The human element of IP

Personality in patent innovation

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The inventor's paradox

Despite the evident benefits of Intellectual Property (IP) protection, some creators encounter challenges and limitations, from time-consuming drafting and application procedures to concerns about the difficulty of enforcement. Unfortunately, this means the very people who should benefit most directly from the patent system are approaching it with mounting dissatisfaction and skepticism.

However, there is more to this story than systemic frustration. Inventors' personality types — often meticulous and methodical — significantly impact their understanding, utilization and trust of the patent process.

It is time for the IP sector to delve deeper into the psychology of inventors. We need to explore why creators often harbor negative feelings toward patents, the impact of this attitude on the innovation landscape and potential solutions for more effective collaboration between inventors and patent departments.

When IP gets personal

Personality research, being concerned with the thought and emotional processes of the individual, has much to offer organizational psychology, that is, the study of how workers approach their job roles and interact with each other. Sophisticated models derived from these fields are able to predict job performance across disciplines to a meaningful degree. Hence, it comes as no surprise that the science of the mind has incredible relevance when the minds in question are responsible for technological development.

One of the most effective methods to understand inventor personality types is the DiSC model, which offers a reliable way to interpret individual preferences in social and professional settings. It is a personal assessment tool that sorts behavioral patterns into four categories: dominance, inducement, submission and compliance. Each grouping represents specific traits and inclinations that may manifest in a person's actions and reactions.

That being so, the DiSC model should be regarded only as an informative and interpretive lens; it is meant to be descriptive, not prescriptive, and has been found to have limitations in certain applications, such as predicting academic performance. However, nearly 100 years of research have solidified it as a valuable framework for understanding the diversity of personality traits in innovation and technology.

Today's terminology often differs from that used by William Moulton Marston in 1928 to describe the expression of emotion in behavior. This change helps remove any unduly negative (self-) perceptions that may be attached. In modern literature, the four archetypes are defined as:

- **Dominant (D) individuals** are assertive and goal-oriented but may sometimes be seen as aggressive or lacking empathy.
- **Influential (i) individuals** are sociable and persuasive but might struggle to focus or follow through on commitments.
- **Steady (S) individuals** are reliable team players, yet they may find it challenging to assert themselves or make quick decisions.
- **Compliant (C) individuals** are detail-oriented and analytical but could be perceived as overly critical or risk-averse.

While the DiSC paradigms indicate tendencies, they are by no means mutually exclusive, and a person's alignment with each of the four can vary according to the social context. Nonetheless, recognizing these categories enables organizations to improve communication and teamwork, leveraging the strengths of each personality type while mitigating potential weaknesses.

The "C" type is perhaps the one most strongly expressed in the IP world. It is noted for possessing a strong ability to plan, organize and execute tasks. The prevalence of this type is often reflected in individuals' pursuit of accuracy, clarity, predictability and efficiency. These traits are crucial for successfully implementing projects in the technological field, where every detail matters and mistakes can have serious consequences.

