

# The Five Personalities of Innovators: Which One Are You?

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Whenever I try to conjure up what innovation looks like, the same slideshow of images clicks across my mind: that photo of Einstein with his tongue sticking out, Edison with his light bulb, Steve Jobs onstage in his black turtleneck, introducing the latest iThing. Unoriginal and overdone, to be sure. And not all that accurate.

Because it's not just about that romantic "ah ha!" moment in front of a chalkboard or a cocktail napkin, it's about the nitty-gritty work that comes after the idea: getting it accepted and implemented. Who are *these* faces? And, most importantly, as I'm sure you're all asking yourselves: where do *I* fit in?

Forbes Insights' recent study, "Nurturing Europe's Spirit of Enterprise: How Entrepreneurial Executives Mobilize Organizations to Innovate," isolates and identifies five major personalities crucial to fostering a healthy atmosphere of innovation within an organization. Some are more entrepreneurial, and some more process-oriented – but all play a critical role in the process. To wit: thinkers need doers to get things done, and idealists need number crunchers to tether them to reality.

Though it may seem stymieing at times, in any healthy working environment, a tension between the risk-takers and the risk-averse must exist; otherwise, an organization tilts too far to one extreme or the other and either careens all over the place or moves nowhere at all. An effective and productive culture of innovation is like a good minestrone soup: it needs to have the right mix and balance of all the ingredients, otherwise it's completely unsuccessful, unbalanced -- and downright mushy.

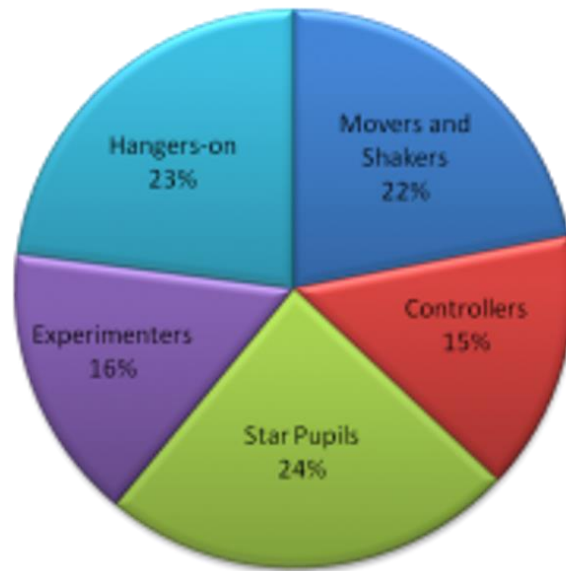
The Forbes Insights study surveyed more than 1,200 executives in Europe across a range of topics and themes. Using a series of questions about their attitudes, beliefs, priorities and behaviors, coupled with a look at the external forces that can either foster - or desiccate - an innovative environment, a picture emerged of five key personality types the play a role in the innovation cycle.

This last piece – the corporate environment – is a stealth factor that can make or break the potential even the most innovative individual. Look at it this way: a blue whale is the largest animal known ever to have existed, but if you tried to put it in a freshwater lake, it wouldn't survive. Well, that and it would displace a lot of water. My point? Even the largest and mightiest of creatures can't thrive in an environment that doesn't nurture them.

The themes surveyed in the study are universal; despite the focus on European executives, these personalities are applicable across oceans and cultures. The full study, provides further breakdown of where these personality types congregate by industry, company size and job function.

I'll leave it to you to decide which one fits you best . You may even see a little of yourself in more than one group. But remember, none of these are bad. All play crucial roles in developing an idea, pushing it up the corporate channels, developing a strategy and overseeing execution and implementation. These are all pieces of a puzzle, arteries leading to the beating heart of corporate innovation. Wow – can I make that sound any more dramatic?

## The Five Personality Types of Innovation



Source: Forbes Insights

**Movers and Shakers.** With a strong personal drive, these are leaders. Targets and rewards motivate them strongly, but a major incentive for this group is the idea of creating a legacy and wielding influence over others. These are the ones who like being in the front, driving projects forward (and maybe promoting themselves in the process), but at the end of the day, they provide the push to get things done. On the flip side, they can be a bit arrogant, and impatient with teamwork. Movers and Shakers tend to cluster in risk and corporate strategy, in the private equity and media industries, at mid-size companies; though they comprise 22% of total executives, at companies with revenues of \$25 million to \$1 billion, Movers and Shakers can encompass up to one-third of the executive suite.

**Experimenters.** Persistent and open to all new things, experimenters are perhaps the perfect combination for bringing a new idea through the various phases of development and execution. “Where there is a will, there is a way,” is perhaps the best way to describe them. They’re perfectionists and tend to be workaholics, most likely because it takes an incredible amount of dedication, time and hard work to push through an idea or initiative that hasn’t yet caught on. They take deep pride in their achievements, but they also enjoy sharing their expertise with others; they’re that intense colleague who feels passionately about what they do and makes everyone else feel guilty for daydreaming during the meeting about what they plan on making for dinner that night. Because they’re so persistent, even in the face of sometimes considerable pushback, they’re crucial to the innovation cycle. They tend to be risk-takers, and comprise about 16% of executives – and are most likely to be found in mid-size firms of \$100 million to \$1 billion (20%). Surprisingly, they’re least likely to be CEOs or COOs – just 14% and 15%, respectively, are Experimenters