

Working together as a team

In the following descriptions will be given of the eight team-roles of Belbin.

First a description is given of the role and its strong and weak points. Next, the features per role are described again plus examples that further explain the role.

It is important for each team member to know which category he / she belongs to, i.e. to know what his / her value is.

A second goal of the descriptions is to understand which roles can be played by other team members.

Behavior can be better explained that way and is probably easier to accept.

Excerpt from "Team-Rol Management" by drs. R. Groen.

COORDINATOR

Role:

- Controlling the way in which the team tries to accomplish its objectives, in which optimal use is made of the capacities available.
- Recognition of everybody's strong and weak points.
- Making sure the best possible use is made of the best points of each team member.

Characteristics:

Strong points

- The power to command respect
- The power to make people enthusiastic
- A sense of timing and balance
- Good communicative skills

Acceptable weak points

- No striking creative or intellectual powers

Characteristics in detail:

A coordinator is stable, dominant and extravert. Coordinator is one of those slightly misleading labels because he is not necessarily the leader of the team. Leading a team however is his most suitable position. He will often suggest to chair the meeting and therefore has the task of co-ordinating the meeting.

He controls the input of others and links proposals. He reaches compromises if necessary. He mainly distinguishes himself by being strongly oriented with the objectives to be achieved. He is reasonably intelligent – definitely not brilliant – and not particularly creative; only rarely he comes up with original ideas.

He has backbone and his approach to matters is disciplined because of his considerable self-discipline. He has a certain amount of charisma, i.e. he has natural authority. He is dominant but in a calm and controlled way: he is not overbearing. He trusts people until they betray his trust and is without jealousy. He has insight into the strong and weak points of each team member and makes people to do the things they are best in.

He is highly aware of the need to make effective use of joint capacities. He divides the roles in the group, makes clear boundaries concerning activities, spots gaps and indicates steps to bridge those gaps.

The coordinator is the person who makes sure that everyone knows what has to be done and he runs the meeting. He works out which points the team has to consider, he determines priorities, but tries to avoid dominating the discussion.

His contribution in the beginning of the discussion usually consists of asking questions rather than making proposals. He listens and summarizes the feelings of the group, points out bottlenecks and if a decision needs to be taken he does so without hesitation, but only after everyone has had their say.

SHAPER

Role:

- Gives shape or direction to the efforts of the team, in which he mainly tries to clarify objectives and to indicate priorities.
- Looks for patterns in discussions and tries to give shape to them.
- Is very much oriented towards results and makes sure all activities contribute to this.

Characteristics:

Strong points

- Enthusiasm
- Energetic

Acceptable weak points

- Intolerance with regard to vague ideas and people

Characteristics in detail:

A shaper is restless, dominant and extravert. In the scientific team of Belbin it sometimes is suggested that the team should have a social leader – the permanent chief – and a separate project leader. The project leader would have supervision over a special task or project. If they were right then the shaper would be the project leader and the coordinator would be the social leader.

In cases where a team has no coordinator or where the coordinator is not the true leader, the shaper usually is the real leader. The shaper generally bubbles with nervous energy. He's quick, stimulating, impulsive, and impatient and can be sharp at times with a tendency to be quickly frustrated. He is happy with every challenge. He quickly gets into a fight, but just as easily forgets the incident and doesn't harbour grudges. He is the team member to suffer from the highest level of paranoia; he is very sensitive to remarks belittling him, because he is quick to conclude that he is becoming the victim of a conspiracy.

The most important job of the shaper is to provide a shape or direction for the efforts of the team and he often makes a more important contribution than the coordinator does in this. He looks for certain patterns in discussions and tries to link ideas, goals and practical considerations into one whole to work on them directly. The shaper has little self-confidence, is constantly plagued with doubts about his personal qualities and can only achieve results by receiving confirmation.

He is always busy with the things he wants to achieve; often these are the objectives of the group, but in contrast with the coordinator he views the group as an extension to his own ego. He wants action – and preferably as soon as possible. He is a go-getter and does not tolerate vague indirect methods of thinking.

People outside the team may characterise him as arrogant and even irritating.

Even the members of the team may feel threatened by him from time to time and he can be the source of uneasy situations. But above all he is the person who makes sure that things will be done.

PLANT

Role:

- Generates new ideas and strategies, especially in connection with important subjects.
- Looks for possible openings in problems with which the group is confronted.