Active

Dominant

Influential

Task Focus

Task Focus

**Compliant**

Steady

Reflective
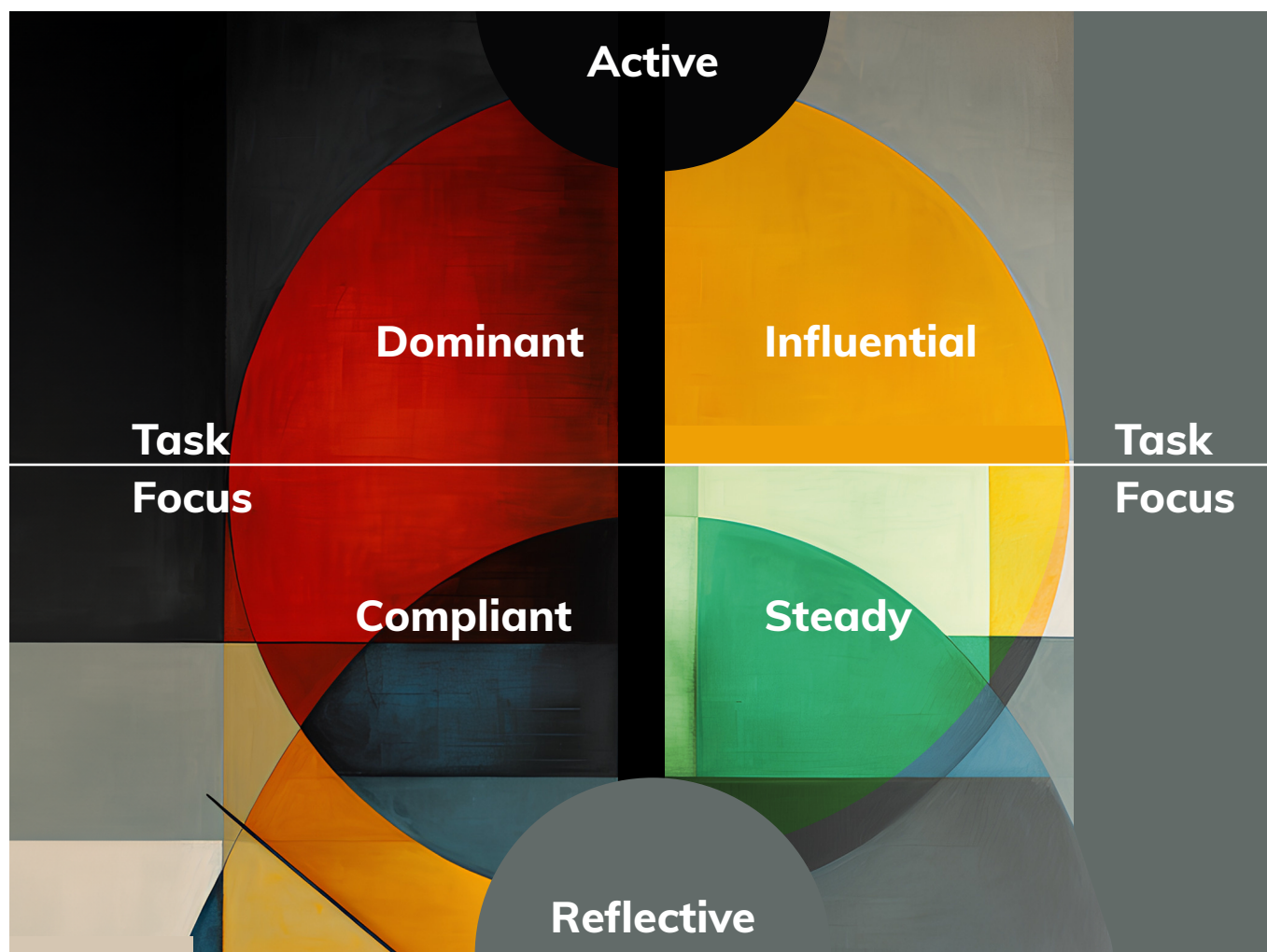
Not given sufficient information to work with, people in the "C" category may feel irked or unmotivated, perhaps even refusing to participate. Based on this, it can be said – anecdotally but with some confidence – that the "C" type is likely the most common among inventors, engineers and scientists. By and large, these researchers and innovators prefer a precise and structured approach to their duties.

The same holds true for patent professionals who work to secure exclusive rights for inventions. These practitioners will also be trained technicians, engineers and scientists, with specializations reflecting their affinity for language and law. Thus, actors at both ends of the IP-creation cycle are mainly pragmatic and analytical; each is a master of their craft with a keen sense of precision and

logic. Of course, "C" personalities are not alone in the innovation landscape, and these individuals work alongside people with differing behaviors and priorities, which can create disharmony. For example, the need for structure common among "C" individuals may lead to friction with "i" types, who might not be as focused or detail-oriented when giving and receiving directions. Similarly, "D" types may seem less empathetic to the "C" group's preference for patient analysis.

This means that people in the "C" category and their coworkers may face delicate situations in shared professional spaces. Understanding these hurdles is crucial for improved, ongoing success among inventors and other patent team members.

