A different psychological approach to project management could be an asset when trying to find the right people for the right job. **Michael Davis** looks at the differences between people and the sexes.

A WHOLE BRAIN APPROACH

'THERE ARE more things in project management, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy', is an interesting twist on William Shakespeare's Hamlet, but there are many things in project management to be explained, and let us start with its apparent feminisation.

Fortunately, there is a technology that explains the universe and everything to do with people. And, since project management depends on people, the revelations are like '... realising that the stars also shine in the daytime!' (Ned Herrmann). The technology is Whole Brain Project Management.

In the December 2007 issue of Project, editor Giselle Young asked: "It seems the jury is still out on whether the industry is becoming more 'feminised'. Some believe women are truly making the difference, bringing in valuable skills – others believe gender stereotyping is not helpful. But all seem to agree that the industry is changing. Communication, negotiation, understanding and making staff feel valued have rocketed up the list of important requirements that make a project succeed. Whether or not change in the profession is down to an influx of women providing the other side of the skills coin, could simply be a matter of pure semantics. But project management is becoming more 'holistic' in its approach to managing change, and opening to new ideas and concepts that a decade or two ago would have been frowned upon."

It is the phrase "...other side of the skills coin..." that provides a clue. If we substitute 'brain' for 'coin' then we are on the right lines, and the answer – and much more – is to be found in Whole Brain Project Management.

Whole Brain Project Management is an application of Whole Brain Technology developed by Ned Herrmann while he was with General Electric. Whole Brain Technology is based on the physiology of the thinking brain...the left cerebral cortex, the right cerebral cortex, the left limbic and the right limbic. Figure 1 shows Herrmann's Whole Brain Model, which is a metaphor for the brain, linked to its physiological roots. So, instead of simply 'left' and 'right' brain, we actually have four quadrants – 'upper left', 'lower left', 'lower right' and 'upper right'.

Herrmann showed how we are born with thinking preferences to a greater or lesser degree in each quadrant, what he called 'dominance'. He developed the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI) to profile an individual's thinking preferences in the Whole Brain Model.

The HBDI is a metaphoric assessment tool that emulates the brain. For example, the profile of an engineer (man or woman) would show the skills associated with each quadrant. The Engineer's profile is said to be dominated by Quadrant A, which includes quantitative, diagnostic, analytical, technical, rational, factual, realistic, logical and data orientated skills.

Ned described how our natural thinking preferences lead us to develop skills and competences reflected in our behaviours. His metaphor for the brain has been validated worldwide by half a million profiles.

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The people skills congregate in quadrant C – caring, feelings, empathy, emotional, instinctive, supportive, relationships and communication. This is where we find Giselle's words 'communication, negotiation, understanding and making staff feel valued'. But are these male or female traits? Analysis, of the half a million profiles, shows that the most frequently occurring HBDI profiles of men and women revealed a greater percentage of men with the A quadrant, and a higher percentage of women in the C quadrant.

Further analysis of the dominant quadrants confirms that, in general, the dominant quadrant for men is A, and that for women is C. For example, when the 'structured' A and B quadrants are put together, figures reveal 46 per cent of men fit this profile compared with 26 per cent of women. Whereas with the 'free-flowing' more intuitive C and D quadrants, the picture is reversed with 46 per cent of women fitting the profile compared with just 21 per cent of men.

This confirms our anecdotal feeling that men and women are 'different' and opposites, even if we cannot explain it. Now, with Herrmann's technology, we have the technology and vocabulary to explain it. Nothing is right or wrong – only different. Viva la difference!

It is well known that communications skills are critical success factors in project success. But can left-brained men (and women) learn the free-flowing intuitive people skills of Quadrant C? The answer is yes, and it takes training, coaching, will power and practice. As award-winning project manager Carol Bell, writing in Project, says, "People skills are frequently described as 'soft' – I personally believe that they are anything but soft. They are often the hardest skills to acquire. Skills such as communication and multi-tasking should not be viewed solely as feminine skills as this will tend to build new stereotypes."

Fortunately, Whole Brain Project Management shows us how to behave situationally in project teams.

The so-called 'soft' skills are not limited to communications. There is also the need to organise, monitor and control people. Psychologist and project manager Dr Kirsty Hunter, writing in 'Project', says that "…a project manager requires excellent organisational skills [Quadrant B] and multi-tasking [Quadrant B], and these are definitely stronger characteristics prevalent in females". Herrmann's research confirms this, that women are naturally twice as likely as men to possess the social skills to deal with people and organise them.

What does all this mean for project management? Well, the topics of the APM Body of Knowledge on the Whole Brain Model shows that the dominant skills in project management have traditionally been left-brained in both Quadrants A and B.

That is, topics in the Body of Knowledge such as project definition, design, technology and issue management, contract management, configuration management etc, all fall into Quadrant A. While in Quadrant B (which deals with who, how amd when) are BoK topics such as procurement, methods and procedure, handover, work

breakdown structure, resource management and so on.

In the other two quadrants, the APM BoK shows: Quadrant C as including conflict management, communications, negotiation, teamwork, training etc; and Quadrant B as sales, concept, strategy, business case, project sponsorship, benefits management and requirements managements.

One can conclude from the research that, if Quadrant C thinking and behaviours have entered the profession [the general question raised in the Women in Project Management theme of Project December 2007/January 2008], they have been imported naturally, in general, by women, who are statistically more Quadrants B and C. Therefore the apparent 'feminisation' of project management discussed in the Project feature theme is due, in general, to an influx of women bringing their Quadrant C skills with them.

Whole Brain Project Management also reveals insights into improving team performance, situational leadership, matching people and projects, powerful report writing, creativity…and so on.

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