

Belbin® Report

Belbin and Entrepreneurship: The profiles of successful start-ups



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Research shows that innovative start-ups drive economic growth and are responsible for the majority of job creation in the UK within the last five years, but little is understood about employees of start-ups and how they contribute to the outcome of the venture.

Whilst some studies analyse the particular mix of business and technical skills, this paper aims to explore how different combinations of Team Role behaviours might spell success for new businesses.

In 2015, Belbin had the opportunity to partner with a number of SMEs as part of the UK Government's Growth Accelerator scheme.

About Growth Accelerator

A group of companies were selected by Growth Accelerator to receive EU and government funding for small, growing businesses, in order to thrive and generate jobs. To be eligible for funding, businesses had to be registered in the UK (and based in England), have fewer than 250 employees and a turnover of less than £40m.



The UK Government exclusively targeted high-growth businesses who sought to enter their next growth phase and demonstrated the potential and determination to achieve their goals.

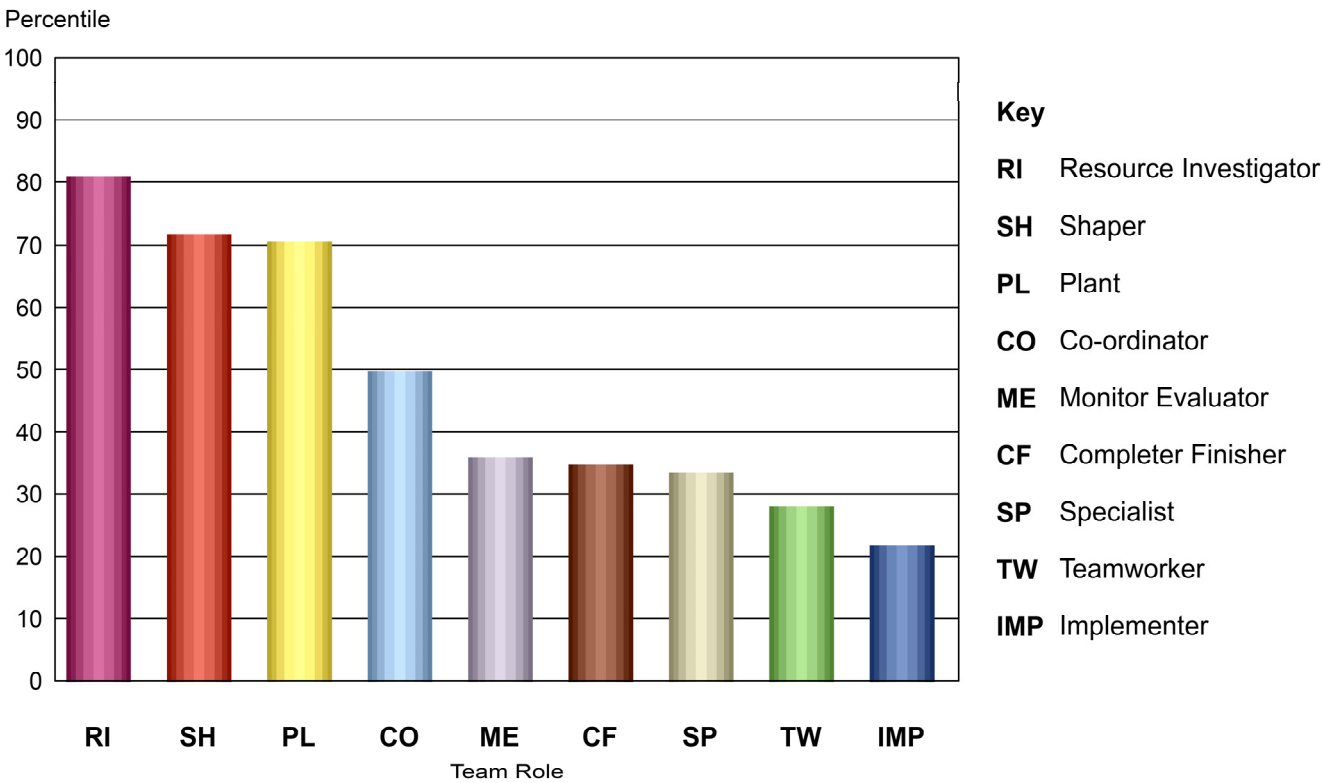
Belbin worked with the executive and leadership teams of 34 such companies between August 2014 and July 2015. The group forms an ideal cohort to examine the nature of successful, growing SMEs, and the results offer interesting insights into the Team Role composition of successful entrepreneurs and executives.



