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## **Belbin Team Roles: Theory and Practice · Activecollab Blog**

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8-11 minutes

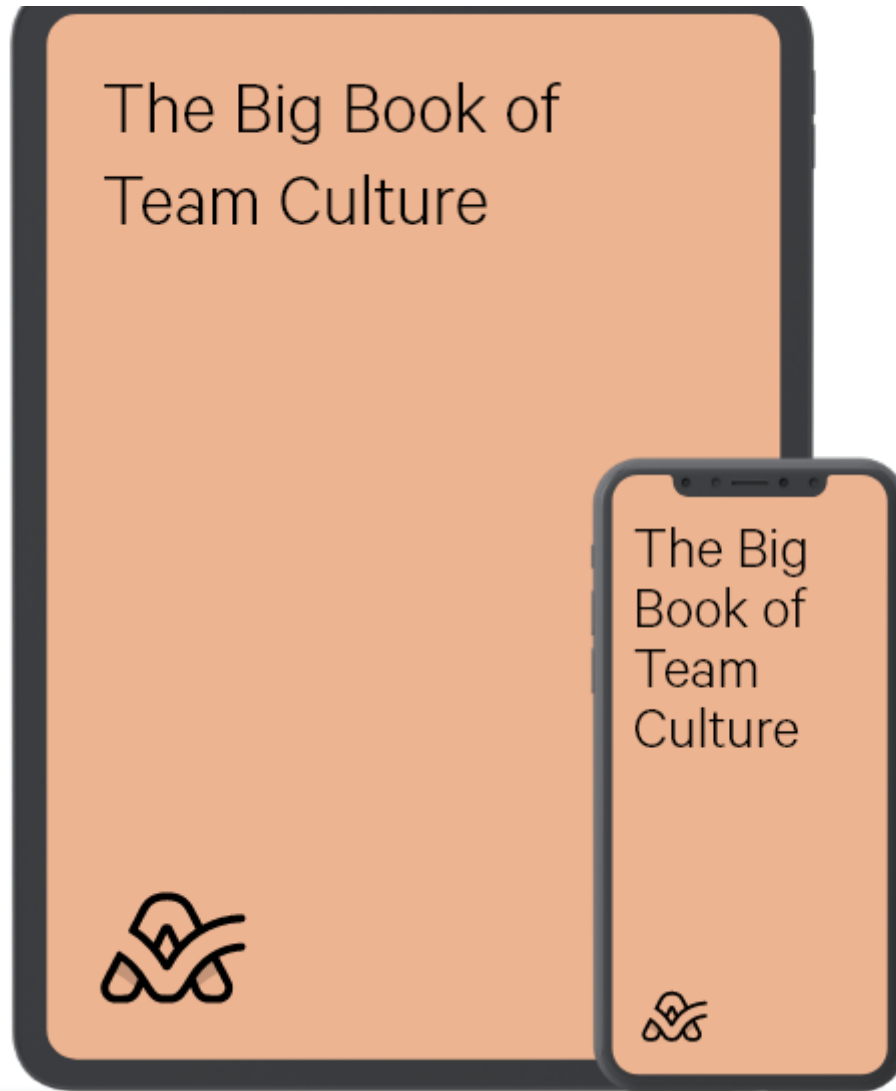
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Why is your team successful? Why is your team failing? Dr. Belbin has an answer.

Dr. Raymond Meredith Belbin is the leading authority on team roles. His research, which spanned more than 40 years, showed that it is more important how members fit together than how smart they individually are.

Successful teams were comprised of members with different and compatible roles, while unsuccessful ones were characterized by constant conflicts between members with similar tendencies and personalities.





## **The Big Book of Team Culture**

This article is just a small part of our Big Book of Team Culture. Get

your hands on this free ebook and learn what makes a great team, how to improve teamwork, what it means to be a leader in a modern workplace, and how to create positive team culture - all in one place.

## **What Happens When You Make a Team out of A-Players**

Belbin's research produced several [personality tests](#) that enabled experts to determine if an individual will become a business superstar. Those who passed with flying colors were smarter, had better analytical skills, and were better than others in almost every aspect. Logically, the next step in the research was to create a super team made up entirely of these outstanding individuals.

Belbin named them the Apollo team. Expectations were high as everyone thought the superstars of the Apollo team would achieve success effortlessly. However, it turned out that the team made out of the strongest individuals is not as effective as it should be - what's more, it usually performed worse than a regular team.

The Apollo team members had spent most of their time debating

and trying to persuade other members that their point of view was the correct one. However, no one was willing to change their point of view and each member loved to find holes in each others' arguments. The team couldn't reach a decision together while more pressing jobs were completely neglected.

