

MANAGING YOUR TEAM ROLES – PRACTICAL ADVICE AND TIPS

Once you know your Belbin Team Role profile you might ask the question, “How can I use this information to improve my personal effectiveness?”.

I have written this short guide to help answer this question because I have frequently found many people go little further than saying, “This is really interesting.” when they receive their Belbin Team Role profile report. Of course, it’s good that people find the information interesting but to leave it there is a missed opportunity.

I don’t intend this guide to be a replacement for a trained and experienced facilitator or coach providing personal support and guidance. I do however hope that it will serve to help you make the transition from finding your Belbin profile report *very interesting* to making it *very valuable* to you as a personal development tool.

GENERAL ADVICE

The first piece of advice is to suggest you regard your Team Roles in three bands as shown in the table on page 2.

When deciding what to do to maximise your potential, as a general principle, I recommend building on what is naturally there in terms of your strong or preferred roles. Your strong or natural roles should be developed and used appropriately and the weaknesses associated with the roles minimised. This may seem simplistic but it is the key to high performance and high self-esteem.

Your manageable roles present an opportunity for you to stretch yourself a bit by trying to develop these roles. In fact the reality is that most of us need to be more adaptable in today’s working environment and are unlikely to be in a position where only our natural roles need to be deployed. When trying to develop your manageable roles however be careful not to delude yourself by believing you are successfully adopting the role simply because you are trying to do so. Obtain regular feedback from your colleagues and be prepared to obtain updated Observer Assessments by way of a reality check.

Your unnatural or least preferred roles are something you need to be aware of and manage. My advice however is to avoid making the mistake of dedicating your life to making these unnatural roles your strong roles. This is akin to trying to become right handed if you are naturally left handed. I accept that some people may accomplish this, particularly if the need to do so is so compelling, but for the majority of us it is likely to be an ill conceived strategy. It is my experience that striving hard

to develop these unnatural roles, rather than managing them, will probably bring about only minor improvements while dramatically undermining natural strengths.

Weak or Least Preferred Roles	Manageable Roles	Strong or Preferred Roles
<p>Try to avoid work where these roles need to be used extensively.</p> <p>Seek out work colleagues who have these roles and don't possess your strong roles and build mutually advantageous working relationships with these people.</p>	<p>These roles provide the opportunity for development and the means of broadening your behavioural contributions</p>	<p>Strive to perfect these roles and ensure you effectively manage the way you deploy them.</p> <p>Try and eliminate the weaknesses associated with the roles.</p> <p>Seek work that requires these roles and plan your career to build on these natural strengths.</p>

ADVICE ON MANAGING EACH OF THE NINE TEAM ROLES

In addition to the general principles described above I would also like to offer some specific advice relative to each of the nine Team Roles to help with the process of maximising your personal effectiveness. It is possible of course that you are already doing this but be honest with yourself and, again don't be reluctant to do a reality check by getting feedback from others. This should include studying the words your observers use to describe you in your *Belbin List of Observer Responses* report and the negative proportion of each line in the *Observed Team Role Strengths and Weaknesses* report.

Also bear in mind how your top two or three Team Roles combine when considering the advice below. For example, if your top two Team Roles are Shaper and Teamworker the Shaper focus on getting results is likely to counter the Teamworker tendency of being a bit indecisive. Similarly, your Teamworker qualities will probably mitigate the Shaper tendency of being blunt and insensitive to the feelings of others. *Your Team Role Feedback, Maximising Your Potential* and *Suggested Work Styles* reports contain useful additional information and offer valuable advice guidance so study them carefully.

Plants

If you are a Plant you are likely to find it exciting and stimulating to generate new and often radical ideas. Be aware though that others may think some of your ideas a bit crazy so take time to explain them and make links with the issues they would help address. It is also important that you deploy good timing when offering your ideas.

Because Plants have a tendency to be quite introvert you should make an effort to ensure you are heard and understood, after all, a good idea is not much good unless it is adopted and developed. You should also take care to avoid the often negative tendencies of Plants to be a bit forgetful or absent minded. This can be helped by using IT or other simple reminder processes. For example, I know of one Plant who was always locking his hotel room key inside his room. His solution was to put it on the floor just inside the door so that he couldn't open the door without picking it up.

Resource Investigators

Most people love the positive and enthusiastic communicative style of the Resource Investigator but the tendency to be verbose can sometimes be a bit irritating to people so develop your skills and techniques to avoid this. As natural adopters of other people's ideas make sure that you do so ethically and give credit to the originators. The tendency to become easily bored needs to be managed by disciplining yourself to see things through personally or by collaborating with someone who is strong in this area.

