

# The Five Monkeys and Personality Characteristics of the Nerd

**R**ECENTLY I COMPLETED AN IN-DEPTH PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TYPES OF PEOPLE WHO GET INVOLVED WITH COMPUTERS-AND THE RESULTS ARE PRETTY FRIGHTENING. THE STUDY WAS COMMISSIONED BY A

group convened from the Federal Government, a major state university, and the CIO's (Chief Information Officers) of ten Fortune 50 corporations, along with senior officials of the National Security Agency, the FBI, the CIA, and several French agencies: *Jenesais Quoi* (Zhen-say kwah), *Jenesais Qui* (Zhen-say key), *Jenesais Quand* (Zhen-say con), *Jenesais Ou* (Zhen-say ooo), and *Jenesais Pourquoi* (Zhen-say po-kwah), collectively known in international circles as The Five Monkeys.

Members of the committee included extremely senior theorists and practitioners in psychology, psychiatry, sociology, business management, and computer science from the University of Chicago and Columbia University. It would take more than one hand to count the number of Nobel prizes on that committee.

## My Role

I was selected to be secretary of the committee because of my 20+ years of experience in all facets of the industry: hardware, software, manufacturing, management, and communications. Initially, a high-profile newspaper journalist was chosen. However, the committee subsequently rescinded its offer when asked whether it was to be a Mac or PC project. Numerous employees of well-known computer magazines were considered, but all were ultimately rejected for their inability to count to two in either binary, hexadecimal, or decimal.

Thus I got my shot at glory. My only condition was that I be allowed to share the early results of the study first with the loyal "Computer Connection" readers of **Electronics Now**. You guys and gals are special. I hope you appreciate that, because this hasn't been easy.

## Survey Overview

After issuing thousands of questionnaires and analyzing millions of data

points, what we came up with was not a set of personality types, but a set of qualities that tend to mix and match in different individuals (and perhaps the same individual at different times), leading to a multi-dimensional spectrum of possibilities. Then, by constructing an elaborate set of computer models, we have been able to successfully predict the behavior of various historic individuals. Ongoing field tests are underway at the above-mentioned Fortune 50 corporations as to whether our model can be used in real-world settings.

Under terms of our agreement, I cannot discuss details of the model. However, I am at liberty to discuss the set of qualitative attributes used in constructing the model. That way, those of you with



THE STRESS AND STRAIN of high technology gets to all of us at one time or another. For proof of that, read this column!

some coding skills should be able to build your own models, although I should warn you that to achieve anything like real-time response, the committee's model requires a coordinated array of 65,536 RS/6000 processors running a special-purpose parallel-processing operating system and analysis tools.

Nonetheless, we are currently negotiating with Sega, Nintendo, Sony, and Intel concerning development of hand-held models that can be used during engineering design review meetings. Texas Instruments and Casio may produce units with built-in plotting and printing functions. Needless to say, Hewlett-Packard plans to do an RPN version. It is likely that the hand-helds will also have built-in versions of *Tetris*, *Duke Nukem*, and *Doom*.

Microsoft has also shown interest in incorporating a scaled-down version as a Design Wizard in the next versions of Visual C++ and Visual Basic. We've also been in contact with most other software-tool vendors. Netscape has announced a Navigator plug-in that will allow ordinary citizens to log in to a Defense Department computer system and get a free personality profile based on the model. We've also been approached by vendors of late-night television gadgets, "one-minute" management gurus, IDG publications (which wants to publish a "... for Dummies" version), the Norwegian rowing team, and the caretaker at Pitcairn Island. But I digress.

## The Findings

A few notes before we get started.

1. An old joke has it that there are two kinds of people in the world: those who divide the world into *n* kinds of people, and those who don't. The committee unabashedly aligns itself with the former.

2. Given the orientation of this magazine, I'm not going to bore you with the dry sociological and psychological terms developed by the committee. Instead, I'll use the nicknames we used among ourselves during the project.

3. In addition to the data strictly required by the questionnaires, we also collected data on the subjects' favorite colors, astrological signs, sports teams, microbrewery beers, underwear preferences (boxers or briefs), and attitudes toward checkered shorts, Hawaiian shirts, toy Poodles, Jim Carrey movies, and other subtle indicators of culture, education, and attitude. Extensive cross-

checks were run as part of the analysis, and some extremely interesting correlations turned up. Unfortunately, my non-disclosure agreement prevents me from revealing the details. But I won't be saying too much if I hint that Jim-Carrey admirers had a tendency to show positive attitudes toward most items in the list, and a negative correlation with leaders of technology, business, and politics in most traits except raw intelligence, where they led.

