

The Importance of Teams



Recent research carried out by Gallup, Ernst and Young and others has shown that there is a need for teams within organisations. Ernst and Young, in May 2013 summarised some of their findings as follows:

“Almost 9 out of 10 companies surveyed agree that the problems confronting them are now so complex that teams are essential to provide effective solutions.”

“An overwhelming majority of respondents think that their organization’s ability to develop and manage teams will be essential for their future competitiveness.”

This leads us to the conclusion that the success of an organisation is linked to the success of it’s teams. Teams are often the key step in linking the talents of individuals to the success of the organisation. Antony Jay put this well in the forward of 'Management Teams, Why they Succeed or Fail' by Meredith Belbin: “It is not the individual but the team that is the instrument of sustained and enduring success.”

What is a Team?

There are always plenty of articles, books, papers, and news articles that talk about teams and teamwork. They tend to be very general, and don’t always link up to practical business situations. Perhaps a better question to ask is:

Teams need to be put together with care

What makes up an effective Team?

There are many points that can be discussed, but the key aspects are as follows:

- A team must have a purpose. Its purpose should be clear, communicated and understood.
- Members are chosen for what they can contribute “Who is in a team matters less than how the team members interact, structure their work, and view their contributions.” Google
- Dynamic interaction – this only happens when there is a lack of hierarchy and an agreed purpose. Everyone needs to understand when they need to make their contribution.
- Shared leadership – this should be rotated, depending on where the team is in relation to the business objective.
- Psychological safety is critical – team members must trust one another.
- Small enough to be productive – often overlooked, but critical.

“Small teams can deliver results faster, engage people better, and stay closer to their mission.” Ernst and Young, May 2013

“If I see more than two pizzas for lunch, the team is too big.” Jeff Bezos, Amazon CEO

Teams need to be put together with care

“Simply putting together a number of people and expecting them to work as a team is not enough.”

This is in essence what we believe in at Belbin HQ. For teams to be effective you need to work with them and provide teams and managers with the tools that they need to succeed.

Gallup’s survey: ‘The Matrix: Teams Are Gaining Greater Power in Companies’ (May 2016), highlights the importance of the role of managers within teams: “70% of the variance in employee engagement scores is attributable to managers and how effectively they guide their teams.”

Belbin - The Language of Teams

We need to help managers:

- Identify the individual strengths in the team;
- Define and communicate clear goals;
- Develop an atmosphere which encourages members to share their strengths and weaknesses;
- Foster relationships that exploit strengths and manage weaknesses;
- Identifying and Communicating strengths.

An article published by Harvard Business School in 2016 called 'Preparing the Self for Team Entry: How Relational Affirmation Improves Team Performance.' reiterates the importance of communication within a team: "Making people aware of their own strengths results in better communication among team members and thus higher levels of performance."

This is backed up by Rhodes (1991), who stated that: "Without open, explicit communication about tools and processes, individuals have trouble making clear to one another what they are doing."

We believe Belbin Team Roles is the language and tool that managers and teams need.

Seminal research carried out by Dr Belbin and his team at Henley Management School has shown that an effective team needs access to nine different types of behaviour. We call these clusters of behaviours 'Team Roles'.

Once an individual understands their Team Role strengths and weaknesses, they have a language that can be used every day at work.

Managers can use this language to allocate the right roles to the right people; put together productive working relationships and ensure that weaknesses are managed without impacting on the collective strengths.

Belbin – The nine Team Roles



Resource Investigator

Contribution: Outgoing, enthusiastic. Explores opportunities and develops contacts.

Allowable Weaknesses: Might be over-optimistic, and can lose interest once the initial enthusiasm has passed.



Teamworker

Contribution: Co-operative, perceptive and diplomatic. Listens and averts friction.

Allowable Weaknesses: Can be indecisive in crunch situations and tends to avoid confrontation.



Co-ordinator

Contribution: Mature, confident, identifies talent. Clarifies goals. Delegates effectively.

Allowable Weaknesses: Can be seen as manipulative and might offload their own share of the work.



Plant

Contribution: Creative, imaginative, free-thinking. Generates ideas and solves difficult problems.

Allowable Weaknesses: Might ignore incidentals, and may be too pre-occupied to communicate effectively.



Monitor Evaluator

Contribution: Sober, strategic and discerning. Sees all options and judges accurately.

Allowable Weaknesses: Sometimes lacks the drive and ability to inspire others and can be overly critical.



Specialist

Contribution: Single-minded, self-starting and dedicated. They provide specialist knowledge and skills.

Allowable Weaknesses: Can only contribute on a narrow front and tends to dwell on the technicalities.



Shaper

Contribution: Challenging, dynamic, thrives on pressure. Has the drive and courage to overcome obstacles.

Allowable Weaknesses: Can be prone to provocation, and may sometimes offend people's feelings.



Implementer

Contribution: Practical, reliable, efficient. Turns ideas into actions and organises work that needs to be done.

Allowable Weaknesses: Can be a bit inflexible and slow to respond to new possibilities.



Completer Finisher

Contribution: Painsstaking, conscientious, anxious. Searches out errors. Polishes and perfects.

Allowable Weaknesses: Can be inclined to worry unduly, and reluctant to delegate.

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Belbin Effective Teams

The first step to finding out strengths and weaknesses is by asking individuals to complete the Belbin questionnaire, called the Self-Perception Inventory, and where possible, to ask them to get feedback from their colleagues.

Once these Belbin Individual Reports have been generated, conversations can begin...

In a nutshell, using Belbin will give you (not an exhaustive list!):

- Balanced teams based on behavioural contributions, not job titles
- Self-aware individuals who can adapt their behaviours according to the situation and business need
- The right people doing the right tasks, leading to better-performing teams
- Depersonalised team conversations, using a common language to discuss team contributions
- Informed decision-making based on fact rather than a gut-feel or hunch
- Confidence when making decisions involving people
- Insight into behavioural strengths and weaknesses that don't necessarily show up on a CV

For more information on how to implement the language of Belbin Team Roles throughout your organisation, or to discuss how to make the most out of your teams, please contact us at: team@belbin.com or phone 01223 264975.

Make 2018 the year of the team: Give managers the language and tools they need.