

# Understanding Team Role Theory

The whiz-kid, the steady plodder, the knocker of ideas, the loyal company slave,...We've all met them at some time - or worked with them. Individually they may drive us mad. For too many years the search for successful management has been seen almost exclusively as a search for the right individual. Corporations have been preoccupied with the qualifications, experience and achievement of individuals. Yet all of us know in our hearts that the ideal individual for a given job cannot be found. He/she cannot be found because he/she cannot exist.

Any attempt to list qualities of a good manager will demonstrate why one cannot exist; far too many of the qualities are mutually exclusive. The manager must be highly intelligent but, must not be too clever. The manager must be highly forceful and must be sensitive to people's feelings. On one hand the manager must be dynamic and on the other must be patient. The manager must be a fluent communicator and a good listener. He/she must be decisive and he/she must be reflective; and so on. And if you do find this jewel among managers, this paragon of mutually incompatible characteristics, what will you do when this supreme being steps under a bus, or goes to live abroad for the sake of their partners health, or leaves to take up a better job with your principal competitor? But if no individual can combine all these qualities, a team of individuals certainly can - and often does; moreover the whole team is unlikely to step under a bus simultaneously. This is why it is not the individual but the team that is key to the success of any enterprise.

## **NOBODY'S PERFECT**

- but a team can be

The following document is an extract from a much larger research dissertation which looks into the impact and effects of team working within manufacturing. I hope this extract helps you to understand some of the concepts and thinking behind Belbin's work. I also hope you will gain some understanding about yourself and your 'team role' contribution, so please read this with your own team role profile to hand.

Thank you.

*Malcolm Yates*

# The Concept of Team Roles

Buchanan and Huczynski (1985) consider that the structure of a group can be differentiated in the following ways: liking, status, power, leadership and role and it was on the latter that this work centres. Buchanan and Huczynski (1985) also note that most people have in fact two roles within a group; the role they perceive that they should have and the role that they actually enact. Belbin's work (1981) which is discussed in the body of this document attempts to encourage convergence between the two, and will also look at the difference between the functional role within the group that the members are allocated and the more personality based team role that they adopt naturally.

A large number of courses and seminars on recruitment in the early eighties which were designed to help in ascertaining methods of effective appointment, based on the functional role the person was to play, qualifications, experience, attitude, appearance etc. were all considered. What was lacking was a method of deciding whether the person would fit in with the team already in place. Hastings (1986) comments that distinction needs to be made between functional and team roles if the group or team is to function effectively.

In the Spring of 1991 participants in this study were involved in a course for newly promoted junior managers and supervisors from one of the client companies. The management team were taken to the North Lakes Hotel in Penrith and set a series of tasks which basically revolved round the use of the swimming pool. Most of the tasks involved constructing a bridge on the bottom of the swimming pool using the plastic scaffolding developed by "Quadro". One member of the team was so terrified of going in the swimming pool she could not fulfil her functional role so instead she fetched towels and made coffee and generally attended to anything that was required outside of the pool. At the debriefing, all involved said that she had fulfilled a need for the team and had not let them down, although she felt she had. Her Belbin profile was that of a Team Worker (see later) and her team role but not her functional role appears to have been critical to the team's success. The team roles as described by Belbin (1981): *A pattern of behaviour characteristic of the way in which one team member interacts with another where his or her performance serves to facilitate the progress of a team as a whole.*

Bales (1950) was one of the first to categorise team as opposed to functional roles using the process he called "Interaction Process Analysis" which had twelve categories ranging from showing solidarity and helping to showing antagonism. His argument was that knowledge of how the internal group inter-reactions were managed would give an indication of how the group managed its tasks and relationships with the outside.

The work of Meredith Belbin (1981) initially at the Henley Management Centre and latterly at Cambridge, has provided a clearer insight into the internal group relationships and the clarification of the roles needed for a team or group to work effectively. It is necessary to look briefly at his findings and the way in which they have been applied to this study.

Belbin's work with a large number of managers suggested that there were nine possible team roles that a person can adopt (originally eight). Some are natural roles and some are roles that a person can adopt if necessary and some are roles that a person finds very hard to adopt.

Other work such as that carried out by Margerison and McCann (1985) has come up with very similar findings. The team types Belbin postulated are:

- (PL) *Plant* - very creative, the ideas person
- (RI) *Resource Investigator* - extrovert, good at making outside contacts and developing ideas.
- (ME) *Monitor Evaluator* - shrewd and prudent, analytical.
- (SH) *Shaper* - dynamic and challenging.
- (CO) *Co-ordinator* - respected, mature and good at ensuring that talents are used effectively.
- (IMP) *Implementer* - practical, loyal and task orientated.
- (CF) *Completer Finisher* - meticulous and with attention to detail also full of nervous energy.
- (TW) *Team Worker* - caring and very person orientated.
- (SP) *Specialist* - high technical skill and professional as opposed to organisational prime loyalties.