4. To be honest, the real purpose of the study was to find ways for CIOs to be able to control renegade technologists who are supposed to be implementing policies prescribed by CIOs, but who often pursue their own agendas or those of their constituencies, at the expense of the CIO, coworkers, the corporation as a whole, and ultimately, the shareholders.

Ultimately what resulted were 22 primary characteristics distributed across seven categories:

- Primary motivator
- Sociability
- Interaction style
- World view
- Provider instinct
- Management style
- Technique

We'll examine each in turn.

### Primary Groups

Primary motivator concerns the real-world goal that primarily motivates a given individual most of the time. The options include power, money, and knowledge. Among committee members, representatives of each category were informally known as Pols, MBAs, and Neurons, respectively.

Regarding Sociability, the committee graciously acknowledges the pioneering insights of Steven Covey in developing the following distinctions: Dependent, independent, and interdependent. Dependent individuals ("Diapers") are those who are incapable of doing anything by themselves. Independent individuals ("Hillbillies") are those who are incapable of doing anything with others. And Interdependent individuals ("Coveys") are those who enjoy working with others, compromising, and in general, sacrificing the good of the one for the good of the many.

Interaction style breaks down into three subgroups: Betsys, Rodmans, and Drones. Betsys tend to avoid public exposure at all costs; conversely, Rodmans crave it like food, water, or air. Drones

tend not to care one way or the other. Their lack of self-consciousness helps avoid personal embarrassment, but their lack of showmanship tends to make them boring. A successful Pol needs to be either a Betsy or a Rodman; Drones need not apply. On the other hand, the committee remarked that scientists and engineers tend to be drawn from the ranks of the Drones and the Betsys.

World view also breaks down into three subgroups: Black-and-white, gray, and color (B&Ws, Gs, and Cs, respectively). B&Ws tend to see every choice as being among polar opposites: true or false, good or evil, for us or against us. Gs see a broader range of choices, without discontinuities. Cs see an even broader range of choices, brought about by the ability to paradigm-shift; that is, to cast problems in new lights to arrive at innovative solutions. Scientists and engineers tend to come from the ranks of the Cs and Gs. Pols are an interesting case. Regardless of their actual World View, they almost always profess to be from the B&W class.

Provider Instinct subdivides into two interrelated groups of two: Hunters, Gatherers, Collectors, and Hemingways. Hunters and Hemingways both hunt; Gatherers and Collectors both gather. Hunters and Gatherers never take more than they need; Hemingways and Collectors never have enough. Pols and MBAs tend to be Hemingways, scientists tend to be Collectors, and engineers tend toward Gatherers.

Another important category is Management style. Here we find three possibilities: Chief, brave, and hermit. A chief leads, a brave follows, and a hermit stays as far away from the process as possible. Pols and MBAs universally profess the Chief attribute, whereas in reality, most would be better suited as Hermits. Technical people tend toward the extremes: either chief or hermit.

The final category is Technique, comprised of Gepettos, Gomers, and Klutzes. Gepettos are craftsmen who excel in performing all facets of a task. Gomers and Klutzes are both more or less incompetent. They are distinguished in that Gomers sometimes succeed in spite of themselves, whereas Klutzes always fail.

### What About You?

The point of this presentation is to outline some of the chief characteristics

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of several key personality types in our world. Knowledge of these characteristics can teach you both about yourself, and about your friends, family members, and coworkers.

At the behest of several of the clinicians on the committee, I'll present a few hints about appropriate roles for personality types in which a particular characteristic dominates. For more detailed information, please contact the relevant academic department at the University of Chicago or Columbia University.

If your primary motivator is knowledge, don't even think about politics. If it's money you're after, don't even think about science. In contrast, if you're a Gomer or a Klutz, you're probably not going to want to be seen in public, so politics is out. On the other hand, a Gomer may be suitable for a bureaucratic position, particularly if you can enlist the aid of a Hemingway to keep you supplied with paper clips, notepads, and malicious gossip.

### **What About Me?**

If you've gotten this far, and I hope you have, you're probably either rolling on the floor laughing, or wondering if I've left my senses. Well, I haven't (at least I think I haven't). In this high-stress, high-tech world, a little parody and humor from time-to-time can keep all of us a little saner—at least I hope so! That's all for now. Until next time, you can contact me at my psychiatrist's office, or via e-mail at [jkh@acm.org](mailto:jkh@acm.org). **EN**