Characteristics:

Strong points

- Highly intelligent
- Independent of opinion
- Strong powers of imagination

Acceptable weak points

- Tends to be impractical
- Head in the clouds sometimes
- Bad at communicating with others

Characteristics in detail:

The plant is dominant, has an extremely high IQ and is introvert. His special name originates from the fact that it has proven to be an efficient way of working by transplanting someone with his characteristics into an uninspired team. One can also view him as someone who throws around ideas that other people have to nurture and mature.

The plant is the person who has original ideas and suggestions. Naturally the plant is not the only one to come up with ideas, but his ideas are characterised by originality, much like the way he tackles problems and obstacles. He has the greatest powers of imagination and the highest intelligence of the team; he is the person to come up with a new solution to an old problem and who can find surprising new avenues of thought when a team gets stuck.

He is more interested in outlines than in details and can make terrible errors concerning these details. There is a dangerous side to the plant: he has the tendency to put too much creative energy into his creations and to ignore reality. Sometimes he is very sensitive to criticism regarding his thoughts and is quickly insulted if they are brushed aside. It can even happen that he haughtily decides to stop contributing to the discussion.

You need special instructions to handle him and flattery is sometimes needed (usually from the coordinator) to get him to perform at his best. But, setting aside his flaws, the plant is a constant source of inspiration.

MONITOR EVALUATOR

Role:

- Analyses problems.
- Evaluates ideas and suggestions, so that the team can make a balanced decision.

Characteristics:

Strong points

- Powers of critical thought
- Objective
- Able to see through the complexity of proposals

Acceptable weak points

- Too critical
- Boring and immovable
- A little bit too serious

Characteristics in detail:

The monitor evaluator has a high IQ and is stable and introvert. In a balanced team only the plant and monitor evaluator need a truly high intelligence. In contrast with the plant, the monitor evaluator is a cold fish. He is serious and does not cause much excitement. His contribution lies far more in careful analysis than in creative thoughts; he is the one to stop the team from making the wrong decision and starting the wrong project.

Although he is sceptical by nature, he does not ventilate criticism for its own sake, but only because he detects weak spots in a plan or in an argument. Oddly enough he is the team member with the least motivation; he hardly ever displays any enthusiasm, let alone euphoria, but the advantage is that he can make rational decisions and that his personal interests are no obstacle. He takes his time to make a decision; he wants to consider and reconsider everything and is the most objective person in the team.

One of his great values is that he can cope with, process and evaluate large amounts of information. Moreover, he is good at pointing out and exposing the problems and opinions of others in the team. He can make himself rather unpopular through his lack of tact and he sometimes slams on the breaks by reacting cautiously to the team's enthusiasm about something. Though he is not very ambitious, he does compete now and then with people who partly share his qualities, e.g. the coordinator and the plant.

The monitor evaluator finds it problematic to choose the most reasonable attitude and to remain open to change. The danger is that he can have a negative influence on the team through his critical attitude, thus obstructing other members from suggesting and working out new ideas. He has a solid reliable nature, is neither joyous nor cordial and lacks much imagination and spontaneity. He has one characteristic that makes him indispensable to practically every team: his judgement is nearly always right.

IMPLEMENTER

Role:

- Turns plans and strategies into practical, usable procedures.
- Carries out what is agreed systematically and efficiently.

Characteristics:

Strong points

- Self-control and self-discipline
- Realism
- Is practical and has common sense

Acceptable weak points

- Lack of flexibility
- Not open to ideas of which it isn't directly clear what kind of value they'll have

Characteristics in detail:

The implementer is stable and controlled. He is a practical person and organiser. He makes sure that decisions and strategies are turned into real activities. He deals with things that have to be done. His most important contribution consists of turning team plans into clear tasks.

Just like the coordinator he has a strong nature and a disciplined approach. His directness and integrity distinguishes him; he trusts his colleagues, is not easily discouraged, but can be shaken by a sudden fundamental change of plans. He requires solid structures and works to attain them.

Give him a decision and he'll find a perfect scheme to work it out, give him a group of people and a task and he will figure out a production plan. His working method is effective, systematic and structured. He lacks flexibility and is not very open to speculative ideas that do not have clear paths for development. At the same time he is quite prepared to adapt his schemes so that they fit in with existing plans.

The implementer sometimes fights for his position in the team, which can sometimes be harmful. His defensive behaviour can lead to negative, non-constructive criticism regarding the suggestions of others. Nevertheless, he is the one to ensure progress by bridging the gap between the thinkers and the doers. If someone forgets what has been agreed and what everyone is expected to do, he can consult the implementer for the right steps.