All Growth Accelerator CEOs

Findings

Using aggregated data from these companies, we found a marked tendency towards **Resource Investigator**, **Shaper** and **Plant** amongst CEOs and founders of these ventures.



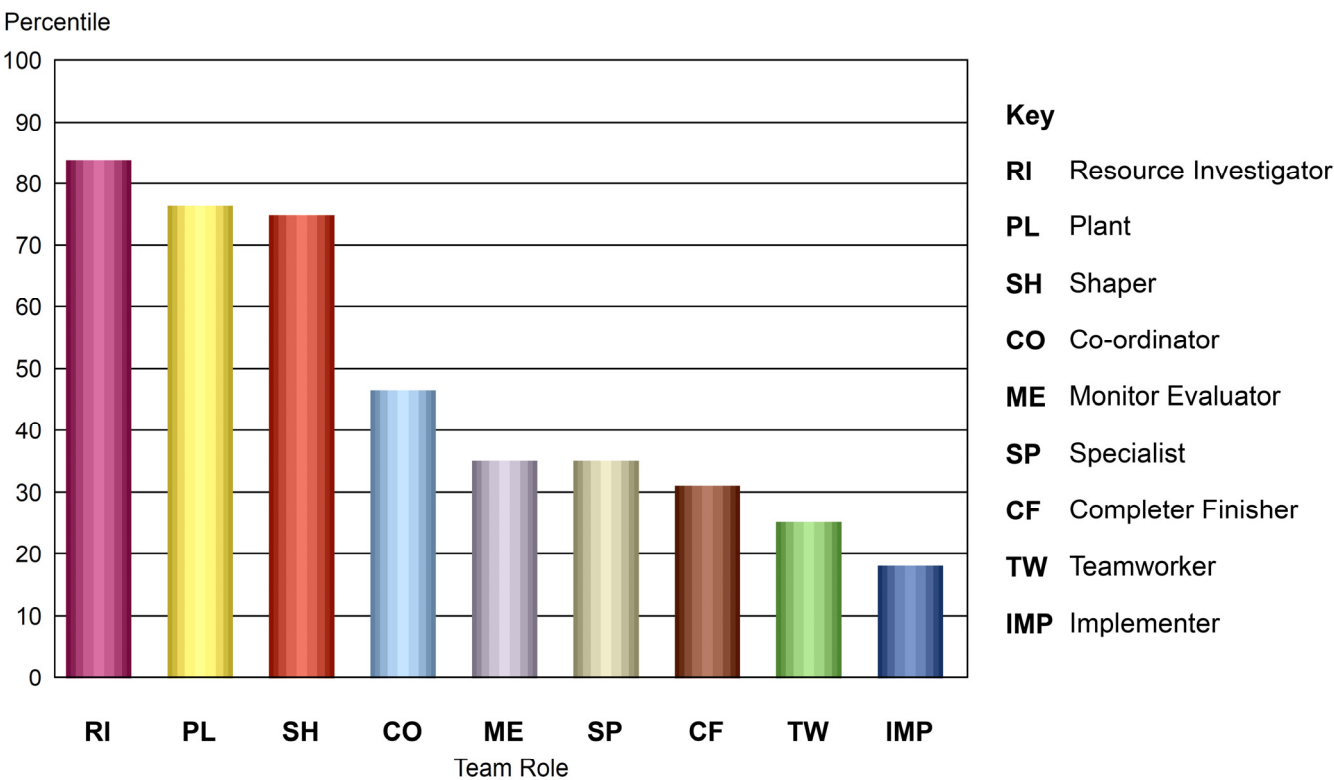
(Source: Belbin Team reports for GA all CEOs, n=33)

The indicated Team Role profile suggests a dynamic individual with an appetite for risk, who comes up with new ideas, persuades others of the merit of those ideas and pushes for change. These CEOs were commonly regarded by others as enterprising, able to seize opportunities and competitive. The CEOs were least likely to be regarded as restricted in outlook, unadventurous or unenthusiastic.