## **Belbin Team Roles**

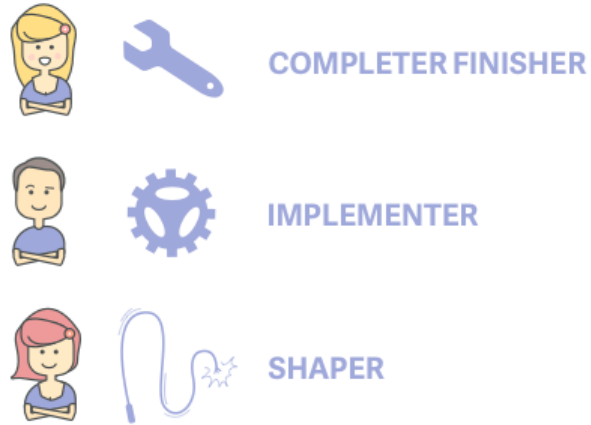
The Apollo team experiment proved that good teams require balance. Over the course of years, Belbin defined nine possible team roles, which he categorized into three groups:

### **Action-Oriented Roles**

Action-oriented roles focus on improving team's performance, putting ideas into action, and meeting deadlines. The three action-oriented roles are:

- **Shaper** - extrovert that questions assumptions
- **Implementer** - brings self-discipline to the team
- **Completer Finisher** - pays attention to the smallest details and makes sure things are done right

### Action-oriented roles



### People-Oriented Roles

People-oriented roles bring people and ideas together. The three people-oriented roles are:

- **Coordinator** - brings order into the team
- **Team worker** - provides support to the team in a diplomatic way
- **Resource Investigator** - develops outside contacts

### People-oriented roles





## Thought-Oriented Roles

Thought oriented roles analyze options and provide technical expertise. The three cerebral roles are:

**Plant** - comes up with innovative, ground-breaking solutions

**Monitor evaluator** - assesses team decisions analytically and critically

**Specialist** - experts in a particular subject matter

### *Thought-oriented roles*





PLANT

Roles characteristics, contribution, and weaknesses

Each Belbin team role comes with its set of characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses (some of which are allowable and others that are not).

Belbin team roles

Roles	Characteristics	Strengths	Allowable weaknesses	Not-allowable weaknesses
<b>Action oriented roles</b>				
<b>Shaper</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenging</li> <li>• Dynamic</li> <li>• Thrives on pressure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the drive to overcome the pressure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provokes others</li> <li>• Hurts peoples' feelings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inability to recover situation with good humour or apology</li> </ul>
<b>Completer Finisher</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Painstaking</li> <li>• Conscientious</li> <li>• Anxious</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Searches out errors and omissions</li> <li>• Delivers on time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclined to worry unduly</li> <li>• Reluctant to delegate</li> <li>• A nit-picker</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obsessional behaviour</li> </ul>
<b>Implementer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disciplined</li> <li>• Reliable</li> <li>• Conservative</li> <li>• Efficient</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turns ideas into practical solutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Somewhat inflexible</li> <li>• Slow to respond to new possibilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obstructing change</li> </ul>
<b>People oriented roles</b>				
<b>Teamworker</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-operative</li> <li>• Mild</li> <li>• Perceptive</li> <li>• Diplomatic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listens</li> <li>• Builds</li> <li>• Averts friction</li> <li>• Calms the waters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indecisive in crush situations</li> <li>• Can be easily influenced</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoiding situations that may entail pressure</li> </ul>
<b>Resource Investigator</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extrovert</li> <li>• Enthusiastic</li> <li>• Communicative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explores opportunities</li> <li>• Develops contacts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over-optimistic</li> <li>• Loses interest once initial enthusiasm has passed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letting clients down by neglecting to follow-up arrangements</li> </ul>
<b>Coordinator</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mature</li> <li>• Confident</li> <li>• A good chairperson</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarifies goals</li> <li>• Promotes decision making</li> <li>• Delegates well</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delegates personal work</li> <li>• Inclination to laziness once someone takes over</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking credit for the effort of a team</li> </ul>
<b>Thought oriented roles</b>				
<b>Plant</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative</li> <li>• Imaginative</li> <li>• Unorthodox</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solves difficult problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ignores details</li> <li>• Too preoccupied to communicate effectively</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong ownership of idea when co-operation with others would yield better results</li> </ul>
<b>Monitor Evaluator</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sober</li> <li>• Strategic</li> <li>• Discerning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sees all options</li> <li>• Judges accurately</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sceptic</li> <li>• Lacks drive and ability to inspire others</li> <li>• Overly critical</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cynicism without logic</li> </ul>
<b>Specialist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single-minded</li> <li>• Self-starting</li> <li>• Dedicated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides knowledge and skills in rare supply</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contributes on only a narrow front</li> <li>• Dwells on technicalities</li> <li>• Overlooks the big picture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ignoring factors outside own area of competence</li> </ul>

## Ideal Team for a Small Business



To have a well-functioning team, it would be ideal to have a member for each role. However, to make that happen, you would need a team of at least 9 people. Since small businesses often work with smaller teams, it is only fair to ask: how would Belbin construct a successful small team?

