

AN INTRODUCTION TO BELBIN TEAM ROLES

The research of Dr Meredith Belbin in the 1970'S lead to the development of Belbin Team Roles, nine clusters of behaviour that individuals adopt when participating in a team. During extensive experiments at Henley Management College it became clear that teams comprising a balanced mix of Team Roles outperformed unbalanced teams.

Subsequent research has also demonstrated that teams consistently outperform individuals when dealing with high risk- high complex issues where a wide range of complementary behaviours is required.

Today, the Belbin Team Role model is used by over 40 percent of the top 100 companies in the UK, the United Nations, the World Bank and thousands of organisations throughout the world to enhance individual and team performance.

The original research involved painstaking and laborious observation using Bales analysis to identify a person's natural team roles. Today the process takes a few minutes by using the Belbin Interplace computer system to process the results of the Belbin Self Perception Inventory, Observer Assessments and Job Assessments.

The diagnostic and advisory information provided by the Interplace reports has proved to be invaluable for:

- Enhancing self awareness and personal effectiveness.
- Fostering mutual trust and understanding and building productive workplace relationships.
- Ensuring managers and organisations have a better understanding of the natural talents, motivations and behavioural tendencies of each employee.
- Matching people to the right jobs and jobs to the right people.
- Selecting and building effective teams and diagnosing the causes of underperforming teams.

Below is a brief summary of each of the nine Team Roles.

PLANT (PL)

Characteristics Plants are innovators and inventors and can be highly creative. They provide the source of original ideas to support innovation. Usually they prefer to operate by themselves at some distance from other members of the team, using their imagination and often working in an unorthodox way. They tend to be introverted and react strongly to criticism and praise. Their ideas may often be radical and may lack practical constraint.

They are independent, and usually regarded as being clever as a result of their original and radical perspective. They don't always manage to communicate in a compelling way and offer their ideas in a practical and relevant framework.

Function The main use of a PL is to challenge conventional and established ways of doing things and provide suggested solutions for solving complex problems. PLs are often needed in the initial stages of a project or when a project is failing to progress. PLs have usually made their mark as founders of companies or as originators of new products.

However, too many PLs in one team or group may be counter-productive as they tend to spend their time reinforcing their own ideas and engaging each other in combat.

RESOURCE INVESTIGATOR (RI)

Characteristics Resource Investigators are usually enthusiastic extroverts. They are natural communicators with people both inside and outside the company. They are natural negotiators and are adept at exploring new opportunities and developing contacts. Although not a great source of original ideas, the RI is effective when it comes to picking up other people's ideas and promoting them. As the name suggests, they are adept at finding out what is available and from whom. They usually receive a warm reception from others because of their warm outgoing nature.

RIs are generally relaxed people with a strong inquisitive sense and a readiness to see the possibilities in anything new. However, unless they remain stimulated by others, their enthusiasm can rapidly fade.

Function RIs are good at exploring and reporting back on ideas, developments or resources outside their immediate group. They are the natural people to set up external contacts and to carry out any subsequent negotiations.

They have an ability to think on their feet and to probe others for information.

CO-ORDINATOR (CO)

Characteristics The distinguishing feature of Co-ordinators is their propensity for helping others to work towards shared goals. Mature, trusting and confident, they delegate readily. In interpersonal relations they are quick to spot individual talents and to use them in pursuit of group objectives. While COs are not necessarily the cleverest or most senior member of a team, they are likely to have a broad outlook and perspective.

The natural goal focus of CO's can sometimes lead to them manipulating others to achieve their personal objectives. In some situations COs are inclined to clash with Shapers due to their contrasting management styles.

Function COs are well placed when put in charge of a team of people with diverse skills and personal characteristics. They perform better in dealing with colleagues of near or equal rank than in directing junior subordinates. Their motto might well be "consultation with control" and they usually believe in tackling problems calmly.

(COs are referred to as Chairmen in the first edition of *Management Teams: why they succeed or fail*)

SHAPER (SH)

Characteristics Shapers are highly goal and oriented people with great drive and energy. They push themselves and others and tend to overcome obstacles by sheer determination. They tend to be highly assertive and have very directive management styles. Shapers also tend to be competitive and like to win. They frequently progress upward in organisations because they get results and because many people are impressed by their courageous and decisive leadership style.

SHs are not noted for their interpersonal sensitivities and can be argumentative and even aggressive.

