

The Belbin teamwork system

'What is needed is not well balanced individuals, but individuals who balance well with each other.' Dr Meredith Belbin

Who's Belbin?

Dr. Meredith Belbin is a UK researcher who found that groups need the right mix of people to be effective. His research identified 9 types of people in groups. Fig. 1 shows the nine types with their strengths and weaknesses. Fig. 2 lists the typical sayings of each type. Both will help you identify yourself.

Fig. 1 Nine Belbin types

General role type	BELBIN Team-Role Type	Strengths	(Allowable) Weaknesses
Cerebral	PLANT	Creative, imaginative, unorthodox. Solves difficult problems.	Ignores incidentals. Too pre-occupied to communicate effectively.
	SPECIALIST	Single-minded, self-starting, dedicated. Provides knowledge and skills in rare supply.	Contributes only on a narrow front. Dwells on technicalities.
	MONITOR EVALUATOR	Sober, strategic and discerning. Sees all options. Judges accurately.	Lacks drive and ability to inspire others.
Action-oriented	IMPLEMENTER	Disciplined, reliable, conservative and efficient. Turns ideas into practical actions	Somewhat inflexible. Slow to respond to new possibilities.
	SHAPER	Challenging, dynamic, thrives on pressure. The drive and courage to overcome obstacles.	Prone to provocation. Offends people's feelings
	COMPLETER FINISHER	Painstaking, conscientious, anxious. Searches out errors and omissions. Delivers on time.	Inclined to worry unduly. Reluctant to delegate.
People-oriented	TEAM-WORKER	Co-operative, mild, perceptive and diplomatic. Listens, builds, averts friction.	Indecisive in crunch situations.
	COORDINATOR	Mature, confident, a good chairperson. Clarifies goals, promotes decision-making, delegates well.	Can often be seen as manipulative. Off loads personal work.
	RESOURCE INVESTIGATOR	Extrovert, enthusiastic, communicative. Explores opportunities. Develops contacts.	Over - optimistic. Loses interest once initial enthusiasm has passed.

Fig 2. Recognise your type by what you say

Do any of these sound like you?

Belbin type	Favourite phrases and slogans
PLANT	<p>When a problem is baffling, think laterally. Where there's a problem, there's a solution. The greater the problem, the greater the challenge. Do not disturb, genius at work. Good ideas always seem strange at first. Ideas start with dreaming. Without continuous innovation, there is no survival.</p>
SPECIALIST	<p>In this job you never stop learning. Choose a job you love, and you'll never have to work a day of your life. True professionalism is its own reward. My subject is fascinating to me. The more you know, the more you find to discover. It is better to know a lot about something, than a little about everything. A committee is 12 people doing the work of one.</p>
MONITOR EVALUATOR	<p>I'll think it over and give you a firm decision tomorrow. Have we exhausted all the options? If it does not stand up to logic, it's not worth doing! Better to make the right decision slowly than the wrong one quickly. This looks like the best option on balance. Let's weigh up the alternatives. Decisions should not be based purely on enthusiasm.</p>
IMPLE- MENTER	<p>If it can be done, we will do it. An ounce of action is worth a pound of theory. Hard work never killed anybody. The difficult we do it immediately. The impossible takes a little longer. To err is human, to forgive is not company policy. Let's get down to the task in hand. The company has my full support.</p>

Sheet 8 Belbin exercise

SHAPER	<p>Just do it! Say 'no', then negotiate. If you say 'yes I will do it', I expect it to be done. I'm not satisfied we are achieving all we can. I may be blunt, but at least I am to the point. I'll get things moving. When the going gets tough, the tough get going.</p>
COMPLETER FINISHER	<p>This is something that demands our undivided attention. The small print is always worth reading. Murphy's Law 'If that can go wrong will go wrong' ... O'Toole's Law: 'Murphy was an optimist'. There is no excuse for not being perfect. Perfection is only just good enough. A stitch in time saves nine. Has it been checked?</p>
TEAM- WORKER	<p>Courtesy costs nothing. I was very interested in your point of view. If it's all right with you, it's all right with me. Everybody has a good side worth appealing to. If people listened to themselves more, they would talk less. You can always sense a good atmosphere at work. I try to be versatile.</p>
CO- ORDINATOR	<p>Let's keep the main objective in sight. Has anyone else got anything to add to this? We like to reach a consensus before we move forward. Never assume that silence means approval. I think that we should give someone else a chance. Good delegation is an art. Management is the art of getting other people to do all the work.</p>
RESOURCE INVESTI- GATOR	<p>We could make a fortune out of that. Ideas should be stolen with pride. Never reinvent the wheel. Opportunities arise from other people's mistakes. Surely we can exploit that? You can always telephone to find out. Time spent in reconnaissance is seldom wasted.</p>

Now do these activities...

Activity 1 Identify individual roles

Sit in pairs. Take turns to tell each other about groups you've belonged to. They can include family, friends, work and recreational groups. Describe your role in these groups. Then, with your partner's help, match the description to the Belbin types. Consider that.....

You might be more than one role type.

You might assume different roles in different groups.

You can take a role, even one you aren't familiar with, if the group needs it.

Activity 2 Work out team roles

People volunteer to be Co-ordinator, Completer/Finisher and Recorder for this exercise.

You have to listen to the questions and answers and fill in the team role grid (Fig. 3).

(You can make your own grid if you prefer).

Fig. 3 Team Roles

Name of group member	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
PLANT					
SPECIALIST					
MONITOR EVALUATOR					
IMPLEMENTER					
SHAPER					
COMPLETER FINISHER					
TEAMWORKER					
CO-ORDINATOR					
RESOURCE INVESTIGATOR					

Instructions

** Mark 2 asterisks in the appropriate box if the group member shows strong characteristics of a Belbin type.

* Mark on asterisk if the group member shows the characteristics to some extent.

Activity 3 What's missing?

Answer these questions

What roles are not filled by members of this group?

What action should the group take to overcome this potential problem?

Reference

Belbin M. (1993) *Team Roles at Work*; Butterworth/Heinemann 0 7506 0925 7