Later Margerison and McCann (1985) produced a similar classification. They saw roles in terms of those who were most happily suited to innovating, promoting, developing, organising, producing, inspecting, maintaining and advising. These roles clearly correlate with the Belbin roles viz:

<b>Belbin</b>	<b>v</b>	<b>Margerison</b>
Plant	v	Innovating/Promoting
Resource Investigator	v	Promoting/Developing
Monitor Evaluator	v	Inspecting/Advising
Shaper	v	Maintaining/Developing
Co-ordinator	v	Organising
Completer Finisher	v	Inspecting
Implementer	v	Producing
Team Worker	v	Maintaining

These correlation's were produced as a result of nearly 200 discussions with managers and represent the majority view having looked at the work of Belbin, Margerison and McCann in considerable detail.

For each of the team roles strengths quoted above, Belbin considered there were allowable weaknesses, the price that had to be paid for the strengths. In attempting to understand how the Belbin team role theory can be applied, practically to organisational restructuring, then a thorough understanding of each of the individual team roles and how they interrelate is perhaps worthy of consideration at this time.

The individuals first role is obvious. e.g. Engineer, Administrator, Nurse, etc. But the second role, what Belbin (1981) would call the team role, is much less obvious, and yet in a sense we have all been dimly aware of it ever since we first started to work in teams. We know, for instance, that one person is always coming up with bright ideas, that another wants to get decisions finalised and tasks allocated, and that yet another tends to pour cold water on other people's proposals. Furthermore, we know that these people are likely to show these same characteristics whatever team they are in - the new product planning group, the social committee of the golf club, or the board of governors of the local school. Belbin's research

has shown there cannot be all that many of these characteristic roles that crop up again and again. Belbin also discovered that it can be helpful to the team's efforts to have a number of different temperament types within a group to play off and balance each other.

It is these enduring characteristics, these team roles, that have been the subject of Belbin's (1981) research. The result is that he has isolated and identified just nine roles as the only ones available to team members. He was able to do so by finding a unique human laboratory and being able to work in it for seven years, forming his hypotheses, testing, discarding, revising and re-testing, until he was able to produce a remarkable study of the anatomy of teams with a quite unusual volume of experimental evidence to support it.

The unique laboratory was the Administrative Staff College at Henley, Oxon, which runs an internationally famous 10 week course for successful middle-managers with board potential. One part of this course is a business game in which eight syndicates compete against each other and periodically feed their decisions into a computer until finally the winner is declared and each syndicate is placed in order of success from 1 - 8. In 1969 Belbin was invited to use this business game as a starting point for a study of team behaviour.

Belbin came to Henley as a highly respected academic/industrialist, chairman and co-founder of the Industrial Training Research Unit, which was funded by the Manpower Services Commission. Having an interest in group as well as individual behaviour, but with no particular theories about teams, he enlisted the aid of three other scholars. Bill Harston, mathematician and international chess master, Jeanne Fisher, an anthropologist who had studied Kenyan tribes, and Roger Mottram, an occupational psychologist. Together they began what was to be a seven year task. Three business games a year with eight teams in each game, and the game itself remaining substantially unchanged, generates a great volume of data, especially if you are sitting in on meeting after meeting, observing, categorising and recording all the different kinds of contribution from team members.

On top of that, a seven year time spread gave ample opportunity to revise hypotheses and re-test them. But it did more. It enabled Belbin and his colleagues to improve their own psychometric tests so that they could determine before the business game began which team type the different individuals belonged to, and then to make their own predictions of the finishing order of the eight teams on the basis of the different balances of team types and the conclusions they had reached about the building of good teams. It is their impressive record in prediction that makes their discoveries so unusually convincing, although Belbin maintains that it is far easier to forecast correctly teams that will fail, than teams sure to succeed. In later stages of his work, Belbin and his team developed the uncanny skill of being able to construct successful teams from test scores without needing to visit an establishment or meet those tested.

The advantage of knowing personally each individual picked for a team can be wasted without the benefit of a guiding team role theory. Most managers seem prone to pick a team of all the cleverest and most talented people they can find. Unfortunately for them, the most disaster-prone team is the one that is exclusively composed of very clever people. (The Apollo syndrome) (Belbin 1981).

