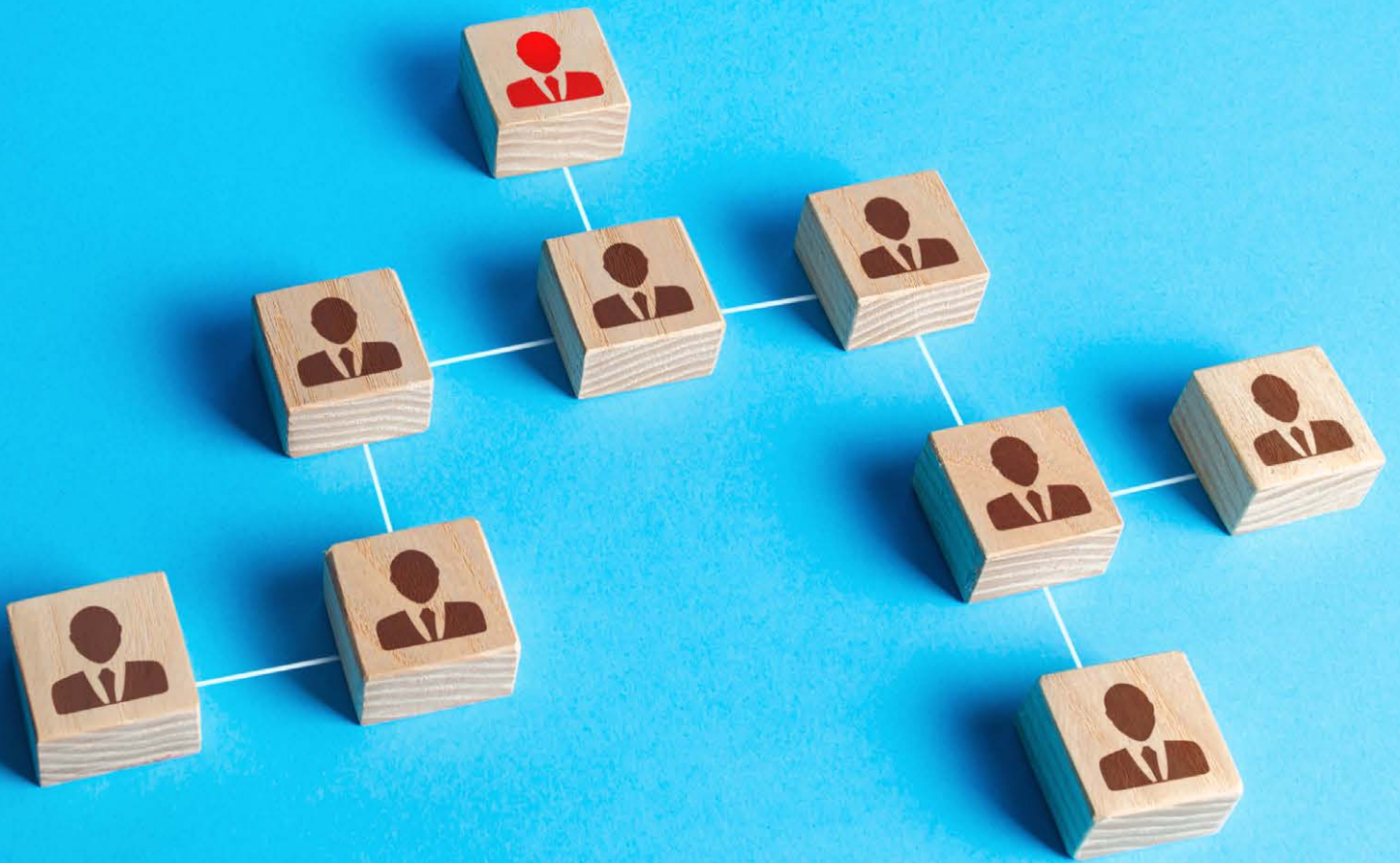


**BELBIN® FOR**

# LEADERSHIP TEAMS



**BELBIN®**

© BELBIN 2021.