TEAMWORKER

Role:

- Encourages team members to use their strong points (e.g. works with the suggestions of others) and supports team members if their shortcomings get in their way.
- Improves team communication.
- Cherishes and cultivates team spirit.

Characteristics:

Strong points

- Service-oriented and helpful
- Flexible
- Is a good listener

Acceptable weak points

- Indecisive and lacks backbone
- Dislikes group friction and competition

Characteristics in detail:

The teamworker is stable, extravert and not dominating. The teamworker is the most sensitive member of the team; he is keenly aware of the needs of each member and what bothers team members. He knows the most about the private lives of team members. He is the most active in the field of communication within the group; he is popular, nice and not arrogant, in short he is the cement that keeps the team together.

He is loyal to the team as a unit (which is not to say that he won't choose side if asked) and lends support to his colleagues.

If someone comes up with an idea, he builds on it instead of criticising it or suggesting another idea. He is good at listening and enjoys listening, and he encourages others to do the same. Considering he strives for unity and harmony, he tries to counteract friction in the group as a result of behaviour of the shaper, plant or sometimes even the monitor evaluator. He has a great dislike for ugly confrontations, avoids them himself and tries to turn them around with others.

The teamworker contributes by means of his sympathy, understanding, loyalty and support; he is especially important when the team has to work under pressure or is in trouble. Because he is not ambitious and wants to avoid conflicts, people sometimes have the impression that he is too soft and indecisive.

However, these characteristics do make him a permanent fighter of discord and disagreement in the team. He is an exemplary team member and though it is not always clear what his role is under normal circumstances, it is quite noticeable when he is absent – especially in tense situations.

RESOURCE INVESTIGATOR

Role:

- Looks for new ideas, developments and information outside the group and reports on this.
- Taps external contacts that could be useful for the team.
- Provides information about all sorts of scenarios.

Characteristics:

Strong points

- An extrovert personality
- A curious mind
- Positive to look into matters and new options

Acceptable weak points

- Over-enthusiastic
- Not interested in follow-up

Characteristics in detail:

The resource investigator is stable, dominant and extrovert. He is the most fascinating of all the team members. He is relaxed, social and pleasant to work with. He is positive and easily becomes enthusiastic, although he just as easily drops things as picks them up. The source researcher is the one who looks for information, ideas and interesting developments.

He easily makes friends and has many contacts outside the company. He is seldom in his office and if he's there he usually is phoning someone. He is the salesman, the diplomat, the liaison officer and is always looking for new options offered by the outside world. Outsiders often view him as a man of ideas, because he stimulates new thought and loves innovation, but he lacks the originality that makes the plant a true man of ideas. He is capable of assessing how important new ideas can be.

If he is not stimulated by others (e.g. if he is on his own) then he quickly becomes bored, demoralised and loses his effectiveness, but within a team he is good at improvising. He is at his best when he is under pressure, but he takes his ease when there is little to do.

Sometimes he carries out activities that are irrelevant and much like the plant he can get occupied by tied down with irrelevant matters. Nevertheless, he is the one who stops the team from stagnating, from getting stuck on a point and he can ensure that people do not lose sight of what works in the real world.

COMPLETER FINISHER

Role:

- Makes sure the team is saved from the trouble of things going wrong and watches out that nothing is overlooked.
- Continuously looks for elements in work that need special attention.
- Radiates a sense of hastiness, which tends to push the team.

Characteristics:

Strong points

- The power to combine a sense of care with a sense of order and efficiency
- Strong personality

Acceptable weak points

- Intolerance of people with a superficial attitude and superficial habits
- Restlessness

Characteristics in detail:

The finisher is calm and introvert. The finisher is always worried that things can go wrong. He only feels happy when he has had the chance to personally check everything and is sure nothing is forgotten.

He is not deliberately fussy, but his obsession indicates how worried he is about the way things go. The finisher does not feel the need to be a strong team member, but always radiates a sense of hastiness that makes him push the team.

He has good self-control, has a strong personality and is unforgiving for easy-going team members. If the finisher is obsessed with something then it is sure to be dealt with; he always watches the deadline for things and always sticks to agreed schemes. If he lets himself go, he can become overprotective and depress the rest of the team.

He can also lose sight of the whole picture and become tied up with details. The way in which he restlessly follows everything and everybody makes him a valuable team member.