The problem with patents
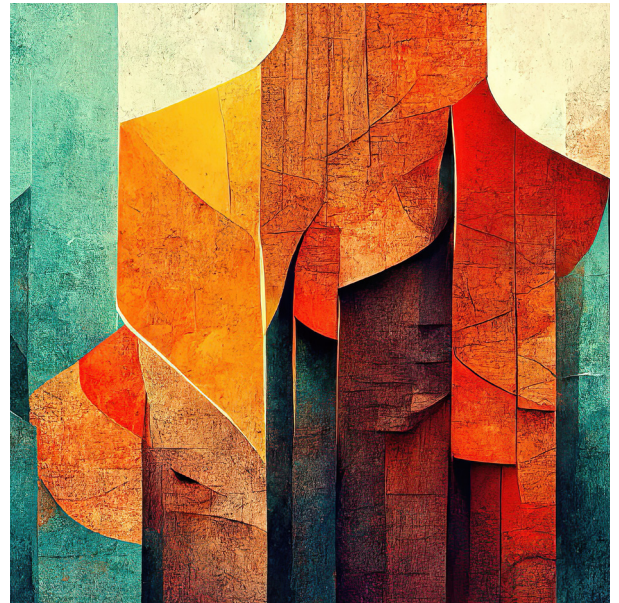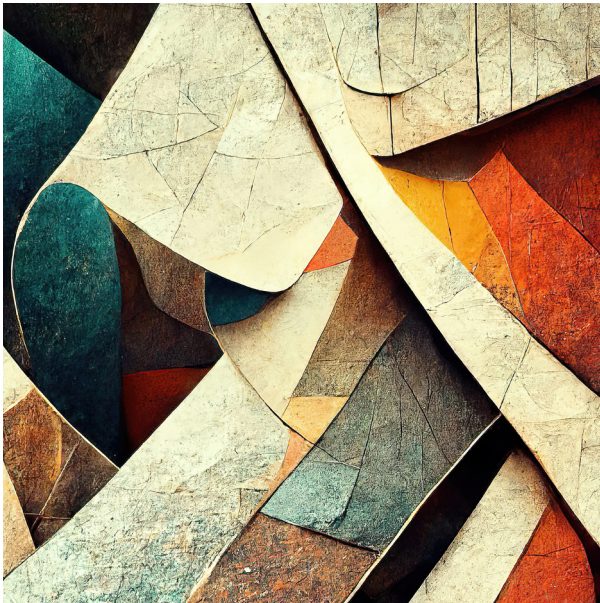
In business, and particularly the complex world of IP generation and management, it is natural to have clear job assignments with specific responsibilities. Engineers innovate, while internal or external patent specialists secure protection, taking enforcement actions as needed. However, this does not mean to eliminate partnerships across roles and personalities. Actively involving the inventor in the patent-creation process is highly beneficial, whether during the initial drafting of the application or responding to office actions in the examination process.

The same is true of monitoring the competition jointly with R&D. Often, dissatisfaction and resentment toward the patent system arise within R&D teams due to its abstruse legal language and opaque procedures as well as a lack of understanding among developers. In the absence of a "one and done" procedure, inventors can find themselves grappling with a lack of clarity and purpose, leading to decreased cooperation with legal specialists and a persistent sense of grievance. Some creators respond by recoiling, either by initially holding back invention disclosures or keeping their distance from the patent system altogether.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), often without internal patent experts, face more significant dilemmas in dealing with patent law. Employees frequently lack knowledge of the legal aspects of patents, leading to uncertainty, strategic missteps and IP vulnerabilities. These issues not only affect the inventors themselves but also the entire organization.

An inadequate patent strategy can result in inefficient resource utilization and a weakening of the company's competitive position. Ultimately, a lack of legal clarity hinders innovation activities and limits the potential to create value from ideas.

One remedy for these problems and others is to leverage the priorities of different personalities and their distinct working styles. Organizing patent processes around the "C" type is often helpful — not just because inventors and R&D teams are at the heart of these tasks but because their need for arrangement and thoroughness can lead to a more robust framework overall.

Incorporating the diverse strengths and preferences of team members not only streamlines the patenting process but also fosters a culture of inclusivity and collaboration. By doing so, companies can transform potential vulnerabilities into opportunities for growth, ensuring a competitive edge.

Making patent peace: IP for all personalities

The first step toward reconciling personalities is to improve transparency. Both inventors and R&D decision-makers should understand what is at stake and have the chance to align on the importance of exactness in patent claims and management. "C"-type personalities will appreciate the chance to analyze details and consider risks, as they enjoy applying knowledge and logic. Meanwhile, their "D," "i" and "S" coworkers will benefit from opportunities to remove collaborative barriers and learn from creators' perspectives. The idea is to encourage all temperaments to use language others can understand — a mutual respect that ensures each party's needs are met.

Companies can employ a variety of IP-centric practices to create a discursive framework:

IP basic training

If instructional sessions are not part of the onboarding program or have not yet achieved the desired impact, leaders may need to reevaluate their approach. However, it is prudent to consider the "C" type's perspective when designing a training program.

Typically, inventors prefer not to delve into complex legal provisions; they feel IP professionals can and should manage these efforts. The problem is that training materials are often produced by IP experts who deliver excessive information precisely due to their own deep immersion and expertise. If the target audience feels overwhelmed with legal specifics, they may disconnect from the topic.

A broader approach to explaining the purpose behind regulations and answering inventors' questions keeps IP guidance relevant and practical for non-specialists. This method of more digestible training could help increase inventor motivation, promoting their willingness to participate actively in the patent process.

Offering training at regular intervals reemphasizes the enduring applicability of IP and ensures inventors are continuously supported and informed. Such programs may also reach creators who have not been deeply involved in the patent process before, alleviating weak spots. The result is increased participation and a positive impact on the company's innovation culture.

Invention harvesting workshops

Technical knowledge cannot be transformed into a patent grant if it is not recognized and captured. Invention harvesting workshops bring together cross-functional teams and provide ample space and time for creativity.

