

BELBIN®

The Team Role Company



Case Study

‘Coffee is a Team sport’: How Belbin provided an understanding of natural talents to enable transformation



“I would like to share our story. It has been a wonderful journey, and it continues to be a great learning opportunity for me and my team.”



At the Belbin International Team Conference in 2024, Alejandro Cadena, Co-founder and CEO of Caravela Coffee, shared the story of how Belbin Team Roles supported a transformation of their Leadership Team and set them on a path to sustainable organisational change to support the company’s future success.

The beginnings of change

In 2021, at Caravela’s Coffee Leadership summit, Co-Founder and CEO Alejandro Cadena set the 16 members of the Caravela Leadership Team a task. To devise the strategies, measures and goals that would take the company forward, to achieve the objectives it

needed to in order to continue to grow and realise its aims for making coffee a better industry.

The Leadership Team were given the autonomy and responsibility for running with the task, not the Co-Founders or CEO. Over the following six months they were expected to make progress and report back. It was acknowledged that as a group of 16 they would have challenges, but the hope was that they would make use of committees to move forward with their task so they could report back on their collective progress.

Six months passed. No progress had been made. A year passed. Still no progress.

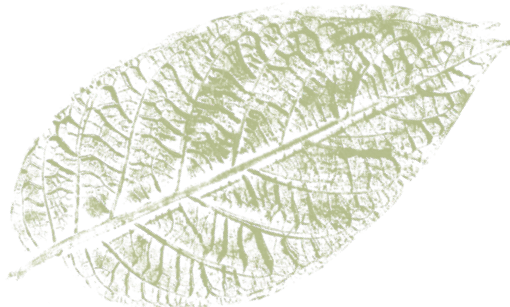
A diagnostic tool to aid understanding

The lack of progress was frustrating. Why were these very capable people not making any progress?

To try to understand, the Leadership Team were asked the reason for their lack of progress. “We are too busy,” and “it is difficult being in different time zones”, were among the reasons cited.

Discussing the situation with the CEO, the company’s Chair, who was based in the UK, said “you should use Belbin”. Not having heard of Belbin before, the People & Culture Director in Colombia took a look and said, “it looks interesting, we should try it out”.

PSA Consultores, the Belbin distributor in Colombia, were contacted and they began by undertaking a Team Roles analysis.



Then the reasons for the lack of progress became clear, and things began to happen.

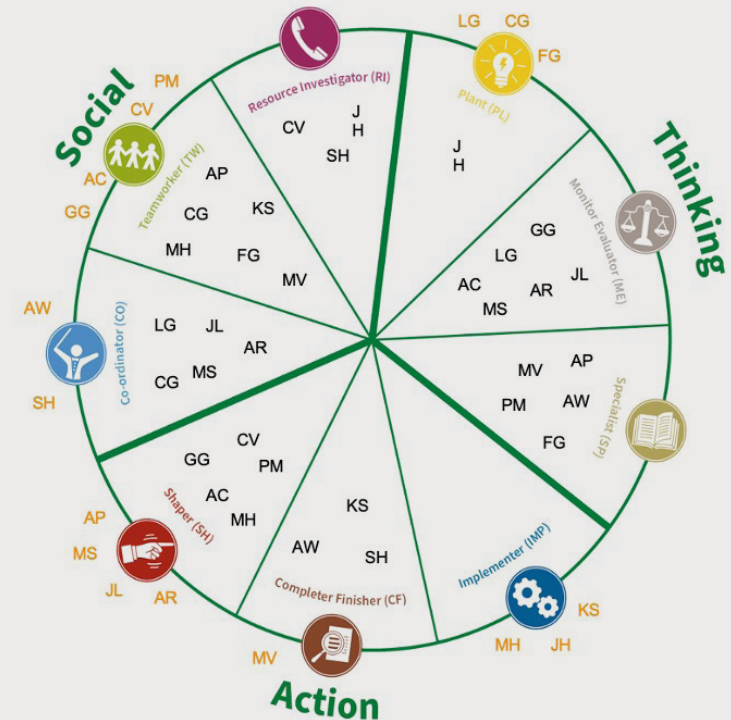
Analysing team dynamics was the key

All members of the Leadership Team completed Belbin Self-Perception Inventories (SPIs) with Observer Assessments. This generated their Belbin Individual reports which were then combined to create their Belbin Team report.