Over the years of his research, first at Henley and subsequently within the real business world extending from Britain to Australia, Belbin and his colleagues learned to recognise individuals

who made a crucial difference to teams and to whose team types he gave descriptive names. The reason for these names is not always obvious, and the names themselves are sometimes a little misleading, but it seems sensible to use them, with the proviso that it is the descriptions, not their labels, that are important. Not everyone they tested and observed belonged to one of the nine types; about 30% did not fall clearly into any category.

Belbin's psychometric tests were used first to relate observed team behaviour to measured psychological traits, and then - when they had learnt how to identify people's team roles from their test results - to construct balanced teams and to predict the outcome of the game. Four principal factors isolated by the tests were:-

1. Intelligence
2. Dominance
3. Extroversion/Introversion
4. Stability/Anxiety

It was the balance of ratings an individual achieved on these four scales plus scores on a number of subsidiary measures, that determined which team role would best suit. While everyone had a 'preferred' team role, most people had a 'secondary' team role they could play if no one else was fitted for it and if, say, someone else on the team played their 'preferential' role better.

Here are the nine team types which Dr. Belbin and his colleagues finally identified:-

## **CO-ORDINATOR**

Traits: *Stable, dominant, extrovert.*

He/she is the one who presides over the team and co-ordinates its efforts to meet external goals and targets. They are distinguished by their preoccupation with objectives. You would expect them to be at least normally intelligent, but not in any sense brilliant and not an outstanding creative thinker; it is rare for any of the good ideas to originate with them. They are much more remarkable for what used to be called “character”. They have a high degree of self-discipline. They often have what is called “charisma” but it is perhaps easier to think of it as authority. They are dominant, but in a relaxed and unassertive way - they are not domineering. They have an instinct to trust people unless there is very strong evidence that they are untrustworthy, and they are singularly free from jealousy.

He/she sees most clearly which member of the team is strong or weak in each area of the team’s function, and they focus people on what they do best. They are conscious of the need to use the team’s combined human resources as effectively as possible. This means they are the one who establishes the roles and work boundaries of the others and also who sees gaps and takes steps to fill them.

He/she talks easily and is easy to talk to; a good communicator in the two-way sense, neither a compulsive talker nor a ‘person of few words’, but certainly a good listener.

It is the Co-ordinator who clarifies the group’s objectives and sets its agenda; he/she selects the problems for the teams consideration and establishes priorities, but does not attempt to dominate the discussion. Their own early contributions are more likely to take the form of questions than assertions or proposals. They listen, they sum up group feeling and articulate group verdicts, and if a decision has to be taken, they take it firmly after everyone has had their say.

## SHAPER

Traits: *Anxious, dominant, extrovert*

Some observers of teams in action have suggested that a team needs a 'social leader', who is the permanent head of the group, and a separate 'task leader', who is in charge of a specific and defined project - much in the way that a nation needs both a Head of State, who is permanent, and a Head of Government, with a specific job to do. If so, the Shaper is the task leader and the Co-ordinator is the social leader. The Shaper is the most likely to be the actual leader of the team in those cases where there is no Co-ordinator or where the Co-ordinator is not, in fact, the leader.

The Shaper is full of nervous energy; he/she is outgoing and emotional, impulsive and impatient, sometimes edgy and easily frustrated. They are quick to challenge, and quick to respond to a challenge (which they enjoy and welcome). They often have rows, but they are quickly over and they do not harbour grudges. Of all the team, they are the most prone to paranoia, quick to sense a slight and the first to feel that there is a conspiracy afoot and they are the object or the victim of it.

The principal function of the Shaper is to give shape to the application of the team's efforts, often supplying more of their own personal input than the Co-ordinator does. They are always looking for a pattern to discussions, and trying to unite ideas, objectives and practical considerations into a single feasible project, which they seek to push forward urgently to decision and action.

The Shaper exudes self-confidence, which often belies strong self-doubts. Only results can reassure them. Their drive, which has a compulsive quality, is always directed at their objectives. They are usually the team's objectives too, but then the Shaper much more than the Co-ordinator, sees the team as an extension of their ego. They want action and they want it now. They are personally competitive, intolerant of woolliness, vagueness and muddled thinking, and people outside the team are likely to describe them as arrogant and abrasive. Even people inside the team are in danger of being steamrollered by them on occasions, and they can make the team uncomfortable; but they make things happen.

## **PLANT**

Traits: *Dominant, very high I.Q., introvert.*

The Plant originally received the name when it was found that one of the best ways to improve the performance of an ineffective and uninspired team was to 'plant' one of this team type in it. But you can also think of the Plant as the one who scatters the seeds which the others nourish until they bear fruit.