These programs also encourage different personality types to work together in ways that coordinate targets and highlight similarities between departments. During the early stages of development, novel technical solutions may be abandoned if no commercial product is envisioned further down the line. This squanders the opportunity to harvest inventions that may be patentable. Even without a marketed product, patents can provide a lucrative revenue stream through licensing or can section off areas of activity from competitors. To be most effective, harvesting efforts must continue beyond the initial onboarding stage, which is where IP awareness becomes crucial once again.

IP databases and patent search tools

Aside from being a source of inspiration and education, patent literature represents a significant element of risk management as infringing third-party rights, even unintentionally, can be very costly. Companies should provide easy access to patent information from the start of research projects so that any need to "invent around" patent claims is identified early. However, not all inventors will screen the available information in the same way.

Some may prefer to interpret data visually, while others may be more numerically inclined. The right search tools empower different personality types to engage with IP databases in ways that make the most sense to them. As an example, when relevant information is obscured by extraneous detail, the "C" type's analytical nature is not put to best use. The result can be misguided conclusions or missed opportunities. Offsetting this hazard takes an intuitive user interface and an extensive selection of data filters. These tools help make complex patent literature searches more widely accessible — but handling the collected information remains troublesome.

In order to take full advantage of the resources at hand, users should have access to training that encompasses both technical proficiency and theoretical comprehension of patent law.

This, in turn, can lead to better IP management and strengthen a company's innovation capacity through collective understanding.

Companies can adopt a holistic approach to instruction through interactive workshops, one where participants directly engage with IP management software and patent search engines while deepening their understanding of legal principles. This interactive format allows individuals to explore the intricacies of patent information and the procedures behind it, facilitating a more profound learning experience that accommodates all behavioral types.

Bringing different personalities together in communal training has the additional benefit of giving diverse thinkers a chance to learn from each other, see new creative approaches and learn what they can bring to the table. Participants can also explore potential conflict situations and discuss solutions that make the most of all strengths.
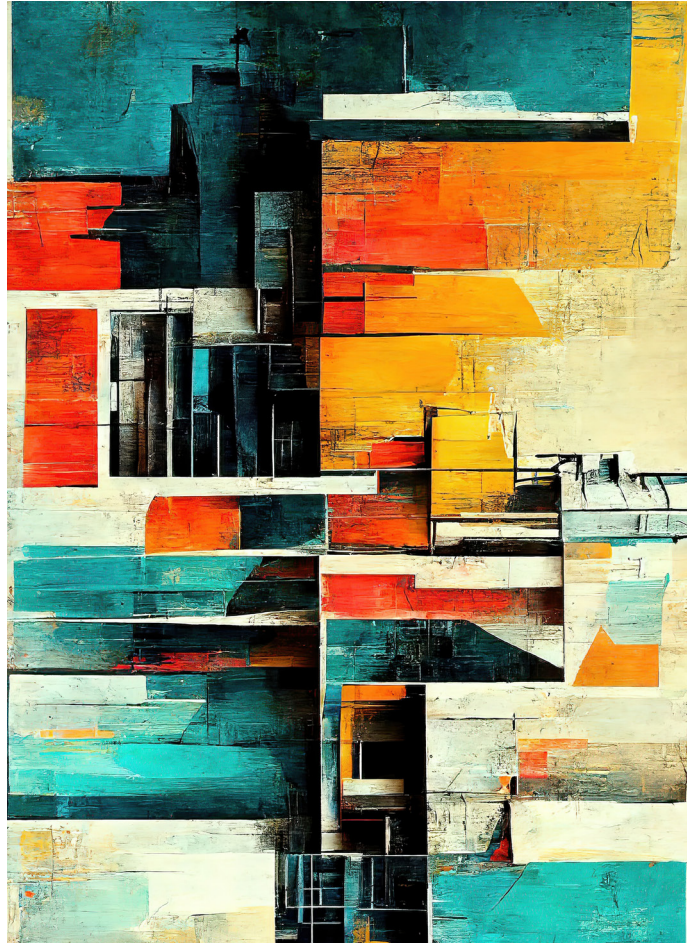
Celebrating the potential of all minds

Sensitive consideration of personalities, strengths and struggles leads to true enablement — the key to a well-functioning, innovative patent environment. Whether an internal IP team is in place, it is essential to cultivate awareness and appreciation for these assets at every level.

Companies often turn to technology, training and culture improvements to reach these goals. In the end, the source of patent creation remains human — often detail-oriented analysts who require insight for motivation.

No matter how an individual's thinking can be categorized, it is crucial to give inventors the information and support they need to find their purpose and reach their potential.

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