Prior to the next scheduled Leadership Team meeting all members were provided with their feedback. The hope was that they would understand the roles they played and would come to the next leadership summit and act more in a team way.

There were mixed reactions to the feedback. Some people were surprised by the results, some were ‘really mad’ about the results, declaring “That’s not me!”.

However, the resulting Team report and Belbin Team Role Circle spoke for itself. It very clearly and visually illustrated the real reason behind the lack of progress.



The ‘Aha Moment’ – the reason is clear to see

The first team roles analysis done by PSA Consultores revealed that the management team lacked action-oriented roles, particularly the Implementer (IMP).

It explained the lack of progress. Implementers are those who turn ideas into actions and organise the work that needs to be done. No Implementers means a lack of actionable planning and application of processes to move things forward.

“When we received this, it was clear why there was no action. Belbin really opened our mind, and we said, ‘now we know why!’”

This finding explained why ideas and initiatives remained unexecuted, creating a key learning moment for everyone.

Organisational evolution and management transformation

This exercise and experience proved to be a landmark moment for Caravela Coffee.

Given the realisation of the absence of key Team Roles to ensure action, they looked to the Leadership Team to identify those who had some Implementer strengths and who would 'step up' to fill the role. Some were found but progress on the original strategy task still did not happen. And the same reasons were given.

Time for real change.



The business went on to be transformed from the bottom up. One of the aspects that makes Caravela Coffee unique is that most of their employees are from the communities that grow the coffee. They are the sons and daughters of the coffee farmers. The company decided to really empower their people, who were all committed to their purpose, to move towards working as a team rather than having managers.

All but six of the original Leadership Team left as this shift in organisational structure was not for them. Those that remained were part of action which now began from the bottom up, not the top down.

Hiring for behaviour and talent, training for knowledge

As part of the changes, Caravela Coffee changed its selection process. They now hire for behaviours and talent, for potential and Belbin is a key tool they use.

Using Belbin, they understood that a main area of weakness for the company was a lack of action roles. Given this, they have recruited more people with Implementer and Completer Finisher in their top roles.



“In a talent update, it was evident that the team had significantly evolved, and the organizational structure shifted from hierarchical to systemic. This change involved adopting a new organizational philosophy focused on greater autonomy (self-management) and collaboration.”

Mayerly Anaya Pinto, PSA Consultores



Then they spend 6 months training them all about coffee. They find the right people, the right talent, and then they train them for the knowledge they need. At the time of the Belbin conference, all of the senior management that had been hired in the previous year had no expertise or knowledge in coffee.

“We have a future leaders programme that is working marvellously as now we have people that are actually making things happen from the bottom up”, – Alejandro Cadena

Building sustainable change

PSA Consultores have continued to support the work and change at Caravela Coffee. During the most recent piece of work, the focus was on balancing the team leading the organisational transformation. This effort prioritised coordination and communication as key pillars to ensure psychological safety and team cohesion in their strategic initiatives.

Workshops using Belbin exercises with their teams are a core element of ongoing team development. It has been noted how they are now working more as a team, using different tools and different thinking to ‘become a better company’ with motivated people. The hope is that this will mean better coffee for generations to come in line with the company’s mission.

Throughout the process at Caravela Coffee, PSA Consultores has been a strategic ally, offering clarity on the organizational reality and guiding cultural change through the Belbin methodology. Thanks to this approach, Caravela has effectively and sustainably advanced its transformation.



“Belbin for us has been a fantastic tool to really understand what we need. First, what was going wrong and then what we needed to fill in the team, to the point that now we say, ‘coffee is a team sport.’”

Alejandro Cadena

‘Coffee is now a team sport’

“Belbin for us has been a fantastic tool to really understand what we need. First, what was going wrong and then what we needed to fill in the team, to the point that now we say, ‘coffee is a team sport.’”

