



CAREERS & OCCUPATIONS

THOUGHTS ON A 'GLASS CEILING'

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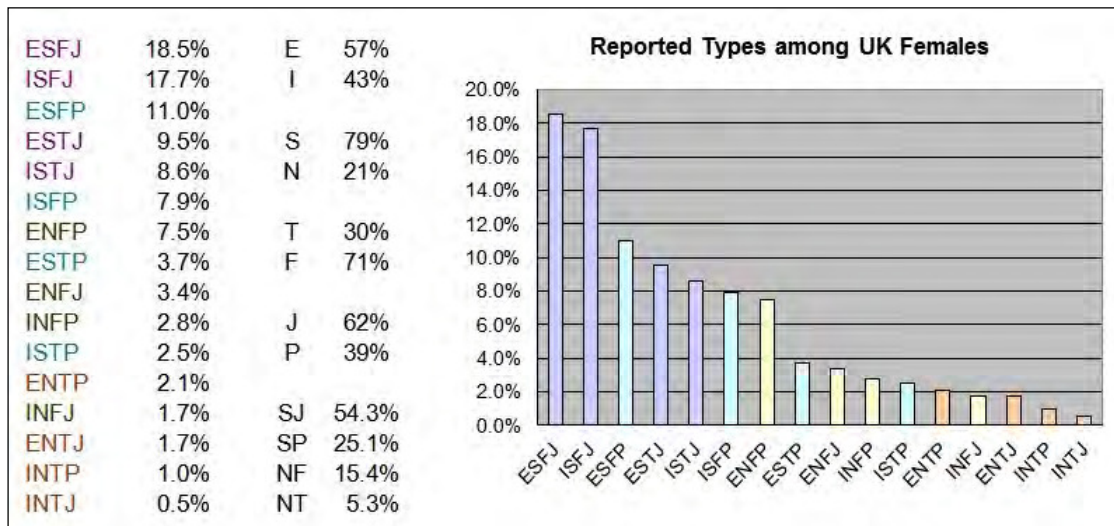
I heard a piece on the radio a few weeks ago, talking about women and the 'glass ceiling' in business. They were discussing a question that has been around a long while: why aren't there more women in the boardroom of major companies? Interestingly, I don't think I've noticed this topic being discussed for some while, so perhaps things are changing. Or perhaps I'm not paying enough attention to the media.

While I was in IT, there were several initiatives aimed at increasing the number of women in technology and in management, and much discussion and expressions of dismay at how difficult it was. In both politics and business media speaks of 'women-only short lists', to try to force up the proportion of women 'at the top'.

Most discussion revolves around the barriers to women that exist – selection bias, child care issues, and so on. I don't know if I've heard it being tackled from a perspective of individual choice – what if more women simply don't *want* to do the 'climb to the top of a corporate tree' thing, even if they can?

Something to keep in mind, throughout this article, is that any person of any Type is able to work effectively in any given role. Their ability in the role will depend on the strengths they have and skills they have developed. However, their Type will underlie the extent they are comfortable or uncomfortable in the role, stressed or stretched, empty or fulfilled.

For reference, here is the distribution of types in the UK female population, according to OPP's Step I research:



Research at Ashridge Management School (on over 8,000 managers participating in their development programmes, 20% of whom were women) has shown that the most common reported management types in the UK are ESTJ, ISTJ, ENTJ and ENTP. Thinking types in general are 85% of

management, even though they are only half the population and only 30% of women. This holds true across all the business sectors they looked at, with only slight variations.

Interestingly, they also observe that while 70% of women in the UK report a preference for Feeling,

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women in management report nearly 74% preference for Thinking. The women who are in management report generally the same Type preferences as the men who are in management.

All types are found in management roles, and according to the Ashridge research that includes women from all 16 types. But of those women who go into management, nearly 40% report a preference for N and T – which contrasts with being preferred by only 5.3% of women in general. It's a bit like these women have found their niche.

The nature of top-level management is often couched in terms of making quick decisions based on objective information – which of course describes Extraverted Thinking, so it is not surprising that management teams tend to favour the TJ types who use Extraverted Thinking as their Dominant or Auxiliary function.