The Plant is the team's source of original ideas, suggestions and proposals: he/she is the ideas person. Of course others have ideas too, but what distinguishes the Plant's ideas is their originality and the radical-minded approach they bring to problems and obstacles. They are the most imaginative as well as the most intelligent member of the team and the most likely to start searching for a completely new approach to a problem if the team starts getting bogged down, or to bring a new insight to a line of action already agreed. They are much more concerned with major issues and fundamentals than with details, and indeed they are liable to miss out on details and make careless mistakes. They are thrustful and uninhibited in a way that is fairly uncharacteristic of an introvert. They can also be prickly and cause offence to other members of the team, particularly when criticising their ideas. Their criticisms are usually designed to clear the ground for their ideas and are usually followed by their counter-proposals.

The danger with the Plant is that they will devote too much of their creative energy to ideas which may catch their fancy but do not fall in with the team's needs or contribute to its objectives. They may be bad at accepting criticism of their own ideas and quick to take offence and sulk if their ideas are dissected or rejected; indeed, they may switch off and refuse to make any further contribution. It can take quite a lot of careful handling and judicious flattery (usually by the Co-ordinator) to get the best out of them. But for all their faults, it is the Plant who provides the vital spark.



## **MONITOR EVALUATOR**

Traits: *High I.Q., stable, introvert.*

In a balanced team it is only the Plant, Monitor Evaluator and Specialist who need a high I.Q., but by contrast with the Plant, the Monitor Evaluator is a bit of a cold fish. By temperament they are likely to be serious and very dour. Their contribution lies in measured and dispassionate analysis rather than creative ideas, and while they are unlikely to come up with an original proposal, they are the most likely to stop the team from committing itself to a misguided project.

Although they are by nature a critic rather than a creator, they do not usually criticise just for the sake of it, but only if they can see a flaw in the plan or the argument. They take a serious and sober view on life; enthusiasm and euphoria simply are not part of their make-up. This, however, has the compensating advantage that ego-involvement does not cloud or distort their judgement. He/she is slow to make up his mind, and likes to be given time to mull things over, but theirs is the most objective mind in the team.

One of their most valuable skills is in assimilating, interpreting and evaluating large volumes of complex written material, analysing problems and assessing the judgements and contributions of the others.

Sometimes they can do this tactlessly and disparagingly, which does not ease their popularity, and they can lower the team's morale by being too much of a damper at the wrong time. Whilst they take an inert approach to most situations, they can be competitive, especially with those whose skills overlap with their own, which means in most cases with the Co-ordinator or the Plant.

It is important for the Monitor Evaluator to be fair minded and open to change; there is a danger that they will turn into an opposing force and allow their critical powers to out-weigh their receptiveness to new ideas.

Although they are solid and dependable, they can lack jollity, warmth, imagination and spontaneity. Nevertheless they have one quality which makes them indispensable to the team; their judgement is hardly ever wrong.

## **IMPLEMENTER**

Traits: *Stable and Controlled.*

The Implementer is the practical organiser. He/she is the one who turns decisions and strategies into defined and manageable tasks that people can actually get on with. They are concerned with what is feasible, and their chief contribution is to convert the team's plans into a feasible form. They sort out objectives and pursue them logically.

Like the Co-ordinator, they too have strength of character and a disciplined approach. They are notable for their sincerity, their integrity and their trust of their colleagues, and they are not easily deflated or discouraged; it is only a sudden change of plan that is likely to upset them, because they are liable to flounder in unstable, quickly changing situations.

Because they need stable structures, they are always trying to build them. Give them a decision and they will produce a schedule; give them a group of people and an objective and they will produce an organisation chart. They work efficiently, systematically and methodically, but sometimes a little inflexibly, and they are unresponsive to speculative 'airy-fairy' ideas that do not have a visible immediate bearing on the task in hand. At the same time they are usually perfectly willing to trim and adapt their schedules and proposals to fit into agreed plans and established systems.

The Implementer can be over-competitive for team status, which can be damaging if it expresses itself in the form of negative, unconstructive criticism of suggestions put forward by other members of the team. Normally, however, they are close to the team's point of balance. If anyone does not know what on earth has been decided and what they are supposed to be doing they will go to the Implementer first to find out.

## RESOURCE INVESTIGATOR

Traits: *Stable, dominant, extrovert.*

The Resource Investigator is probably the most immediately likeable member of the team. He/she is relaxed, sociable and gregarious, with an interest that is easily aroused. Their responses tend to be positive and enthusiastic, though they are prone to put things down as quickly as they take them up.

