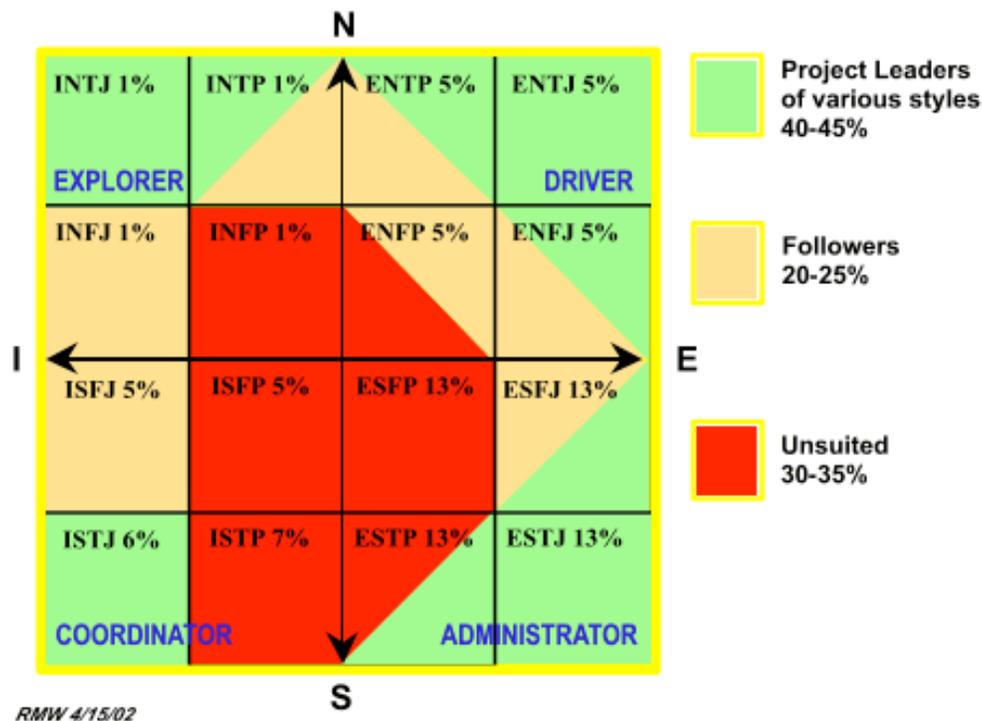


Figure 5. The MBTI Grid and Suitability to Project Management Teamwork

If these relationships are anywhere close, then for a typical enterprise contemplating moving to a project oriented style of management, about a third of the work force may be unsuited to working in the new environment. Thus, it is a mistake to think that everyone will be highly motivated by working on projects. At the same time, in a workforce population of say 100, only one or two people are seriously capable of successfully conceptualizing a project, and then, no doubt, only if they have sound project management experience. Indeed, in this size of firm, perhaps only the CEO and his or her senior vice president are thus suited.

Summary/Conclusions

Our purpose in this paper has been to provide an insight into the availability of people suited to various roles in project teamwork. We compare the management styles required for successful project management, Jung's theory of psychological types as reflected by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and the distribution of those types throughout the population as indicated by Keirsey and Bates. The analysis suggests that while there should be reasonable resources available for a project's implementation, those suited to initial project conceptualization may be strictly limited, perhaps as few as 1 or 2%. Even the number of coordinators suited to project definition and planning may be quite limited.

It is not difficult to argue that many of the problems experienced in the implementation phase of projects stem directly from ill-considered requirements proposed in the conceptual phase. Considering the scarcity of people naturally suited to this work, the rate of unsatisfactory projects should come as a no

surprise.

We also make a further very important observation: Perhaps as many as a third of the population are not comfortable with project type work at all. That suggests that project management as an enterprise-wide style of management may not be the universal panacea that management gurus currently imply.

Appendix A

The list below shows the sixteen MBTI personality type designations with the population percentages and page references from Keirsey and Bates (Keirsey 1984). Against each are samplings of the key phrases relevant to project management also abstracted from Keirsey. These abstracts enabled a subjective assessment of the suitability for project work of each personality type. For this analysis, six 'project' types were chosen: Explorer; Driver; Coordinator; Administrator; Follower; and Unsued (to project work).

INTJ (1-2% p180)

...the most self-confident... think in empirical logic... decisions come naturally... look to the future... "builder"... if an idea makes sense it will be adopted... the most theoretical of all types... natural brain stormers... always seeking strategies and tactics...

[Suggest **Explorer: 100%**]

INTP (1-2% p186)

...see distinctions and inconsistencies... the architect of ideas, systems and edifices... search for whatever is relevant... can concentrate better [than most]... not impressed by authority of office, position... leaves it to others to be builder...