First-generation start-ups

Findings

We were also able to analyse behaviours for those who were CEOs of first generation start-up ventures. Whilst the top three roles remained the same, the order changed, with **Resource Investigator** and **Plant** rising higher than **Shaper**.



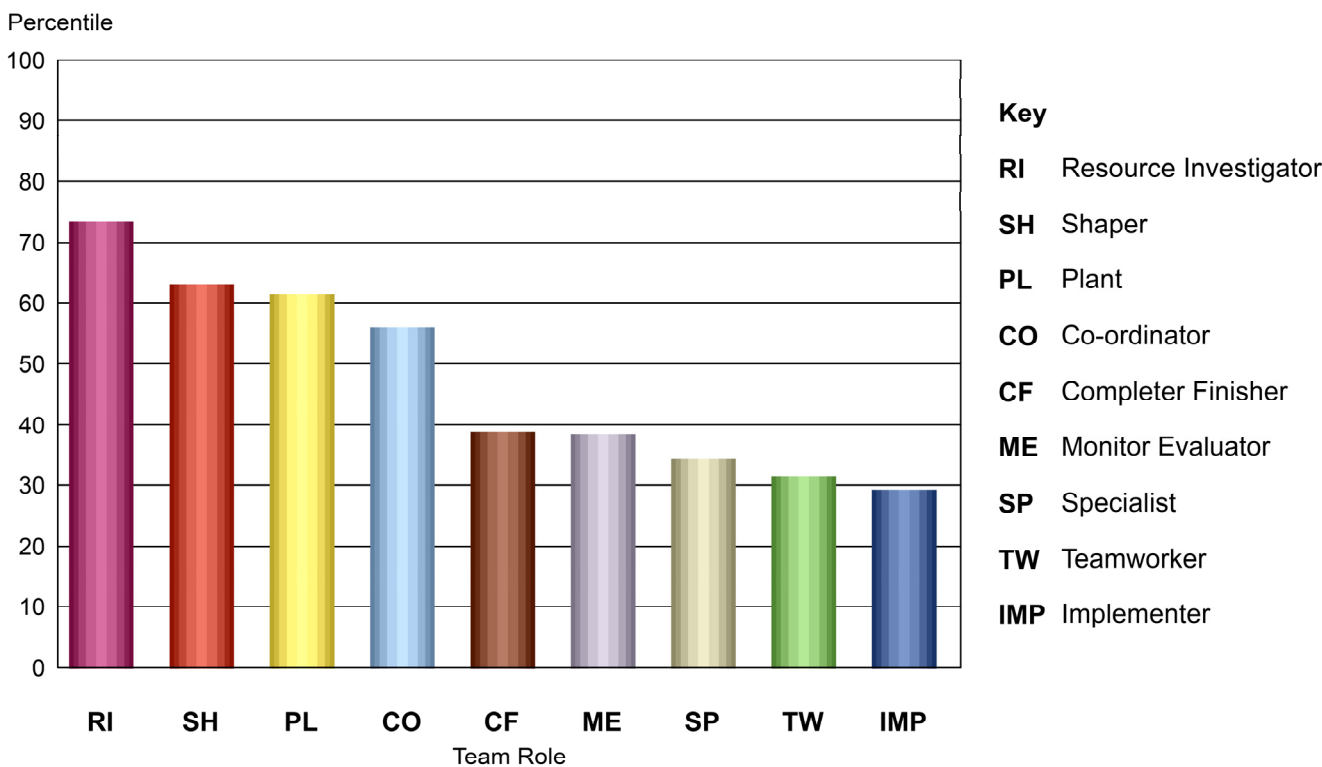
(Source: Belbin Team reports for GA CEOs 1st Generation start-ups, n=18)

Team Role theory suggests that **Plant** and **Resource Investigator** are required in the earliest stages of a project, when generating new ideas and exploring the existing market. In this respect, the start-up is akin to that of a new project, with early success dependent on mastering the 'Ideas' phase. This begs the question, how does the successful start-up adapt – in Team Role terms – to the next growth phase and establish its roots?