+44 (0)1223 264975 [team@belbin.com](mailto:team@belbin.com) [www.belbin.com](http://www.belbin.com)

**Teambuilding initiatives won't cut it for the top team. And they don't have the diary space – or perhaps the inclination – for self-conscious discussions on lengthy retreats.**

But these are the 'teams' who are often in dire need of help when it comes to performance.

DDI's 2021 Leadership Report reveals that only one in three CEOs rate their organization's frontline leadership as 'very good' or 'excellent'. And what's more, they tend to drop their rating of their top team's effectiveness year on year during their first five years of tenure.

**Why so many struggles at the top? Because, more often than not, leadership teams aren't teams at all.**

As Jon R. Katzenbach said, top teams don't have any of the features needed to make an effective team. And describing them as such can devalue the term and damage the concept of teamwork within the organisation.

Why? Because not only is the top team steering the ship, it's also setting an example for teamwork throughout the organisation. It isn't enough to have a strong CEO. Without an effective leadership team, performance suffers and internal politics threatens organizational viability.

**So, what does teamwork in the top team look like? What are the challenges facing these teams? And how can we offer solutions that fit their unique composition?**

# How do top teams differ from other teams?

There are a number of key differences between the characteristics Belbin identifies for high-performing teams and so-called 'teamwork' in leadership teams.

	Characteristics of a high-performing team:
<b>Size</b>	A team is small – 4-6 people. When numbers are higher, the team becomes a group and behaviours change.
<b>Balance</b>	A team is balanced in its Team Role composition, with the understanding that each team member can contribute more than one Team Role.
<b>Objective</b>	Teams work towards a common objective.
<b>Time spent together</b>	Teams work closely together.
<b>Communication</b>	High-performing teams communicate candidly, welcoming (and depersonalising) constructive conflict and fostering psychological safety.
<b>Awareness</b>	Effective teams assess their own performance and understand what individual members can contribute.



## How the leadership team operates:

The size of the 'team' is defined by job titles and sectors of the organisation to be represented.

The qualities that lead to promotion may be exactly the opposite of those required for effective teamwork. There is no guarantee of complementarity. In fact, if corporate 'cloning' has led to the promotion of executives with a certain behavioural fingerprint, homogeneity is more likely than diversity. Since there is often insufficient behavioural diversity, the team is unable to capitalise on opposing viewpoints, which reduces its effectiveness in responding to outside forces, such as changes in the market.

Top-level executives are chosen because they are proficient at representing their own functional silos. In the boardroom, they firefight their specific problems rather than tackling strategic issues that only the top team can solve. When it comes to addressing the broader issues, executives may nod along with the CEO but are not really in agreement on objectives or how to implement them. This can result in inconsistency and scepticism lower down the ranks.

For the leadership team, time together is often brief and disjointed. There is little opportunity to reflect on team cohesion or performance.

Since they are not accustomed to working together, C-suite can fail to communicate. An underlying lack of trust can play into this, encouraging people to think that others are playing politics, withholding information or working to hidden agendas. This in turn can lead to more destructive behaviours, for which the organization ultimately pays the price.

Executives do not regularly assess their performance, or acknowledge the link between team cohesion and performance. Owing to the amount of time spent managing down, they may struggle to adapt their approach to accommodate peers, or may not recognise others' strengths.

## What does a leadership team need?

McKinsey's 2001 study indicated that success at the top level was not just about 'heroic leadership' but the ability to make progress on three fronts simultaneously:

- **Common direction** – the top team needs a shared understanding of objectives and values. It won't work if everyone simply nods along with the CEO without buying in.
- **Interaction** – whilst executives may be used to tackling high-level issues alone, any complex problems that go beyond one person's expertise or capability require effective communication. This is one opportunity for the top team to set an example for teams all the way down the chain of command.
- **Renewal** – the top team needs to be able to draw effectively on external resources in order to expand their capabilities and adapt successfully to change.

## So, if leadership doesn't have time for teamwork, what's the answer?

The study showed that the most effective way to resolve sensitive performance issues in top teams was to take an oblique approach: to address real, critical strategic issues that required their attention. In so doing, they worked on all three initiatives concurrently. They built trust, witnessed visible progress in their own performance, and experienced positive communication as a by-product.

