

co·wonders



team roles

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What is it about:

- Identifying people's dynamics and understanding their roles in groups
- building collaboration and optimising the efficiency of teamworks
- understanding personal strengths and opportunities to improve

source: Book "Management Teams" from Meredith Belbin (1981)

domains: self awareness, group collaboration, leadership, personal and organisational development

approach description:

As Meredith Belbin once said:

"A team is not a bunch of people with job titles, but a congregation of individuals, each of whom has a role that is understood by other members."

What Belbin tries to tell us is that for effective work and communication in a group, each person's role needs to be clear, valued, and recognized by others.

After years of research, Belbin discovered that each person in a team naturally takes on specific roles based on their strengths and personality. These roles define how they contribute to the team's objectives. The outcome of the research is that a balanced team needs a mix of these roles to work effectively.

To reach this balance and optimisation, Belbin identified nine key roles that need to be represented within a team. These roles are grouped into three categories:

- Action-oriented
- People-oriented
- Thought-oriented



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From these groups, we can find three different types of roles:

Team role	Strengths	Allowable weaknesses
Action - Oriented		
Shaper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Challenging, dynamic, thrives on pressure. ● The drive and courage to overcome obstacles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prone to provocation. ● Offends people's feelings.
Implementer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Disciplined, reliable, conservative and efficient. ● Turns ideas into practical actions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Somewhat inflexible. ● Slow to respond to new possibilities.
Completer finisher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Painstaking, conscientious, anxious. ● Searches for errors and omissions. ● Delivers on time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Inclined to worry unduly. Reluctant to delegate.
People - Oriented		
Co-ordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mature, confident, a good chairperson. ● Clarifies goals, promotes decision-making. ● Delegates well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Can often be seen as manipulative. ● Offloads personal work.
Teamworker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Co-operative, mild, perceptive and diplomatic. ● Listens, builds, averts friction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Indecisive in crunch situations.
Resource investigator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Extrovert, enthusiastic, communicative. ● Explores opportunities. ● Develops contacts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Over-optimistic. ● Loses interest once initial enthusiasm has passed.

communication canvas

team roles

Thought - Oriented		
Plant	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Creative, imaginative, unorthodox.● Solves difficult problems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Ignores problems.● Too preoccupied to communicate effectively.
Monitor evaluator	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Sober, strategic and discerning.● See all options.● Judges accurately.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Lacks drive and ability to inspire others.
Specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Single-minded, self-starting, dedicated.● Provides knowledge and skills in rare supply.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Contributes only on a narrow front.● Dwells on technicalities.

Belbin mentioned that one person can excel in one or two roles, but rarely it will go beyond those numbers. The key is to ensure all roles are within the team.

aim of use:

The Nine Belbin's team roles canvas can be used as a tool to improve team or groups performance by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each of the members. It can also support team collaboration, optimise the individual strengths or support their training or upgrading in fields they do not master. Further, this tool can reduce conflicts as it supports the understanding of the people's contributions and limitations.



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educational method:

- **Step 1: Introduction to the Nine team roles**

Write each role (with its strengths and weaknesses) on a piece of paper. One paper, one role. Once done, gather participants together to explain the tool, the differences between the roles and the various strengths/weaknesses of each one.

Put them on the ground and divide them into roles. You can also do this with role cards, assigned randomly to the participants (one card, one role). They will need to play with this role for the next step.

Unite them in groups. Each group needs to have one person for each role.

- **Step 2: Task challenge**

Give the group a team challenge. Choose any of the following examples or create new challenges based on the context and space the activity takes place:

- building a bridge using straws and marshmallows
- creation of a team logo
- surviving a desert island with a list of limited items
- creation of a mystery object built from random objects (and final pitch)
- developing a communication system to talk with aliens, using symbols and gestures

- **Step 3: The observer/s**

Ask a facilitator or a volunteer participant to watch how the team interacts.

- Who takes the lead?
- Who keeps the team motivated?
- Who focuses on details?
- Who makes the work done?

They need to take notes for their feedback.



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educational method:

- **Step 4: Reflection and debriefing**

Bring the participants into the plenary and ask them:

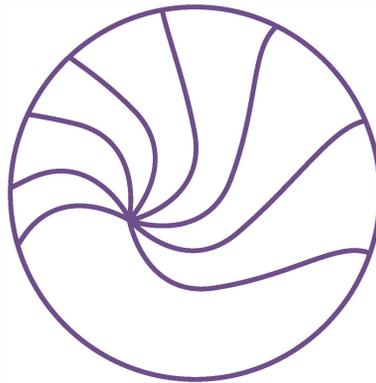
- How did your role influence the task outcome?
- Were any roles influencing too much or missing?
- How did the strengths of your role show up? And the weaknesses?
- What would you like adjust in the team or the process?
- How could the team improve with a better role balance?

Follow up with a couple of debriefing questions:

- What role do you naturally identify with?
- How do knowing our role help us in our communication?
- How can we use this for our day to day teamwork?

And individual work?

At the end, remind them that every role is valuable for the team's success. Close with one takeaway from each of them on Belbin's team roles.



communication canvas

read more:

- **Book:** Team Roles at Work (1993). Meredith Belbin.
- **Podcast:** Unraveling Belbin's team roles model. The Psych in Business podcast. Spotify.
- **Website:** The official website of Belbin learning.
- **Webinar:** Belbin Team Roles - Theory and Application. The Belbin Institute.



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