Establishing roots

Findings

The CEOs of more established firms demonstrated a broader range of roles, with an increase in **Co-ordinator** behaviours. In particular, these CEOs were more likely to be regarded as confident, relaxed, aware of priorities and able to take a broad view. In other words, once the start-up moved beyond the 'Ideas' phase, the most successful businesses brought in skilled leaders able to: address the wider demands of people management; identify and use talent, and harness the energy created by the founders.

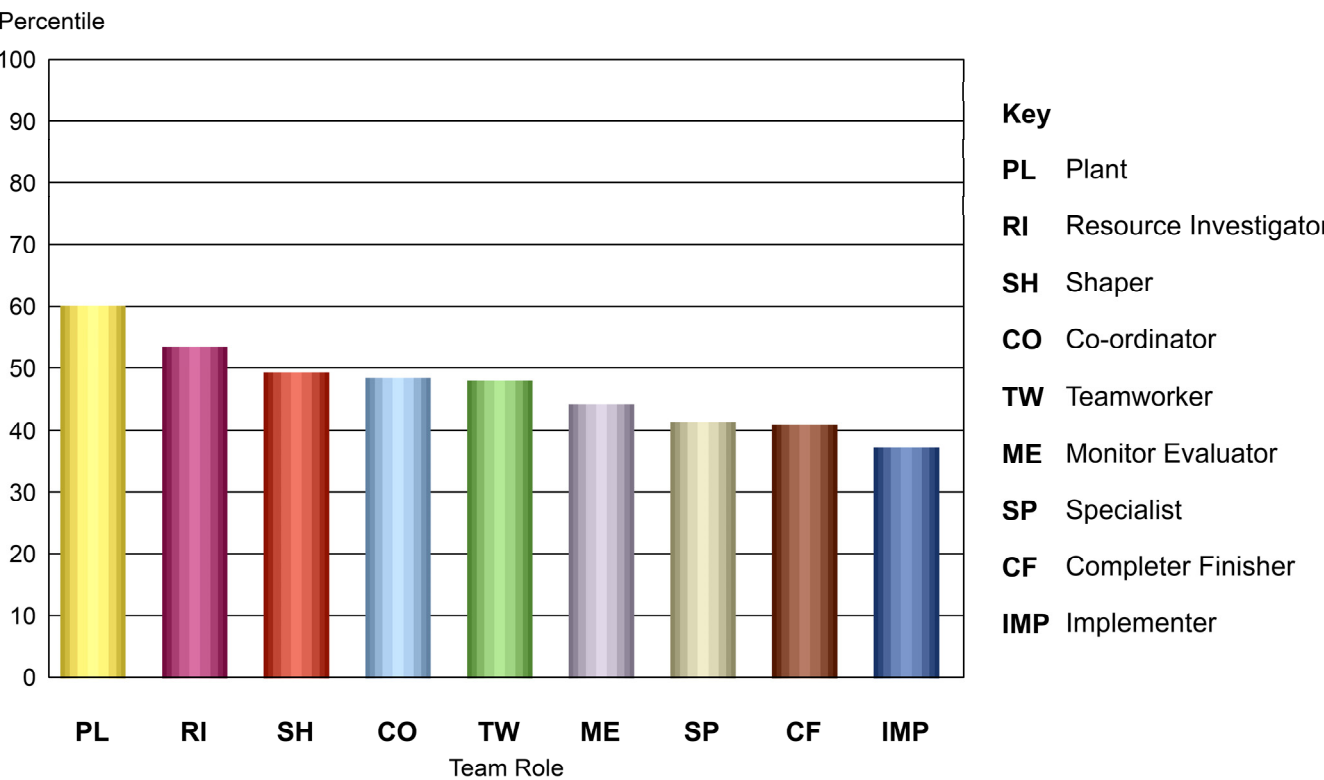


(Source: Belbin Team reports for GA CEOs established firms, n=11)

Co-founding partners

Findings

But what about partnerships? For the 12 firms where two partners established the venture together, a broader balance can be seen from the co-founding partners, with **Co-ordinator** and **Teamworker** rising as fourth and fifth roles respectively. The **Plant** role was more prevalent in this group, suggesting a greater tendency towards solving problems in the marketplace and offering thought leadership to teams.