[Suggest **Explorer-Follower: 50-50**]

ENTP (5% p183)

...very alert to what is apt to occur next... characteristically have an eye out for a better way... keen judge of the pragmatics... expert at directing relationships between means and ends... not however a mover of mountains... count on ability to improvise... restless if a project they are engaged in is no longer challenging...

[Suggest **Driver-Follower: 50-50**]

ENTJ (5% p178)

..."Commandant"... basic driving force and need is to lead... strong urge to give structure, to harness people to distant goals... establish plans for a task... search more for policy and goals... places greater trust in empirical thought...

[Suggest **Driver: 100%**]

INFJ (1-2% p170)

...come easily to decisions... strong drive to contribute... visions of human events past, present and future... take work seriously... generally not visible leaders... very consistent and value integrity... good at public relations...

[Suggest **Follower: 100%**]

INFP (1-2% p176)

...idealistic... profound sense of honor... prefer the valuing process over the purely logical... take deliberate liberties with logic... adaptable... welcome new ideas... patient with complicated situations, impatient with routine details...

[Suggest **Unsuited: 100%**]

ENFP (5% p173)

...intense emotional experiences vital... brilliantly perceptive [but] can make serious mistakes of judgment... become bored quickly... enjoy creating a project but [not] the follow-through... good at initiating meetings/conferences [not] the details... difficult to work within constraints, especially in following rules, operating procedures...

[Suggest **Follower-Unsuited: 50-50**]

ENFJ (5% p167)

...outstanding leaders of task groups... high value on cooperation... influential... relate with empathy... intuition well developed... likes things settled and organized... prefer to plan ahead... comfortable either leading or following...

[Suggest **Driver-Follower: 50-50**]

ISFJ (6% p194)

...desire to be of service... willing to work long hours... when undertaking a task, it will be completed if possible... efficiency and effectiveness of a procedure not questioned... super dependable... [good for] middle management administration jobs...

[Suggest **Follower: 100%**]

ISFP (5% p203)

...artisans in their nature... hedonic and impulsive... do not plan and prepare... not interested in developing facility in speaking... instinctive longing for the natural, pastoral... insubordinate... spender rather than a saver...

[Suggest **Unsuited: 100%**]

ESFP (13% p198)

...radiate attractive warmth and optimism... great fun..."eat, drink and be merry"... problems will not be allowed to make their appearance... impulsive... outstanding in public relations... adept at selling... enjoy entertaining...

[Suggest **Unsuited: 100%**]

ESFJ (13% p192)

...energized by interactions with people... harmony is key... need to be appreciated, typically in the form of services... conscientious and orderly... good in teaching, preaching, supervision, administration, coaching, people-to-people jobs... [Suggest **Follower-Administrator: 50-50**]

ISTJ (6% p189)

...decisiveness in practical affairs... dependable... extraordinarily persevering... counted on to conserve resources... practical... without flourish... interest in thoroughness, details, practical procedures... not likely to take chances... excellent supervisors... [Suggest **Coordinator: 100%**]

ISTP (7% p200)

...impulsive... action is end in itself... act is self-directed, self-leading... seeing hierarchy and authority as unnecessary... [must be] free to vary each move... do not wish to prepare for anything... want no obligations, duties, or confining promises... [Suggest **Unsuited: 100%**]

ESTP (13% p196)

...[people of] action... resourceful... outstanding entrepreneur... conciliator par excellence... unwillingness to bother with follow-up details may cause an excellent project to fail... energies may be channeled into antisocial activities... [Suggest **Administrator-Unsuited: 50-50**]

ESTJ (13% p188)

...in touch with external environment... pillars of strength... responsible... outstanding at organizing... like to see things done correctly... tend to judge in terms of standard operating procedures... realistic, matter-of-fact... loyal to institutions... [Suggest **Administrator: 100%**]

¹ Wideman, R. Max. 1996. *Dominant Personality Characteristics Suited to Running a Successful Project (And What Type are You?)*, AEW Services, Vancouver, Canada.

² Briggs, Isabel Myers. 1993. *Introduction to Type*. Consulting Psychologist Press, Ca.

³ Keirsey, David, and Marilyn Bates. 1984. *Please Understand Me: Character and Temperament Types*. Prometheus Nemesis Book Company, CA: 167-207.

⁴ Waterman, R. H. 1992. *Adhocracy: The Power to Change*. W. W. Norton & Co., NY: 16 & 59.

⁵ Keirsey, David, and Marilyn Bates. 1984. *Please Understand Me: Character and Temperament Types*. Prometheus Nemesis Book Company, CA: 3-4.

⁶ Shenhar, Aaron J. and R. Max Wideman. *Matching Project Management Style with Project Type for Optimum Success* PMForum web site, September, 2000.