

INTEGRATING BELBIN INTO PEOPLE PERFORMANCE OPTIMISATION STRATEGIES



There's more to Belbin than Building Teams by Barrie Watson

“That was a real revelation. I had no idea there was so much to Belbin.” This is typical of the sort of response I receive from people all over the world as I explain the capabilities, uses and applications of the latest Belbin behavioural profiling system.

In fact it was the enthusiastic response I received to recent presentations I made in Bangalore, Chennai and Mumbai that encouraged me to write this.

There are so many people who still see Belbin Team Role profiling as something that is used for helping teams become more effective.

Without wanting to challenge that this is indeed a valid use of the model I would like to offer some thoughts on the wider applications of the Belbin methodology. May I emphasise however that this is not just a hypothesis, it is what I do to help organisations around the world as part of their people performance optimisation strategy.

There are five main ingredients that are all inter-related:

- * Raising self awareness and personal effectiveness
- * Improving the effectiveness of managers
- * Building productive working relationships
- * Matching people to the right jobs
- * Selecting and developing high performing teams

Before offering further comment however may I make one thing absolutely clear: You will not be able to achieve the outcomes I describe by using the old self-scoring version of the Belbin Self Perception Inventory. It is necessary to use the latest assessment and the e-interplace generated reports.

For a free set of the latest Belbin assessments and examples of the e-interplace reports contact:
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Raising self awareness and personal effectiveness

To anyone who understands the Belbin Team Role model it should be quite obvious how the Belbin Self Perception Inventory (SPI) contributes to this.

I would like to offer a few more thoughts though on a few things that has become apparent to me over the years.

Firstly, we need to accept that although the Team Role model was originally developed to identify a person's natural contribution to a team it has wider applications. It is my proposition that the behavioural clusters that comprise the 9 Team Roles are prevalent to a large extent when we are working on our own. The same sort of things that we enjoy doing within a team will be little different from the things that we enjoy doing when working alone.

If we accept this, more or less, then we can see how raising a person's self awareness is the first step towards improving personal effectiveness. Obviously, if we don't know our natural behavioural tendencies we are unlikely to devise a strategy for managing these.

And this is where the use of the Belbin Observer Assessment (OA) is so important. Many people may not have a realistic view of themselves or may have deliberately faked the answering of the SPI. Obtaining feedback on the perceptions of work colleagues therefore is of great value.

Finally, may I say how important it is to offer the SPI and OA based reports in such a way as to vest ownership with the individual. It is the job of managers and facilitators to ensure there are no misunderstanding when interpreting the reports. It is up to the individual concerned to put the information to good use to improve their effectiveness and achieve a more fulfilling and successful career.

Applying this philosophy throughout an entire organisation achieves spectacular results.

Improving the effectiveness of managers

There are many things that impact on the effectiveness of managers of course and whilst tempted to go into some of them that are outside influence of the Belbin methodology I shall refrain.

What I would like to focus on is how raising the self awareness of managers, in terms of their management style, we can help them devise a strategy for improving the effectiveness as a manager. The Belbin individual reports serve this process very well, particularly the Personal Work Style report.

There is another important issue that the Belbin reports address however, enabling managers to have a better and deeper understanding of the people they manage.

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Armed with this information they will have a lot better chance of planning appropriate development and assigning the right work to the right people.

Again, a relatively simple concept but something that is often overlooked as managers may make the assumption that what motivates them will also motivate others.

Building productive working relationships

Arguably the greatest benefit from using the Belbin methodology is from fostering higher levels of mutual understanding and building productive working relationships.

If we accept that a key factor in maximising the performance of each person is to identify their natural strengths and talents and build on these then understanding and applying the concept of complementarity provides the means.

For example, a person who is a high Shaper/Resource Investigator may be capable of persuading others to join them to make things happen and get results. Such a combination however could be capable of leading a multitude into a folly. (I am quite confident that these are Mr Blair's top two Team Roles) Let's not talk about these qualities in a derogative way however as they have great merit.

The point I wish to make is that a person with this combination would benefit enormously by working closely with someone who was, say, a Plant/Monitor Evaluator. Without the knowledge of each others Team roles however the probability is that these two people would find the chemistry very difficult and probably dislike each other.

The much under used Belbin Working Relationship report is therefore a valuable tool for addressing this issue. It offers the basis for ensuring each person can play to their strengths and truly embrace diversity, rather than uttering words of political correctness as an abstract concept.

Matching people to the right jobs

To complement and support the process of enhancing personal effectiveness it is the role of managers to ensure that people are assigned the right work and matched to the right jobs. This can often be contrary to what happens as the main emphasis is frequently on making people fit the job.

There is no problem with this if the mis-match is related to lack of the appropriate skills, or experience. If the mis-match is about a pre-disposition or lack of motivation to use existing skills however the result is going to be disappointing.

It is in this area that the Belbin Job Requirement and Job Observation assessments can be put to good use. They help elicit what the behavioural factors, using the language of Team Roles, are for any given job.

Armed with this information a gap analysis can be conducted to compare the person being considered for a

job or currently doing a job with what is the ideal behavioural fit.

It's an objective and transparent process that, if applied properly, will save a lot of money wasted on training and lead to performance excellence.

Selecting and developing high performing teams

This is the most common application of the Belbin methodology. I have to say however that even so the real opportunities are often missed.

This is because the emphasis is rarely on selecting a team and more on team building for an existing hierarchical work group.

The truth is that a high performing team needs to be carefully selected, just as with say, a football team. Can you imagine a football manager, even one that has been fired five times in the last five years, assembling the 11 best goalkeepers in the world and expecting them to be a high performing team.

The truth is however that many of the executive teams I am invited to work with are not in fact selected to be a team. Each person is selected to perform well in their individual jobs and thus there is a high statistical probability that the team will be unbalanced.

Even worse though is that they are likely to be unaware of this and expect miracles from team building interventions.

The Belbin team reports provide the vital information required to elicit the balance of the team and should be a starting point for devising a strategy for improving team performance.

More controversially, I would also advocate the vigorous promotion of non-hierarchical result focused team working, as distinct from hierarchical work groups. (I put a board of directors in the latter category.)

This is a world where we still have the hierarchical work groups working better because of higher levels of mutual understanding and collaboration and interaction. Alongside this structure however we also have time limited project or results focused teams operating at all levels within an organisation. These are carefully selected using Belbin Team Role reports in an open and interactive way to ensure the right people are selected for the teams and that they achieve their optimum performance.

Integrate all of these philosophies for using the Belbin methodology into your HR or people performance optimisation strategies and reap the rewards of impressive results and the gratitude of your people.

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