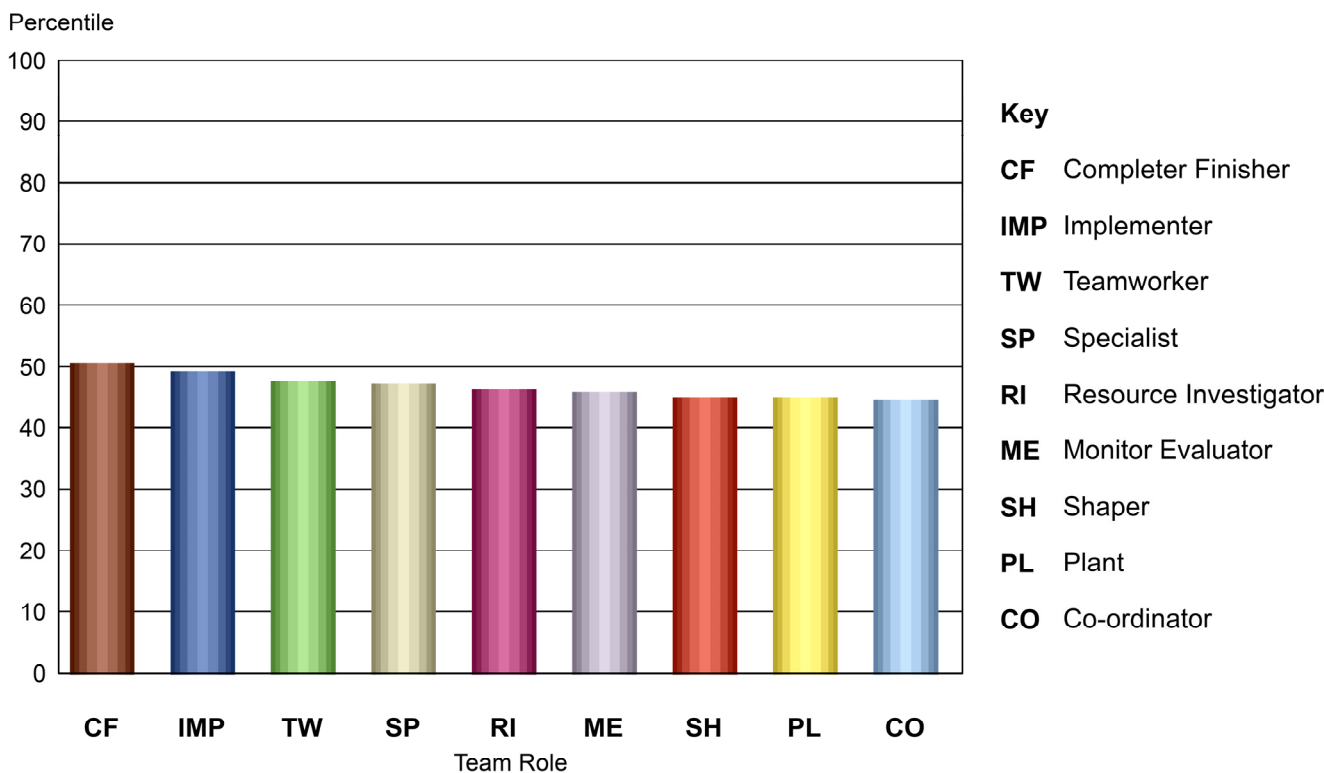
(Source: Belbin Team reports for GA co-founding partners, n=12)

This group were more likely to be regarded as caring, helpful and encouraging of others, reflecting the importance of strong communication and balance when working in a partnership.

