

Thinking, social... action! Getting to know the nine Belbin Team Roles

When you're first getting to grips with Belbin, nine Team Roles – the nine clusters of behaviour or ways of contributing to a team – can seem a lot to remember. It can be helpful to break them down into groups of three that describe their primary focus: thinking, social and action roles.

Of course, in reality, we all have several 'preferred' roles which come into play, but to keep it simple here, we're using a Team Role name synonymously with a person.

Thinking roles

Plant, Monitor Evaluator and Specialist are the cerebral or thinking roles, but each entails different kinds of thinking.

Plants are creative and free-thinking. They love beginning with a blank page and coming up with something new. They can often find their way through complex problems and come up with solutions that no one else has considered.

By contrast, Monitor Evaluators are extremely logical and adept at analytical thinking. They pull apart a concept and explore it from every possible angle to discover any potential pitfalls.

Specialists love to research and study a subject in depth. As the name suggests, they tend to be experts on a specific subject, and are dedicated to pursuit of knowledge in this area.

The Plant's contribution is to offer new ideas to the team for consideration, and the Monitor Evaluator's task is to establish the viability of that idea – which can put them in conflict with the resident Plant. The Specialist's job is to provide specific knowledge that the team may be lacking.

Both Plants and Specialists may prefer to work alone. Plants may have some difficulty communicating their ideas to others.

Specialists are self-starting and want to focus on in-depth study, so they may isolate themselves from others who don't share their specific interests.

Monitor Evaluators may also keep themselves detached from the team, in order to remain impartial and dispassionate when analysing ideas that may be precious to one team member or another.

Social roles

Resource Investigator, Teamworker and Co-ordinator are the social or 'communication' roles, but again, each is distinct within this category.

Outgoing and talkative, Resource Investigators tend to work outside the team, networking and establishing new relationships and contacts which can provide new opportunities and give the team valuable insights into the marketplace.

Teamworkers are the internal communicators, ensuring cohesion within the team which keeps everything running smoothly.

Diplomatic and perceptive, and good listeners, they care about others' feelings and strive towards a harmonious working environment.

Co-ordinators – who are proficient at identifying and using individual talents – communicate to encourage others, promote consensus and help steer the team towards its objectives.

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Mature and calm, they facilitate meetings and discussions, ensuring that everyone has their say and offering advice and consultation when needed.

Each of these three roles need to work with others in order to be effective, but their strategies and intentions are different. Resource Investigators are likely to be enthusiastic and talkative; Teamworkers, to have a discreet 'word'; Co-ordinators, to manoeuvre and orchestrate others to achieve the best possible outcome for the team.

Action roles

Implementer, Completer Finisher and Shaper are the three action roles, concerned with the task at hand. Implementers are organised and efficient, and thrive on structure – they make plans to ensure that work is completed on time and in an orderly fashion.

What about Completer Finishers? Well, if Implementers want it done quickly, Completer Finishers want it done properly. They focus on the details, ensuring that no mistakes are allowed to slip through and spoil the end result.

As such, they may struggle to delegate to others (who else could be guaranteed to take the same care?) and may sacrifice the deadline for the detail.

Shapers, by contrast, keep deadlines first and foremost in their minds. Competitive and outspoken, they are the driving-force of the team, pushing others to ensure that goals are met and projects delivered on time.

Whilst Implementers are motivated by loyalty to the company, and the satisfaction of getting the job done, Shapers and Completer Finishers tend to be motivated by anxiety. For Shapers, anxiety is a driver for success, challenging them to push harder and reach ever higher to achieve their goals. For Completer Finishers, anxiety compels them towards the highest possible standards. However, it is internalised and may not be voiced until the workload is overwhelming and the stress becomes too much.

Striking a balance in your team

It can be informative to study the balance of social, thinking and action roles in an individual's profile, to determine where their overall focus lies. Often, a balance of different categories of roles can be found, but sometimes there are noticeable gaps. A lack of social roles may suggest problems communicating effectively with others. Few task-focused roles may suggest someone who is all talk (or thinking) and no action, whilst low thinking roles may indicate someone who is uncomfortable dealing with difficult or abstract concepts, and wants to jump straight to executing a solution. Of course, the absence of a certain category of roles may be no problem – it depends on the demands of the job role in question.

It all starts with Belbin Reports

Once an individual has received their Individual Belbin Report, you can use the Team Role Circle to plot their top Team Roles and lowest role to see where they sit within the three categories. This opens discussions on the coverage of different types of contribution and the value of different approaches. Our [Reports](#) and [session ideas](#) will start you on your Belbin journey.