

A little bit me, a little bit you

There are many tools to help make individuals and teams more effective, but what about pairs? Organisations are increasingly seeing the benefits of colleagues working in pairs. For example, in the technique called Pair programming, two computer programmers work together, one (the “driver”) writing the code and the other (the “navigator”) reviewing the code and keeping an eye to the overall direction of the work. In Belbin Team Role terms, this allows the driver to attend to play the Implementer and Specialist, whilst the navigator acts as Co-ordinator, Monitor Evaluator and Completer Finisher.

Working in pairs can allow the sharing of responsibility without overlapping or spoiling the proverbial broth with too many viewpoints. Additionally, some who might defer to others in the team meeting may have the confidence to voice their opinions when working closely with just one colleague.

So how do you place people in pairs? Belbin has a report designed especially to analyse working relationships between two people. Obviously there are a lot of other factors which may come into play, but the report provides some initial ideas, as well as some points for discussion.

Broadly speaking, there are four areas to consider:

Complementarity... up to a point

Given that we are aiming for a Team Role balance, we might assume that the optimal pairing would be of individuals with opposite Team Role preferences. However, in order to identify with one another and work well together, there should also be some commonality of Team Role behaviour so that the working style and approach of each person is not entirely alien to the other.

Coverage

Team Roles can be grouped into three categories: Social roles (Co-ordinator, Resource Investigator; Teamworker); Action roles (Completer Finisher; Implementer; Shaper) and Thinking roles (Monitor Evaluator, Plant, Specialist). It is important that these areas are covered by one or other of the pair, to ensure a holistic approach to any project. Again, some common ground can also be useful.

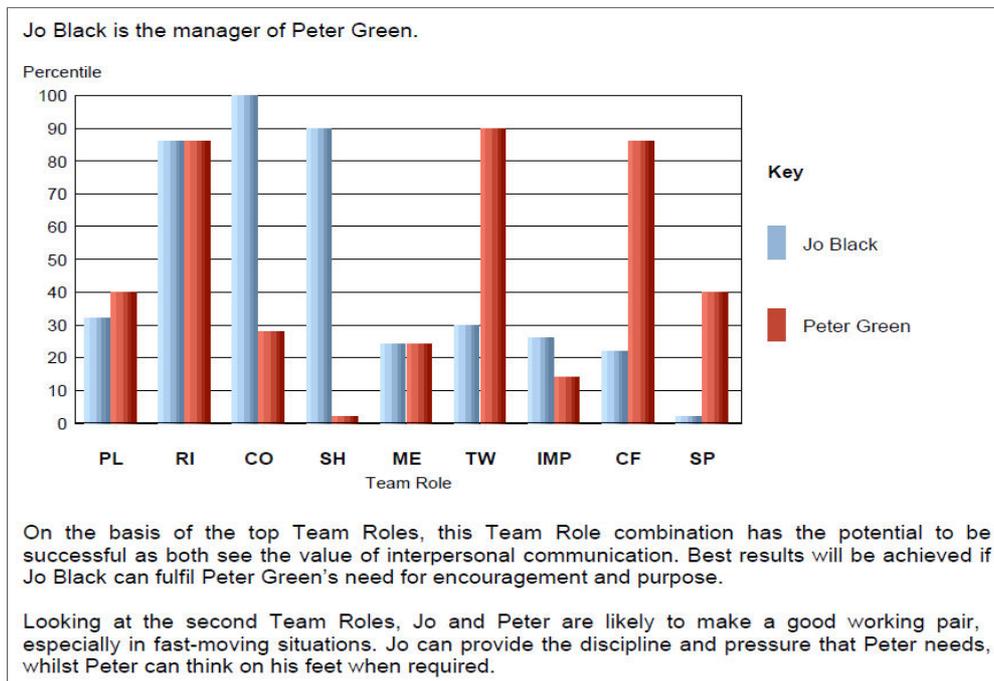
“Too many cooks”

Just as it is vital to avoid too many gaps in Team Role coverage, it is also important that the pair do not have too many Team Roles in common. If this is the case, they may become territorial over the jobs both enjoy, whilst avoiding less preferred work.

Hierarchical relationships

The working relationships report also takes hierarchical relationship into consideration. A Team Role combination which works well for two colleagues may not be so effective if one of the pair manages the other, since other expectations come into play. Additionally, Team Role relationships are not symmetrical. In other words, given the Team Role preferences, there may be combinations which work better with Person A managing Person B rather than vice versa.