Co-ordinators

The qualities of the Co-ordinator are respected by most people and your consultative style is likely to be seen as a welcome alternative to the directional style that is prevalent with the goal or action related Team Roles. Be careful however to share your goals and objectives with others when you are consulting or collaborating with them otherwise they are likely to see you as being manipulative and they will not feel fully involved or valued. You should also avoid the tendency of assigning all of your personal work to others and make a virtue of using your inclusive Co-ordinator qualities to the higher risk and higher complexity issues that are best tackled by teams and thus become a champion of *real* team working.

Shapers

Whilst the Shaper's hard driving and direct style will help you get results and gain respect for this you need to ensure you don't dominate people and simply have them falling in line with your directions and instructions. You will need to strive hard to strike a balance between giving direction and freeing others up to do the same. Failure to do so will, in the long term, lead to your demise as your colleagues will not enjoy working with you without some scope to make a full contribution by using their own talents and skills. Also be aware that your direct style may sometimes appear rude or blunt to others and if you consistently upset people they will look for opportunities to get their own back.

Monitor Evaluators

The analytical and considered logic of the Monitor Evaluator are likely to gain the respect of most people but be aware that thinking about what could go wrong and pointing this out to people does not always carry favour. In today's work environment the *Let's get on with it* approach is more common even though it may be at the expense of later finding problems you could have anticipated. You should therefore carefully time your interventions and express your concerns in a way that aligns with the principle that *this will make it better* rather than *you are making a big mistake if you do this*. In the same way avoid simply being critical and proffering warnings about the shortcomings of proposed actions or lines of thought. Instead, try and engage with people to work out how to overcome any shortcomings you have identified and contribute to devising ways to go forward.

Teamworkers

The Teamworker is likely to be liked by just about everyone as your tendency to help and support others and be sensitive to their needs are very endearing qualities. I often describe Teamworkers as the equivalent of the lubricating oil in a high performing engine and we all know it is important but don't really say so. You should therefore take steps to ensure that your contributions are valued and recognised and not taken for granted. Your tendency to be a bit indecisive as a result of your tendency to wish to avoid upsetting anyone needs to be managed. This is best done by working closely with someone who provides complementary goal orientation qualities.

Implementers

This is one of the most common Team Roles and may be described as the engine room of an organisation as a result of their disciplined, organised and practical approach to work. You will welcome having a structure and procedure to guide you and this will enable you to be highly productive and consistent. To be effective rather than just efficient however you must make an effort to sometimes challenge existing procedures and suggest changes to improve them even though they may only be of an incremental nature and be prepared to try and embrace more radical ideas and use your practical qualities to make them workable.

Completer Finishers

The Completer Finisher has only one standard, *perfection*. This will soon be recognised by your colleagues and they will seek your help when they know the job has to be done right, whether it involves a manual process, writing a report or preparing a presentation. The fact that you also place high importance on sticking to deadlines however presents you with a dichotomy as speed and quality do not fit together very well. You will therefore need to make a great effort not to take on too much and to try and prioritise your work. The high standards you set may also make you reluctant to delegate work to others so you will need to try and manage this tendency.

Specialists

Do not confuse the Specialist Team Role with the functional use of the term in the way that it is often used to describe an expert in his or her field. Because the world of the Specialist is predominately about learning and seeking out knowledge you are of course likely to become a functional specialist. For you however learning is a pleasure and a motivation you are likely to want to go way beyond having sufficient knowledge to do the job well. You may feel you never know enough, and this can be where your weakness lies. You will need to work hard to ensure the knowledge you gain is put to good use, even if you feel a need to go further with developing more knowledge. You also need to be aware that the accumulating of knowledge can be a very individual and isolated approach so make an effort to align with the knowledge and expertise needs of your colleagues and organisation. This will ensure you become regarded as a valuable resource and not just a boffin.

CONCLUSION

Ensure you don't just regard your Belbin Team Role profile as a very interesting document and file it away. Treat this enhanced self-awareness as the basis for improving your personal effectiveness. It may require some effort but this will be rewarded by higher self esteem, the admiration of others and by you being a sought after person whose qualities are clearly recognised and valued and duly rewarded.

FURTHER READING

You will find further useful advice on managing your Team Roles in *Succeeding at Work* by Belbin Associates – ISBN 978-0-9552979-5-3

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