

AN INTRODUCTION TO BELBIN TEAM ROLES

The research of Dr Meredith Belbin in the late seventies led 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 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.

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elizabethann.watson@cert-uk.info**

The original research involved painstaking and labourious 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 in:

- Enhancing self awareness and personal effectiveness.
- Fostering mutual trust and understanding.
- Ensuring managers and organisations have a better understanding of the natural talents of each employee.
- Matching people to jobs.
- Selecting and building effective teams.

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

PLANTS (PL)

Characteristics Plants are innovators and inventors and can be highly creative. They provide the seed and ideas from which major developments spring. 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, clever and original and may be weak in communicating with other people on a different wave length.

Function The main use of a PL is to generate new proposals and to solve 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.

Too many PLs in one organization, however, may be counter productive as they tend to spend their time reinforcing their own ideas and engaging each other in combat.

RESOURCE INVESTIGATORS (RI)

Characteristics Resource Investigators are often enthusiastic, quick-off-the-mark extroverts. They are good at communicating 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 developing them. As the name suggests, they are skilled at finding out what is available and what can be done. They usually receive a warm reception from others because of their warm outgoing nature.

RIs have relaxed personalities with a strong inquisitive sense and a readiness to see the possibilities in anything new. However, unless they remain stimulated by others, their enthusiasm rapidly fades.

Function RIs are good at exploring and reporting back on ideas, developments or resources outside the 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.

MONITOR EVALUATORS (ME)

Characteristics Monitor Evaluators are serious-minded, prudent individuals with a built-in immunity for being over-enthusiastic. They are slow in making decisions preferring to 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 seldom wrong.

Functions 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. To many outsiders the ME may appear as dry, boring or even over-critical. Some people are surprised that they become managers. Nevertheless, many MEs occupy strategic posts and thrive in high-level appointments. In some jobs success or failure hinges on a relatively small number of crunch decisions. This is ideal territory for an ME; for the man who is never wrong is the one who scores in the end.

CO-ORDINATORS (CO)

Characteristics The distinguishing feature of Co-ordinators is their ability to cause 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 members of a team, they have a broad and worldly outlook and generally command respect.

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. In some situations COs are inclined to clash with Shapers due to their contrasting management styles.

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

SHAPERS (SH)

Characteristics Shapers are highly motivated people with a lot of nervous energy and a need for achievement. Usually they are aggressive extroverts and possess strong drive. SHs like to challenge others and their concern is to win. They like to lead and to push others into action. If obstacles arise, they find a way round. Headstrong and assertive, they tend to show strong emotional response to any form of disappointment or frustration.

SHs are determined and argumentative and may lack interpersonal sensitivity. Their's is the most competitive role.

Function SHs generally make good managers because they generate action and thrive under pressure. They are excellent at sparking life into a team and are very useful in groups where political complications are apt to slow things down; SHs are inclined to rise above problems of this kind and forge ahead regardless. They are well suited to making necessary changes and do not mind taking unpopular decisions. As the name implies, they try to impose some shape or pattern on group discussion or activities. They are probably the most effective members of a team in guaranteeing positive action.

IMPLEMENTERS (IMP)

Characteristics Implementers have practical common sense and a good deal of self-control and discipline. They favour hard work and tackle problems in a systematic fashion. On a wider front the IMP is typically a person whose loyalty and interest lie with the Company and who is less concerned with the pursuit of self-interest. However, IMPs may lack spontaneity and show signs of rigidity.

Function IMPs are useful to 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. It is said that many executives only do the jobs they wish to do and neglect those tasks which they find distasteful. By contrast, an IMP will do what needs to be done. Good IMPs often progress to high management positions by virtue of good organisational skills and competency in tackling necessary tasks.

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

TEAM WORKERS (TW)

Characteristics Team Workers are the most supportive members of a team. They are mild, sociable and concerned about others. They have a great capacity for flexibility and adapting to different situations and people. TWs are perceptive and diplomatic. They are good listeners and are generally popular members of a group. They operate with a sensitivity at work, but they may be indecisive in crunch situations.

Function The role of the TW is to prevent interpersonal problems arising within a team and thus allow all team members to contribute effectively. Not liking friction, they will go to great lengths to avoid it. It is not uncommon for TWs to become senior managers especially if line managers are dominated by Shapers. This creates a climate in which the diplomatic and perceptive skills of a TW become real assets, especially under a managerial regime where conflicts are liable to arise or to be artificially suppressed. TW managers are seen as a threat to no one and therefore the most accepted and favoured people to serve under. Team Workers have

a lubricating effect on teams. Morale is better and people seem to cooperate better when they are around.

COMPLETER-FINISHERS (CF)

Characteristics Completer-Finishers have a great capacity for follow through and attention to detail. They are unlikely to start anything that they cannot finish. They are motivated by internal anxiety, yet outwardly they may appear unruffled. Typically, they are introverted and require little in the way of external stimulus or incentive. CFs can be intolerant of those with a casual disposition. They are not often keen on delegating, preferring to tackle all tasks themselves.

Function CFs are invaluable where tasks demand close concentration and a high degree of accuracy. They foster a sense of urgency within a team and are good at meeting schedules. In management they excel by the high standards to which they aspire, and by their concern for precision, attention to detail and follow-through.

SPECIALISTS (SP)

Characteristics Specialists are dedicated individuals who pride themselves on acquiring technical skills and specialised knowledge. Their priorities centre on maintaining professional standards and on furthering and defending their own field. While they show great pride in their own subject, they usually lack interest in other people's. Eventually, the SP becomes the expert by sheer commitment along a narrow front. There are few people who have either the single-mindedness or the aptitude to become a first-class SP.

Function SPs have an indispensable part to play in some teams, for they provide the rare skill upon which the firm's service or product is based. As managers, they command support because they know more about their subject than anyone else and can usually be called upon to make decisions based on in-depth experience.

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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 tapping these collective strengths that individuals and teams can realise their full potential - in short "nobody's perfect, but a team can be".

Barrie Watson

email: barrie.watson@belbin.info

Website: www.belbin.info