

Belbin - Defining needs, not people

Belbin Team Roles are not just a measurement of people's behaviour at work, they are a definition of the different types of behaviour required in the workplace to bring about success.

Team Roles are defined in terms of what is needed rather than what people fundamentally are. When we describe a particular Team Role behaviour, it is in its purest form, unadulterated by other influences. When it comes to people, Team Roles interact with one another so that most people display a combination of preferred, manageable and least preferred Team Roles.

In other words, when one hears the comment: "Steve is a Shaper", what this really means is that Steve has Shaper tendencies: his behaviour at work resembles Belbin's definition of the Shaper role, perhaps more notably than other roles. We can infer that Steve is direct, outspoken, likes to challenge people and make things happen within the team. We must hope that Steve is not being defined as a Shaper solely on the grounds of being aggressive. These negative qualities, not uncommon in Shapers, could be found in people with any Team Role preferences.

Moreover, it could be too simplistic to remark that "Steve is a Shaper", even if Steve has most of the cluster of characteristics that make up the Shaper role. If Steve is versatile and aware, perhaps he is displaying Shaper characteristics because he recognises that they will bring success in his current role.

In this case, if Steve changes jobs or tasks, he may be seen in a different light. On the other hand, if Steve is a one-trick pony who finds it difficult to take on a variety of roles, he is likely to play his Shaper role regardless of what the situation requires.

This is where we need to analyse Steve's Team Role contributions in more detail. Does Steve display any secondary roles? Does he have all the characteristics that are required to play the Shaper role effectively? And when Steve tackles a new job, does he take on exactly the same roles or does he adapt to the situation and can he play a variety of roles well?

One thing is certain: if someone is aware of the kind of useful behaviours that are needed at a particular time, then they can attempt to display those behaviours. Success will depend on many things – their personality, their values and field constraints. For certain Team Roles, intelligence and interpersonal skills will have a major bearing on how far the behaviour of any given Team Role is appreciated. Finally, role-learning is perhaps the most important ingredient.

Next Steps

Knowing the language of Belbin Team Roles can help people behave in a way that is both needed and constructive - get your team started on their Belbin reports now and start using Team Role language to bring about success. You can purchase Belbin reports [here](#), or why not attend our [Introduction to Belbin Session?](#)

Further Reading

[Eight reasons why behaviour is important:](#)

A number of factors influence our behaviour - why is it important that we measure it?