



## All for one and one for all

Belbin's team role inventory is explained and the advantages and disadvantages are considered.

### The tool

#### What it is?

The Belbin Team Role Inventory is based on global research into managers' behaviour carried out by Meredith Belbin and his team between 1970 and 1979. Participants were split into teams and their core personality traits, intellectual styles and behaviours assessed while they completed a complex management exercise and various psychometric tests. Nine different clusters of behaviour or "team roles" tendencies "to behave, contribute and interrelate with others in a particular way" were identified as underlying the success of the teams. Each team role has a combination of strengths and allowable weaknesses. They include:

- In the doing/acting section: Implementer Well-organised and predictable. Takes basic ideas and makes them work in practice. Can be slow. Shaper Lots of energy and action, challenging others to move forwards. Can be insensitive. Completer-finisher Reliably sees things through to the end, ironing out the wrinkles and ensuring everything works well. Can worry too much and not trust others.
- In the thinking/ problem-solving section: Plant Solves difficult problems with original and creative ideas. Can be a poor communicator and may ignore the details. Monitor-evaluator Sees the big picture. Thinks carefully and accurately. May lack energy or ability to inspire others.
- In the people/feelings section: Co-ordinator Respected leader who helps everyone to focus on their task. Can be seen as excessively controlling. Resource/investigator Explores new ideas and possibilities with energy and with others. Good networker. Can be too optimistic and lose energy after the initial flush.

#### How does it work?

The tool assesses how an individual behaves in a team environment. It is a behavioural tool, subject to change, and not a psychometric instrument, which is one of its main differences from tools such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). It can include 360-degree feedback from observers as well as the individual's own assessment of their behaviour. The test is a simple multiple-choice style questionnaire that can be completed in 20 minutes either online or on paper. A detailed report is compiled showing a person's preference for working in one or more of the nine team roles or highlighting strengths and weaknesses across a team. In practice, most people find that they have three or four "natural" team roles which they can use appropriately depending on the situation.

For more information, visit [www.belbin.info](http://www.belbin.info) or [www.belbin.com](http://www.belbin.com), or read Meredith Belbin's *Management Teams – Why They Succeed or Fail* (Butterworth Heinemann, 2003).

## The administrator

John Blakey, Co-Founder at 121partners, comments :-

'121partners has used the Belbin tool many times as one component of a team coaching event for board-level executives. We find that the tool is very simple and quick to use yet produces a professional report that clients find highly insightful. It acts as an excellent theory exercise prior to a practical team challenge which, in our case, would normally be to ask them to row alongside Olympic athletes in an "eight" with a professional cox. This leads to a debrief on the team's strengths and weaknesses and how shortcomings can be overcome. Participants read their report and discuss it in pairs during the feedback. Back in the team we ask them to share the following findings:

- one they recognise as a strength;
- one they see as a development area;
- one they believe it is important for other team members to know about.

Finally, we map the team's most and least preferred roles on a flip chart and invite them to explore any gaps or biases in the overall team profile. Once these have been identified, we coach the team to generate creative options on how the gaps might be filled.'

## The client

Simon Camamile, National Investment Director at Jones Lang LaSalle, comments :-

'What I most liked about the tool was that it showed relative preferences between the different team roles and broke down perceptions into more objective assessments. It helped us to build our self-knowledge, share this constructively and identify weak areas. The report is helpful in that it shows the results from a number of perspectives, such as working styles, job placement and interview questions.

Using the tool made me more aware of my strengths and reassured me that I could operate in the "completer-finisher" role, even though my ideal role is that of "team player". Again, my weaknesses were all relative to the other team members so it avoided a feeling of there being a right or wrong answer. In this way, I think the tool is more similar to going through 360-degree feedback rather than, say, an MBTI tool, where there is a more black-and-white assessment of which category you fall into.

As a team, we learnt that we were largely complementary personalities with profiles that matched our market. We were all generally strong on the "resource investigator" team role, which highlights the networking skills crucial to our business development responsibilities. There were one or two areas where we would need to reinforce the team. We were short of a "monitor-evaluator" and identified a colleague from our wider team who we thought could fill this role.

Overall, our experience of the tool is that it has built trust and openness in the team and increased knowledge sharing. We were already successful in terms of business results but there was a risk that, because of this rapid growth, we would lose our team spirit and drift into working in individual silos. In an aggressive recruitment market, such approaches ensure that we continue to attract top talent.'

## Belbin Team Role Inventory: pros and cons

### UPSIDE

- Quick and simple to use
- Team behaviour focus rather than individual personality type
- Can be used in 360-degree mode
- Recognises that team roles change
- Helps to improve team performance by clarifying preferred team roles, sharing this information, retaining balance and de-emphasising hierarchy

### DOWNSIDE

- Some aspects of the report may be less relevant, such as suggested interview questions for participants
- Tendency for users to assume that some roles are more important than others, such as the leadership roles of “shaper” and “co-ordinator”

Published: 7 September 2007

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