

# Team working (part 2): team member types

## KEY WORDS

- » Belbin
- » Group
- » Team
- » Role
- » Self-perception
- » Skill mix

In this paper, we will explore the different team roles which go toward making an effective team. We will examine the different roles that people, by preference, play in a team and consider the pros and cons of these roles within the team. It is important that the leader or manager considers the pros and cons of each team role, the people who play them and the contribution that these people can make to the effectiveness of teams in a variety of settings and scenarios.

The most widely quoted theorist who deals with the make-up of teams is Meredith Belbin. Based on a nine-year study in the early 80s, Belbin identified what he called 'nine key roles' which people play within a team (Belbin, 1996). We will examine each of these roles and consider how you might use this insight to get the best from your team in the workplace. We will also consider the weaknesses associated with each of the team roles and what the manager can expect as a result of these from the various members of their team.

What is important about the roles, as described by Belbin, is that not every team and every goal which a team sets out to address needs all of the role types in it any one time. Some situations and teams will require different combinations of members at any one time. When situations change or different scenarios arise different team roles will be needed and the existing skills and roles of team members will take on a different level of importance in achieving the task in hand. For example, the people needed to run the day-to-day tasks of a team can be very different to the skill sets exhibited by a team who are seeking to drive change or manage a crisis. We will explore a bit more of this later.

People can discover what team roles best suits their personality type by completing what is called 'a Belbin Self-Perception Inventory' (Belbin, 2020), along with input from people who know them best. Notably, most people will exhibit more than one, often two or three, team types with the importance of each team type for the individual varying over time and with the task in hand.

For now we will look at each of the identified

team roles along with its strengths and 'allowable' weaknesses.

## RESOURCE INVESTIGATOR

These people are seen as outgoing and enthusiastic in their approach to work. Their main purpose in the team is that they explore opportunities and are good at generating contacts with people who are useful to the team. Resource investigators may have a tendency to be overly optimistic, and can, once the initial euphoria has passed, become bored with a project.

## TEAMWORKER

People who are teamworkers are as described, the sort of people who like to cooperate with others. They are perceptive in their outlook and listen to others and avoid causing friction — that is to say they are diplomatic in their approach to work and other people. They can, however, avoid confrontation, even when it is justified and may be indecisive at times of crisis.

## COORDINATOR

As the name suggests, coordinators are good at delegation because they are both able to identify the goals that need to be achieved and the people within the team who have the skills to achieve them. They come across as mature and confident and, therefore, naturally lead. Sometime coordinators off-load work to others and can be quietly manipulative.

## PLANT

The individuals identified as plants are free thinking and creative in their approach to work.

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They are able to come up with ideas and solutions to problems others see as intractable. Plants sometimes miss detail and can be too pre-occupied with their ideas, therefore, failing to communicate effectively.

### MONITOR EVALUATOR

Individuals who are monitor evaluators have the ability to step back from situations and make sober judgements based on an assessment of all of the options. Sometimes their approach to issues may be seen by others as overly critical and they often lack the drive and ability to inspire other people.

### SPECIALIST

Specialists know what they want to achieve and devote their energies to achieving it. They don't need prompting by others to get a job done and use their well-developed skills and knowledge base to inform others about what they do. As the term specialist suggests, the skills of this team member are confined to their area of expertise; this means they are prone to dwelling on specific details of an issue which relates to their technical knowledge and skills.

### SHAPER

People described as shapers tend to thrive on pressure and use their enthusiasm to drive change overcoming obstacles by being dynamic and courageous. As one might imagine shapers have a tendency to upset others and can be easily provoked.

### IMPLEMENTER

Implementers get things done. They are the reliable members of the team who use their practical abilities to turn words into action in a way that organises the work of the entire team to get the desired outcome. They do, however, have a tendency to be slow to respond to new ideas and challenges and can be inflexible once they have decided on a course of action.

### COMPLETER FINISHER

As the name suggests, these people like to get things done. They are conscientious and labour over details. They don't like error and tend to try to achieve perfection. They are the sort of people

in the team who worry a lot and may try to do too much as they do not like to delegate to others.

### OVERVIEW


What we can see emerging from these descriptions is that teams consist of a group of people with varying skill sets as well as weaknesses. What is important to recognise is that, in a team setting, no one person is more important than the other, as the varying skills blend together to get the job done. The best teams contain a blend of skills which are complimentary to each other.

What is noteworthy is that many people who work in health and social care settings are team workers and implementers (Ellis, 2019). It is a good career choice for this type of team member as the skills of being able to cooperate with others and to get the job done are requirements of successful health and social care provision.

Different situations or jobs which need to be done will require the application of different skills and personality types. Teams who are failing to achieve their goals may need the input of people with the skillset of coordinators or perhaps finishers to ensure the task is completed correctly. Other teams who are newly put together may benefit from the input of someone who is a shaper. People will always perform at their best, and therefore contribute most to the goals of the team, when they are matched with the tasks which suit their personality type the best.

### CONCLUSION

In this paper in this management series, we have examined the role types which go towards creating a team as well as exploring the strengths and weaknesses associated with each role type. We have seen that the best teams require a good mix of personality types to get the job of the team done. We have seen that the importance of the different role types to the team will vary over time and according to the job which needs to be done; but that in general no one team role is more important than any other.

In the next paper in this series we will look at some of the strategies the manager can use to get to know the team and their individual and collective strengths and weaknesses. We will also consider how the manager might nurture the team. 

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