Function SHs are generally perceived as ideal managers because they generate action and thrive under pressure. They come into their own when quick and decisive action is called for to overcome threats and difficulties or when progress towards goals and objectives is unacceptably slow.

MONITOR EVALUATOR (ME)

Characteristics Monitor Evaluators are serious-minded, prudent individuals with a built-in immunity for being over-enthusiastic. They are likely to be slow in making decisions preferring to carefully think things over. Usually they have a high critical thinking ability. They have a good capacity for shrewd judgements that take all factors into account. A good ME is unlikely to make intuitive and reckless mistakes. They deal in facts and logic rather than emotion when considering options.

They are often regarded as over-critical and can be seen to be slow and boring.

Function MEs are best suited to analysing problems and evaluating ideas and suggestions. They are very good at weighing up the pro's and con's of options. In a managerial position their ability to make high quality decisions consistently is likely to make them highly regarded.

IMPLEMENTER (IMP)

Characteristics Implementers are characterised by their practical approach and possess higher than normal levels of self-control and discipline. They are prepared to work hard to ensure things are done as prescribed in a systematic way. They are typically loyal to the organisation and prescribed and established ways of doing things. They are likely to be regarded as someone who will not seek personal agendas and self-interest.

On the downside IMPs may be inflexible in accepting new ways of doing things, particularly if they are radical or impracticable.

Function IMPs are valuable in an organisation because of their reliability and capacity for application. They succeed because they are efficient and because they have a sense of what is feasible and relevant. While many people might stray favouring the tasks they like to do and neglect things they find not to be to their liking an IMP is more likely to do what needs to be done in a systematic and relentless way.

(IMPs are referred to as Company Workers in the first edition of *Management Teams: why they succeed or fail*)

TEAMWORKER (TW)

Characteristics. Teamworkers possess a mild and sociable disposition and are generally supportive and concerned about others. They have a great capacity for flexibility and adapting to different situations and people. TWs are perceptive, diplomatic and caring and tend to be good listeners. Because of these qualities it is hardly surprising that they are popular with their colleagues.

Their concern about creating harmony and avoiding conflict can make them indecisive when faced with having to make difficult solo decisions.

Function The TW may be legitimately compared to the lubricating oil in a car engine. We don't always appreciate how important it is until it isn't there. Because of their ability to be able to resolve interpersonal problems TW's come into their own when situations are tense and people feel uncared for and not appreciated. They can rise to senior positions because they have few enemies and the fact that they are ready to listen to the views and suggestions of others.

COMPLETER-FINISHER (CF)

Characteristics Completer Finishers have a great capacity for the attention to detail. They constantly strive for perfection and correct errors. CFs are quite introvert and require less external stimulus than most people. The CF can be trusted to do work to the highest standard and to complete it on time.

The combination of striving for perfection and meeting deadlines often creates anxiety though and CFs are likely to be reluctant to trust others to do work to their own high standards.

Function The Completer Finisher is invaluable where tasks demand close concentration and a high degree of accuracy. The standards they set make them well suited to situations where precision and high standards are essential. CFs will also demand the same high standards from people around them and therefore create their own micro culture where the only standard acceptable is perfection.

SPECIALIST (SP)

Characteristics The Specialist Team Role and the functional title of Specialist is often a cause for confusion. While it is true that both uses of the term may relate to people who are a source of technical knowledge and expertise the Specialist in Team Role terms has some very specific attributes. Their main distinguishing feature is their love of learning. They see learning and the accumulation of knowledge as the main reason for their existence and their single minded and resolute pursuit of this end is their main motivation. The SP is likely to be recognised by colleagues as an expert to turn to for help and guidance.

The SP will usually try to avoid being involved in unstructured meetings and discussions or those of a social nature. They may also be somewhat unyielding when challenged about the validity of their knowledge or field of expertise.

Function While SPs may not be regarded as natural team players teams will be wise to engage the SP as a means of providing in depth research. As managers, they command respect because of their in-depth knowledge and they can be used to mentor others to raise their technical expertise.

CONCLUSION

From the above descriptions it can be seen that each Team Role has its own distinctive cluster of behavioural characteristics - with potential strengths and allowable weaknesses.

There are no good or bad Team roles but it is important for each person to know their own Team Roles and those of their colleagues with whom they interact.

It is only by making use of complementary and collective strengths that individuals and teams can achieve their full potential - in short, *Nobody's perfect, but a team can be.*

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