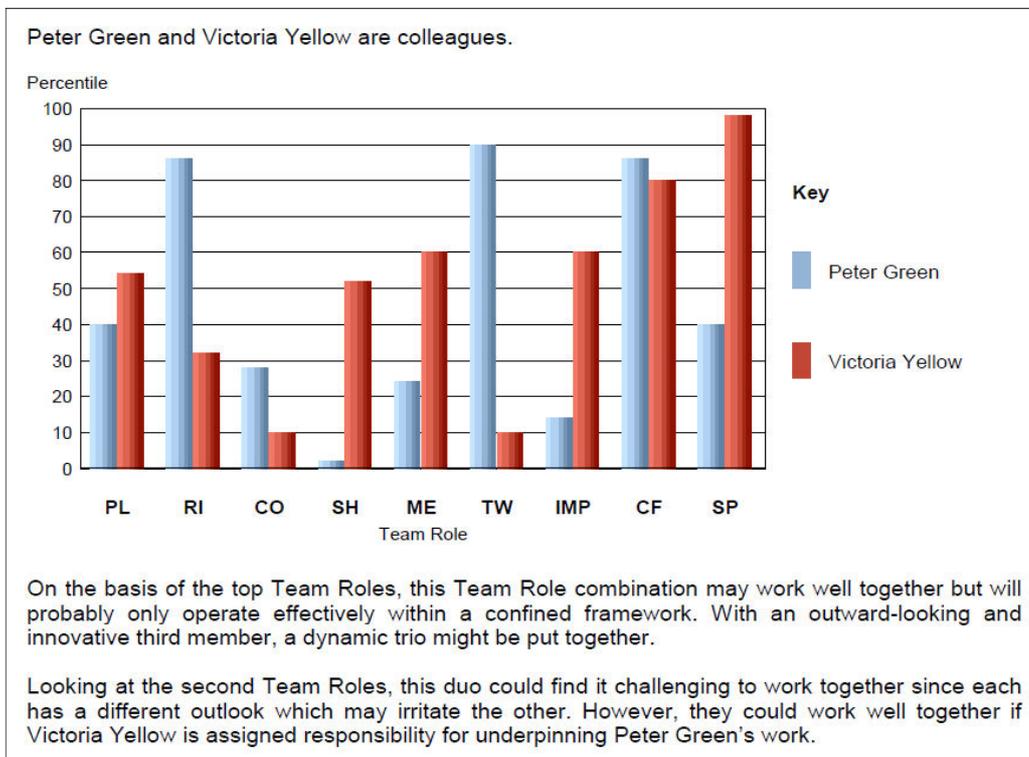
Example A



In this example, Jo Black is the manager of Peter Green. The commentary indicates that:

- Peter and Jo share an inclination towards social roles, which means each should be able to identify with the other's way of working. It is notable that Jo and Peter have good coverage of the action roles Completer Finisher and Shaper, but are lacking in Implementer. Thinking roles are not so well represented in this pairing.
- Jo has a higher Co-ordinator (CO) score, whilst Peter has a preference for Teamworker (TW). As manager, Jo is identified as being able to provide "encouragement and purpose" for Peter. This is a comment which is influenced by the hierarchical relationship and would not be made if Peter were indicated as the manager of Jo.
- Lastly, the report comments on the interaction of Jo's Shaper (SH) and Peter's Resource Investigator (RI) – two roles which can keep pace with, and complement, one another.

Example B



In this example, Peter Green and Victoria Yellow are colleagues. The commentary indicates that:

- Peter and Victoria may be inward-looking, owing to their top roles of Teamworker (TW) and Specialist (SP) respectively. However, this likelihood may be mitigated by Peter's Resource Investigator (RI) tendencies.
- Peter and Victoria have opposite 2nd Team Roles – Resource Investigator (RI) and Completer Finisher (CF) respectively. This may mean that they have difficulty identifying with each other's approach. Although it is beyond the remit of the report, it is also notable that Peter's Completer Finisher role is also high, so this may negate the effect of the prominent Team Role opposites within the pair.
- In general, the pairing shows promising Team Role balance, with most roles covered and only one potential role overlap (CF).

Size up your team

How do you think your team would fare? Are you trying to decide on a pairing for a new project? Is there a problematic relationship which is limiting your team's effectiveness? Working relationships cost £15+VAT per pairing. You can find more information about these reports at: <http://www.belbin.com/rte.asp?id=415>.