

Making the most of meetings with Belbin

“A meeting is an event at which the minutes are kept and the hours are lost” – Unknown

Meetings are an essential part of the fabric of business, but the frustration arising from lengthy, unproductive ones is all too common. According to [a recent article in the Guardian](#), there’s nothing we love more than complaining about them with our colleagues. But how can understanding behaviour help make meetings more effective and less painful for all concerned?

Know the purpose

Are you meeting to generate new ideas or discuss strategy? Is it a crisis meeting or a final check on the small print? Owing to busy diaries, often meetings are scheduled far in advance as a placeholder, rather than being called in response to a particular situation.

The result? People are assembled because of their job titles, rather than because of what they can contribute. If you’re aware of each team member’s Team Roles and operate within that framework, you can ensure you’ve got the right people present.

Need to bounce ideas around? Find those with Plant and Resource Investigator tendencies. Only add Monitor Evaluator influence to the mix once those ideas are ready for scrutiny.

Finalising plans and checking the details? You’ll need those with strong Implementer and Completer Finisher behaviours. Keep out the predominant Resource Investigators, as they’ll likely be doodling their way through.

Keep them small

It’s true of teams and meetings alike. Meetings often veer off-track because too many people are involved – and this has an unequal effect on individuals, depending on their behaviours. Resource Investigators and Shapers are likely to drown out other voices, despite the Co-ordinator’s best efforts. Since each person makes more than one Team Role contribution, it should be possible to cover all bases without including everyone every time.

Change the chair

Co-ordinators make the most effective chairs, because they give everyone airtime, seek to build towards consensus and don’t get bogged down in details. However, the team’s most effective Co-ordinator might not be the team leader. Working with Team Role strengths provides an opportunity to look beyond hierarchical or functional considerations and shake things up a bit.

Talk Team Roles

Understanding and identifying Team Roles isn’t a panacea, but it does enable people to voice and work past the difficulties and frustrations they experience when working in teams, as well as to recognise and value others’ strengths.

When Belbin becomes a shorthand, enthusiastic Resource Investigators can say, “Let’s not ME (Monitor Evaluate) this idea until we’ve found out more,” or an impatient Shaper can state, “Let’s CF this at a later date”.

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This understanding can help keep meetings to time, and to the point. Of course, success rides on knowing the behaviours present in your team. Only a [Belbin Report](#) can provide the insights you need, but in the meantime, here's our quick guide to Team Roles in meetings.

Plants

Should be invited to brainstorming meetings or to think-tanks to find new ways to navigate existing problems.

Resource Investigators

Are likely to be enthusiastic when discussing new ideas. Need to be able to communicate their findings from the outside world to the team, but should be wary of talking too much and not letting others speak.

Co-ordinators

Are ideally suited to chairing meetings, allocating actions to the most appropriate people and ensuring that everyone has a chance to speak.

Shapers

Are likely to be impatient (vocally so!) if the meeting drags on. Will want to focus on actions and outcomes, not just debates.

Teamworkers

Will try and bring people together. May struggle to communicate their views, especially on issues which prove controversial or divisive.

Monitor Evaluators

May well sit back in their chairs or at a distance from the team, as a physical manifestation of their objectivity. May take their time to weigh in on issues being discussed while they formulate opinions, and then are likely to enjoy debate for its own sake.

Implementers

Will want to talk practicalities and make concrete plans, so this contribution should not be present in meetings designed to generate new ideas, but in those where ideas need to be turned into actions and deadlines.

Completer Finishers

Are likely to focus on the details, which might frustrate Shapers. If the meeting is intended to be 'broad brush', Co-ordinators might have additional work in ensuring that the meeting does not delve into an unnecessary level of detail.

Specialists

Are ideal for providing specialised expertise as and when needed, but the timing of their contribution might require careful thought, so that they don't bring all discussions back to their area of expertise, at the expense of other considerations.

We'd love to hear your worst meeting gripes, or better still, how Team Roles have helped improve your meetings. Drop us an email: team@belbin.com