Coffee is a complex system. At the point you receive your espresso or cappuccino in a café there has been a whole team of people working extremely hard to get it there. From the coffee growers, the coffee pickers, all the different people working at different stages to get the coffee to the end consumer, it really is a team sport.

The analogy used at Caravela Coffee is one of a football team. Everyone can move around their role. In football, defenders can score goals too if needs be. Even goalkeepers can make goals. In coffee, the goalkeeper is the coffee farmer. If he loses the game, everyone will lose as there will be no coffee. The barista is the forward. And the fans are the coffee drinkers.

“This analogy has been inspired by Belbin and the role it has played in our company to help us understand people’s natural talents and the role they can play.”



“There’s a saying, “If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change.” [Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, The Leopard]. We live in an increasingly complex world and we all need to change and transform each other constantly. And I think Belbin is a great tool to do that.”



About PSA Consultores: dedicated to human development

PSA Consultores is a consultancy firm dedicated to human development, with more than 30 years of experience advising public and private sector companies in Colombia. Their focus on people as the main leader of organizations, makes them a strategic ally to achieve highly favorable results, aligned with the objectives proposed by companies.

Since 2017, they have been the official representatives in Colombia of the Belbin Team Roles methodology, which they use with their clients to understand people's behavioural strengths and contributions to a team and consolidate high-performance work teams.

The team at PSA Consultores provide their clients with an effective combination of knowledge, commitment and experience.



About Caravela Coffee: a different type of coffee company

At Caravela, they don't trade coffee, they connect the people who are responsible for transforming it. Their relationship-based approach begins with sourcing team members who live and work within the communities they purchase coffees from and ends with sales team members who frequent our customers' cafés. They believe that the path to better coffee is people powered.

Since 2000, Caravela Coffee has been on a mission to make specialty coffee as prosperous as it is delicious by facilitating the equitable exchange of green coffee between highly skilled coffee producers in Latin America and high-quality coffee roasters around the world.

In 2021, they proudly became the first Carbon Neutral green coffee trading company, underpinning their commitment to responsible coffee sourcing.

BELBIN John Yellow

Comparing Self and Observer Perceptions Based on your Self-Perception and 6 Observer Assessments

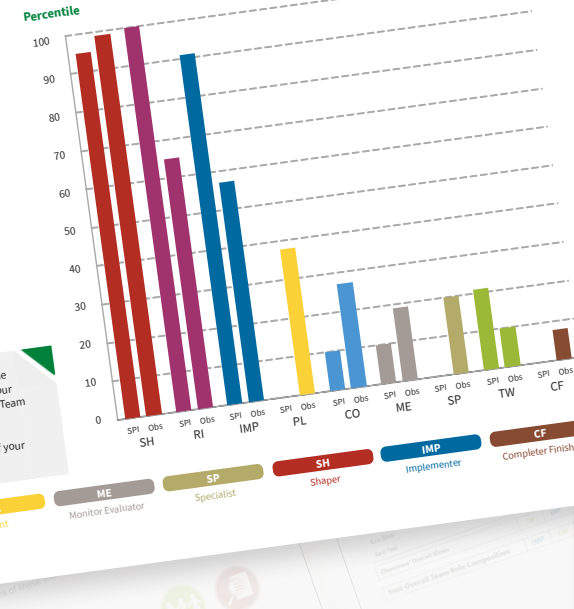
You see yourself as someone who is enthusiastic and optimistic, and who can develop contacts outside the immediate group.

Your Observers see some different strengths than you do. They see your desire to win, competitive nature and ability to challenge when needed.

What do your Observers all agree on? They see that you are not afraid to say what you think, have a strong desire to succeed and win and flourish when meeting new people.

	Self-Perception (SPI)	Observations (Obs)
SH	95	99
RI	100	65
IMP	91	57
PL	0	38
CO	10	27
ME	10	19
SP	0	20
TW	21	10
CF	0	8

The table on the left and the graph on the right show your percentile scores for each Team Role, comparing your preferences against the combined perceptions of your Observers.



Belbin has been providing the science behind team performance for over 40 years.

Get in touch today and transform your teams with Belbin Team Roles.



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