Type understanding shows us that homogenous teams are more comfortable together and make decisions more quickly and more harmoniously – but of course they share the same blind spots. A quicker decision is not necessarily a better one, and logically could be worse because of the absence of perspectives and considerations that would have been contributed by a more varied Type representation. Recruiting women with the same Type preferences as the typical management team will not address that problem, yet it is a tendency of management teams to 'clone' themselves – when they are looking for someone new, they look for someone like them.

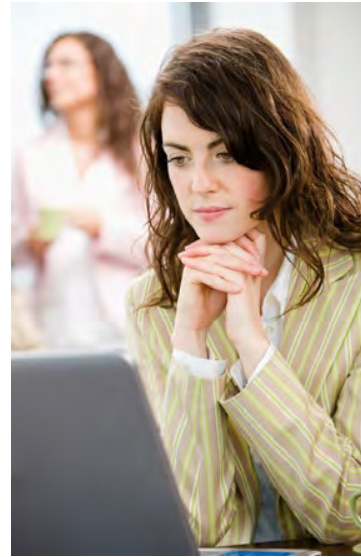
Interaction Styles[®] gives us some insight here. Certain types are comfortable taking charge and do so readily – it seems to be part of who they are. The most common management types, unsurprisingly, tend not to include those types of the 'Behind the Scenes' style.

Type	Interaction Style	Temperament	Team Roles
ESTJ	In Charge	Stabilizer	Conducting
ISTJ	Chart the Course	Stabilizer	Clarifying
ENTJ	In Charge	Theorist	Conducting
ENTP	Get Things Going	Theorist	Exploring

If we look at *Team Roles* as described in *Type-Mapping*[®] we again see another way to pattern the most common management types, and likewise those who refer a different kind of role to that of leading or being in charge. A useful aspect of Type Mapping is to show us how much of a 'stretch' it is for an individual of a given type to be working in a specific role. More stretch is good for a time for development, but long-term can lead to stress.

Henry L Thompson conducted some research into the implications for the validity of reported Type when the MBTI[®] is completed in a work environment. His study showed that, when compared to completing the questionnaire at home, there is a

clear shift of reported preferences towards S, T and J in the work environment. The research also explored work satisfaction, and *'the happiest people were the ones that reported the least difference between job and home Types'*. Interestingly, that difference was greatest among the older participants in the study. This study underlines the importance for an individual of discovering one's best-fit Type rather than simply reported Type.



The Ashridge study is framed in terms of reported Type, and the individuals took the MBTI[®] as part of their management training. It may be the study (women as well as men) has a certain proportion of their respondents replying in 'work mode' which biases the results towards Thinking. For these individuals, their 'true Type' might be a little or a lot different from their persona at work.

I might surmise (from my own experience and that of many of my clients from my Career Coaching work) that, as those with a Feeling preference (men as well as women) get older and recognise they've been having to 'stretch' in their work just a bit too far for comfort, they will find a way to change their path. As they develop their Thinking (3rd or 4th function) and learn to be a bit tougher, they learn to say 'no'. Whether that means taking a tangent in their employment, or finding a new job or new niche in their old job, or indeed launching out on their own, they back off from the discomfort of working far outside their Type preferences.

Perhaps more and more women are realising that, however much they value 'equality' for women, they really don't thrive when they try to be like men. They don't want the same things, they don't have the same interests, they don't enjoy the same work. Of course, there are still those women who have a preference for Thinking, and interests that align with that preference. It is great that opportunities for them are becoming more equal. Likewise, let's not forget the 35% of men who have a preference for Feeling. More and more, they are being given 'permission' by society to move outside standard gender-defined roles and into work which is more closely aligned with their Type preferences.

From a BBC article in February, it does seem that more women are opening small businesses. Women are not avoiding responsibility, or even business, but are perhaps more attracted to work where they can shape the culture of their workplace themselves, rather than having to fit an estab-

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lished managerial mind-set. They have potentially more options for flexibility, and a chance to align their business focus with their values, and their work with their interests.

Business and politics need to recognise the largely untapped resource of women (especially those with a Feeling preference), and welcome the different perspective they can bring. But best advantage will not be had from such a move if they try

to fit women into the established managerial mind-set. They need to recognise and integrate new gifts rather than pressuring people to conform to the long-established model.

And don't be offended if it turns out that not many actually want to go that route even though they can.

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