Researchers also found that consultancy should be light-touch. Rather than taking over the reins, a coaching approach allowed top teams to discover and remedy problems for themselves, so that they were better equipped to do so in future.

## How can Belbin help?

**Management teams are in Belbin's DNA.**

Dr Meredith Belbin's unique study of managers, conducted at Henley Business School during the 1970s, identified the nine Team Roles via a business simulation game.

*"We found that around a quarter of our clients already use Belbin at the most senior levels within their organization. And 97% of customers agree that Belbin helps teams work more effectively together."*

Belbin Customer Survey, 2018

Whilst many personality tests may feel too self-conscious at top level, Belbin works to identify behavioural strengths, as evidenced not only by the executive themselves, but by the rest of their team.

Since feedback can come from others in C-suite, a **Belbin Individual Report** can help leaders better understand their place in the leadership team and how they might need to adapt their style when working in the senior team.

The Belbin Reports allow leaders to hit the ground running. They provide actionable content which can be applied to real scenarios. No abstract frameworks or artificial concepts which can cause scepticism because of their disconnect from the reality of work. And they open discussions, whilst giving ownership of solutions to the top team.

## Using Belbin to progress top teams on three fronts

- **Objectives**

Understanding the behavioural strengths and weaknesses of other team members can help C-suite to shape their objectives as a team in their own right, rather than simply seeing opponents across the table in the boardroom.

The language of Team Roles can be used as a shorthand to establish intentions. For example, when working on broad strategy, it can be useful to acknowledge that hammering out the details (a Completer Finisher contribution) won't be needed until later in the process. This will avoid the meeting becoming bogged down and losing pace.

Those with strong Monitor Evaluator tendencies might be asked to sit out the initial scoping phase of a project and invited to analyse the viability of an idea once it is fully formed.

- **Interaction**

Talking Team Roles can help executives express dissatisfaction, depersonalise conflict and resolve issues which might otherwise end in heated debate, or be swept under the carpet.



Few top teams are given coaching to work as a team, and many might think that experience provides everything necessary for high performance. Having an awareness of Belbin Team Roles is a good reminder that there are other factors at play, and that behaviours can be a constructive lens for discussion.

- **Renewal**

For a leadership team introducing new people, the **Belbin Team Report** can offer valuable insights into the kind of behaviours that may be missing in the leadership team.

Looking at secondary Team Roles can help to balance the top team more effectively and enable top team members to take on more challenging work. And where there are gaps, the team can learn how they might draw on external resources to increase behavioural diversity and ensure competitive advantage.

Once progress has been made on all three fronts, success will have bought time and inclination for inquiry and reflection. By inviting feedback from peers in the leadership team and from those they manage, leaders set the example of reflection and growth throughout the organization.

*“Structured self-discovery and reflection must be combined with decision making and action in the real world; the constant interplay among these elements over time is what creates lasting change.”*

McKinsey, ‘Teamwork at the top’

## Fine-tuning: high-performing teams at the top level

---

Top teams face unique problems. But they are also uniquely placed to find solutions. To develop better strategies that increase stakeholder confidence; to perform more consistently, and to set the example of a high-performing team for the rest of the organization.

Belbin is quick to understand and apply. It is practical and accessible to all, whilst having the depth and nuance to deal with issues at the top level.

Our facilitators have a wealth of experience in improving leadership team performance.

And, once the top team has confidence in the methodology, the process can be cascaded down to teams on the ground.

The practical insights and focus on peer feedback perfectly complement the action-reflection cycle, so executives can see progress in real-time.

**What are the challenges facing your leaders?** Is your top team a 'real' team? Are you ready to analyse their behaviours en route to tangible results? Our team of experienced consultants and facilitators are ready to take your call.



The only sanctioned way of finding out your Belbin® Team Role strengths and weaknesses is by completing the official Belbin® Self-Perception Inventory online, and receiving a Belbin® Individual Report.

Over 3 million Belbin® Reports have been generated worldwide for individuals, managers, teams and organisations.

**BELBIN®**

**We can help you every step of the way.**

**Find us at [belbin.com](https://belbin.com) and begin your Belbin® journey.**