Firstly, it would be ideal if the team had 6 members. Belbin's research has proven that teams with less than 6 members struggle with work and overlapping duties, while teams with more members (7+) tend to get lazy and do the same amount of work as the six-member team.

Secondly, Belbin claims that successful small team should have one Coordinator, one Implementer, and one Plant. Those are a must. Choose other roles as you see fit.

You are probably wondering: "If I have a task that requires creative solution, why don't I just gather three 'Plant' members and let them work their magic?" It turns out, you shouldn't do this.

During his research, Dr. Belbin wanted to know how teams made of people with similar personalities function in everyday business environment, and how they cope when it comes to problem-solving. To achieve this, he divided examinees into four groups based on

their personalities:

- **Stable Extroverts** - Excellent communicators. They are best as sales representatives or HR managers.
- **Anxious Extroverts** - Ideal for high-paced working environments. They are most likely to work as sales managers, works managers, and editors.
- **Stable Introverts** - Perfect for long-lasting, close-knit teams. Their usual occupations are administrators, solicitors, government officials, and corporate planners.
- **Anxious Introverts** - They excel at individual jobs that require self-direction and self-sustaining persistence. These are extremely creative people, research scientists, and specialists on long-term assignments.

Each group was divided into a number of teams.

These newly formed 'pure' teams brought out extremes in behavior and effects. Results showed that purely extroverted teams had a higher rate of success than purely introverted ones. On the other hand, there were differences in results as each group had strengths and weaknesses:

- **Stable Extrovert teams** - These teams work well together, enjoy group work, have a versatile approach, and use resources well. However, they are inclined to be euphoric and lazy. They had achieved good results overall, but are dependent on one another.
- **Anxious Extrovert teams** - They are dynamic and entrepreneurial, good at seizing opportunities, and prone to the healthy disagreements. On the other hand they are easily distracted and can quickly stray off topic. They had excellent results in rapidly changing situations, but were utterly unreliable at other times.
- **Stable Introvert teams** - Excellent planning and strong organization are their strong suits. However, they tend to be slow-moving and often neglect new factors in a situation. When it comes to results, team members didn't really care whether they were good or bad.
- **Anxious Introvert teams** - These teams are capable of good ideas, but have a tendency to get preoccupied and often lack team cohesion. Naturally, their results were poor.

In some cases, different teams of the same group achieved different results. After closer analysis, Belbin determined that every 'pure' team that achieved a noticeable result had one thing in

common: one of the members has taken the role of an **Implementer**.

Implementers were not simply team members who only did or arranged things (most work involves both). In behavioral terms, they were people who essentially worked for the company, rather than in pursuit of self-interest, and did so in a practical and realistic way. They could identify with the organization and would accept and look for goals in work that fell in line with its ideals and aspirations. There was never any question that jobs would not be done because they did not feel like it or it did not interest them. - R.M. Belbin, [Management teams - Why do they succeed and fail](#)

These Implementers were:

- Disciplined individuals who got work done swiftly and systematically;
- Tough-minded, practical, trusting, and tolerant towards others;
- Conscientious and aware of external obligations;
- Respectful of existing conditions and ways of looking at things;
- With a well-developed sense of self-image and a high degree of internal control.

Belbin figured out that he finally found the secret sauce for the perfect worker. Therefore, the next logical experiment was to create a team made entirely out of Implementers.

Just like with the Apollo team, expectations were high. And just like with the Apollo team, these teams of 'perfect workers' turned out to be a disappointment. According to the findings, they produced average results at best. Implementers were well organised and diligent, but lacked any real ideas. They were strongly committed to anything they set in motion, but were disturbed if plans changed. Simply put - they worked well but failed to get good results.

## **Final Words**

Just like in the [Group vs Team](#) matter, Dr. Belbin proved that closely knit teams of compatible members will get you much further than the group of highly intelligent but stubborn individuals. So, when making a team, take your time with the [recruitment process](#), and choose your team members carefully - because in the end, they will be the ones who bring you success or failure.

To find out your Belbin role, visit the [Belbin web page](#) and apply for an official test. You can also take this [free Belbin test alternative](#).

