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HOW TO USE BELBIN TEAM ROLE REPORTS

The Belbin Team Role reports can be used whenever you are looking at maximising both individual and team performance in the workplace. We have produced a series of articles which we hope that you will find useful and which will enable you to get the most out of the Belbin Team Role reports. This month we look at...

1. How to use the Belbin reports...TO FORM A TEAM

In many organisations, teams are well-established in set locations with defined job descriptions and roles. However, in Belbin terms, it can be beneficial to assemble a team to meet a specific challenge – for example, when beginning a new project or introducing change.

The formation of a new team provides an opportunity to move outside existing structures and to put together a number of individuals who may not previously have worked together, but who – in combination – provide the best spread of roles to meet the requirements of the task at hand.
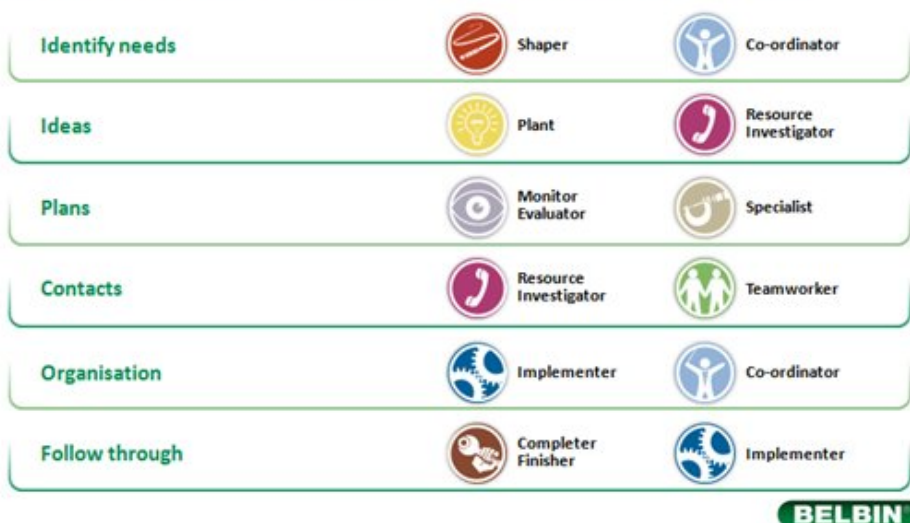
Being more flexible about the composition of teams (and setting up and disbanding teams for specific purposes) can help to ensure that the most suitable individuals are able to contribute, regardless of rank or role. It can also prevent stagnation and circumvent interpersonal conflicts or ineffective management diplomatically and without undermining traditional hierarchical structures.

So how do you go about assembling a new team?

Decide on the team's purpose

Before you can begin to put the team together, you need to decide what the team needs to do and consider which Team Roles are required to make this happen. This table shows the Team Roles which are most appropriate to each stage of a project's life cycle:

As Projects Progress Different Team Roles are Required

Stage	Role 1	Role 2
Identify needs	Shaper	Co-ordinator
Ideas	Plant	Resource Investigator
Plans	Monitor Evaluator	Specialist
Contacts	Resource Investigator	Teamworker
Organisation	Implementer	Co-ordinator
Follow through	Completer Finisher	Implementer

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When deciding on the make-up of your new team, there are a few key points to remember:

Size – although there are nine Team Roles, this doesn't mean that you need nine people in the team, since individuals tend to have more than one preferred Team Role. An ideal size for a team is 4-6 people. Beyond this number, the team becomes a group, with different associated characteristics and behaviours altogether.

Timing – whilst it is important to have a balance of Team Roles, not all Team Roles are required at every stage of the project. If a role is introduced at the wrong stage, this can have adverse consequences on the project. For example, a Monitor Evaluator should not be present at the initial "ideas" stage, since there is a risk that they might dampen enthusiasm and cause a potentially strong idea to be rejected too early. Instead, consider the idea of a "fluid" team where members join the team to make their contribution and drop out again when their stage of the project is at an end.

Abundance – with certain Team Roles, it is fair to say that "a little goes a long way", so overpopulation in a team is not a good idea. This primarily applies to Plants (too many ideas competing for attention) and Shapers (potential for aggressive behaviour).

Find out which Team Roles are in the pool

The next step is to find out the Team Role preferences of everyone in the "pool" of individuals from which the team will be drawn. Each person must complete a Belbin Self-Perception Inventory and obtain Observer Assessments so that you can ensure that you have the most accurate information about each person's Team Role contributions.

The Belbin team report can help you to draw this information together, so that you have an "at a glance" reference from which to work:

Taking into consideration the points mentioned above, look for individuals with preferred roles which could be useful at each stage and which compliment the roles of other team members.

Health check

Once you have a possible team assembled, there are a number of steps you can take to "healthcheck" the team. This table can help you to decide whether you have all of the behaviours you need and that no project stage has been missed. N.B. Bear in mind that you may not need all of the Team Roles at once.

A Team Problem – Have we got...

Question	Role
People with any good ideas?	PLANTS
Someone who chooses which idea would work best?	MONITOR EVALUATORS
Someone who is going to allocate the roles and orchestrate the team effort?	CO-ORDINATORS
Practical people who can realise these suggestions?	IMPLEMENTERS
People who are going to produce high standards?	COMPLETER FINISHERS
People who are going to make contacts outside the group and find external resources?	RESOURCE INVESTIGATOR
Someone who is going to move the group forward and stop complacency?	SHAPERS
Someone who is going to stop arguments and pull the team together and improve atmosphere?	TEAMWORKERS
People who are knowledgeable in certain areas of expertise?	SPECIALISTS

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Belbin team/group reports can help to analyse the make-up of the team you are planning to assemble. This can identify any potential gaps or overlaps. If you wish, you can run different sets of reports to represent the team at different stages of the project with different team members.
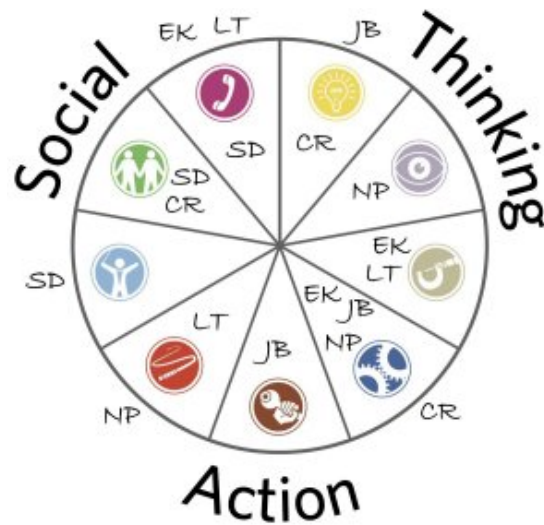
For example, the Team Role Circle provides a visual representation of the individuals who fulfil each role (represented by their initials) and can identify any gaps or potential overlaps of Team Roles.

Help the team to work together

Once the team has been assembled, they will need ongoing support to ensure that they are working productively together.

In an effective team:

  Members understand their own and others' strengths and weaknesses

  The required Team Roles are represented

  Relationships promote strengths and contain weaknesses

Once the team has been working together for some time (we recommend at least six months), Observer Assessments can be completed to assess each individual's place within the new team and to address any issues which may arise.

If you have any queries, we'd love to chat, call us on **+44(0)1223 264975**