The remainder of the leadership team

Findings

Lastly, we analysed the profiles of the remaining leadership teams (without founders/CEOs). In this group, different Team Role behaviours emerged – in fact, those behaviours complementary to the CEOs were dominant. This suggests that the founder/CEOs have recruited those who display skills and behaviours opposite to their own, in order to establish balance within the team and mitigate their own allowable weaknesses:



(Source: Belbin Team reports for GA all participants without CEOs, n=249)

High in **Completer Finisher** and **Implementer** behaviours, others in the successful leadership teams were generally regarded as reliable, accurate, efficient and helpful. Individuals with strengths in these roles would be more likely to take on the routine work needed to turn ideas into action and to ensure that important details were not overlooked.

Our findings show that new ideas alone are not enough.

In order to succeed, start-ups need to include the right people at the right time, to enable the idea to become a reality. Whilst the initial focus of a start-up may be on developing the concept and securing interest from investors, successful SMEs recognise the importance of hiring the right people for the right team at the right time.

Follow-up

We followed up the companies that took part in the Growth Accelerator Programme, and found that understanding the strengths and weaknesses of individuals in the organisation – and having a language to describe them – has helped with the organisations' efficiency, individual performance, strategic planning and recruitment.

One organisation, who reported an increase in turnover of 66% one year after the GA programme said that:

“Belbin gave us a very clear understanding of what makes us tick and how we best perform in certain areas. It [Belbin] helped us to acknowledge when we were not good in certain areas, and to understand why, and how to deal with it.”

When asked about the impact on team performance:

“There were some shocks! Belbin helped us define how we develop our roles and where we need to hone our skills/delegate more.”

Another organisation said that they would recommend the programme:

“It has been a good exercise to help us get through some staffing issues, and to help us have a common language for growing the business, identifying gaps within our team, and has helped us to recruit staff more effectively.”

One key factor of Belbin for the GA courses was the use of Observer Assessments. Since Belbin measures behaviour, the most useful way to validate an individual's perceived strengths is to seek feedback from others who work closely with that person. Behaviour is observable, so if colleagues see different strengths than does the individual, this provides opportunities for learning and growth. Without Observer Assessments, Belbin relies on self-reporting. In other words, results are only valid if the individual has a high level of self-awareness.

As one organisation noted:

“It was interesting to see how individuals reacted to their profile! Giving people a deeper understanding of themselves and how they fit with the team has helped us.”

Taking care to recruit the right fit for your company is key to success, and many SMEs have incorporated Belbin Team roles into their recruitment processes such that they have been very successful in hiring and building high-performing teams who have exceeded expectations.

“When you’re in a start-up, the first ten people will determine whether the company succeeds or not. Each is ten percent of the company. So why wouldn’t you take as much time as necessary to find all the A-players? ... A small company depends on great people much more than a big company does.”

— Steve Jobs

"Belbin has been a great addition to our recruitment process and helps us understand the behavioural preferences of candidates, so that when used with our competency screening we are now hiring the right people for the right job and team. Prior to using Belbin we focused purely on candidates' competencies and experience backed up by interviews, which with hindsight lead to some expensive wrong hires. We have used Belbin in recruiting for positions from production planner through to operations & sales directors."

— Louise Madden | CEO Applied Photophysics Ltd



Wherever your organisation is in its life cycle, Belbin offers a shared understanding of behavioural styles and a common language. This can help you to plan for the future, whatever that might look like!

Begin your Belbin journey today at
www.belbin.com

About the authors

Victoria Bird is the Head of Research & Development at Belbin. After graduating from the University of Cambridge, Victoria joined the Belbin team in 2006. She is dedicated to delivering the data, insights and analysis which help spread the Belbin message to individuals and teams worldwide.

Tom Robson is one of our longest-serving consultants, with over 20 years of Belbin experience. An experienced consultant with a focus on executive team development, organisational development and strategic change, Tom has significant business, healthcare and international development sector expertise, and is passionate about empowering individuals and teams to fulfil their potential.



References

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