The Resource Investigator is the member of the team who goes outside the group and brings information, ideas and developments back to it. They makes friends easily and have masses of outside contacts. They are rarely in their office, and when they are, they are probably on the telephone. Their ability to stimulate ideas and encourage innovation by this activity would lead most people to mistake them for an ideas person, but they do not have the radical originality that distinguishes the Plant; for all that, they are quick to see the relevance of new ideas.

Without the stimulus of others, for example in a solitary job, the Resource Investigator can easily become bored, demoralised and ineffective. Within the team, however, they are a good improviser, active under pressure, but can over-relax when it eases. They can fail to follow up tasks they have undertaken in one of their frequent bursts of short-lived enthusiasm. Their range and variety of outside interests can lead them, like the Plant, to spend too much time on irrelevancies that interest them; nevertheless theirs is the most important team role to preserve the team from stagnation, fossilisation and losing touch with reality.

## **TEAM WORKER**

Traits: *Stable, extrovert, low in dominance.*

The Team Worker is the most sensitive of the team - he/she is the most aware of individual's needs and worries, and the one who perceives most clearly the emotional undercurrents within the group. They also know most about the private lives and family affairs of the rest of the team. They are the most active internal communicator; likeable, popular, unassertive, the cement of the team. They are loyal to the team as a unit (though this does not mean they cannot take sides when there is split) and support all the others. If someone produces an idea, their instinct is to build on it, rather than demolish it or produce a rival idea.

They are good and willing listeners and communicate freely and well within the team, and also help and encourage others to do the same. As a promoter of unity and harmony, they counter-balance the friction and discord that can be caused by the Shaper and the Plant, and occasionally by the Monitor Evaluator. They particularly dislike personal confrontation and tend to try and avoid it themselves and cool it down in others.

When the team is under pressure or in difficulties, the Team Worker's sympathy, understanding, loyalty and support are especially valued. Their uncompetitiveness and dislike of friction may make them seem a bit soft and indecisive, but also makes them a permanent force operating against division and disruption in the team. They are exemplary team members and though in normal times the value of their individual contribution may not be as immediately visible as most of the other team roles, the effect is very noticeable indeed when they are not there, especially in times of stress and pressure.

## **COMPLETER FINISHER**

Traits: *Anxious, introvert.*

The Finisher worries about what might go wrong. He/she is never at ease until they have personally checked every detail and made sure that everything has been done and nothing has been over-looked. It is not that they are overtly or irritatingly fussy, their obsession is an expression of anxiety.

The Finisher is not an assertive member of the team, but they maintain a permanent sense of urgency which they communicate to others to galvanise them into activity. They have self-control and strength of character, and are impatient of and intolerant towards the more casual and slap-happy members of the team.

If the Finisher has one major preoccupation, it is order; they are a compulsive meeter of deadlines and fulfiller of schedules. If they are not careful they can be a morale-lowering worrier with a depressing effect on the rest of the team, and they can too easily lose sight of the overall objective by getting bogged down in small details. Nevertheless their relentless follow-through is an important asset.

## **SPECIALISTS**

Traits: *Very high I.Q., introvert, passive, single-minded.*

Specialists are dedicated individuals who pride themselves on acquiring technical skills and specialised knowledge. Their priorities centre on maintaining professional standards and on furthering and defending their own field. While they show great pride in their own subject, they usually lack interest in the subjects of others. Eventually, the Specialist becomes the expert by sheer commitment along a narrow front. There are few people who have either the single-mindedness, or the aptitude, to become a first-class Specialist.

Specialist's have an indispensable part to play in some teams, for they provide the rare skill upon which the firm's service or product is based. As a manager, they command support because they know more about their subject than anyone else, and can usually be called upon to make decisions based on their in-depth experience.

Listing the team types as we have done here gives an impression that they were identified from the start, whereas in fact, of course, they were only discovered and 'fixed' after many observations of the same kinds of behaviour and the same type of contribution cropping up again and again in the Henley Management Game. The theory has been tried out in other courses in Britain and Australia and a small but increasing number of companies are adopting Belbin's new science of team skills training. These further developments and extensions have confirmed all the types, and have also confirmed the special advantages of a full and balanced team. The absence of one of the roles obviously weakens any team, but equally the presence of too many of one type produces predictable kinds of failure; for instance, with too many Plants, many good ideas are produced but never taken up; a team composed entirely of Plants and Shapers may look brilliant, but will be beaten by a combination that is properly furnished with the less conspicuous and flash members who help to compose a full and balanced team.

The question obviously arises, what happens if you have fewer than nine people? The answer seems to be that as people have 'secondary' team roles, they can double up when necessary and perform two of the functions instead of just one; in other words you can operate an effective team with four people if necessary (Belbin 1991). This revelation particularly interested me, since I had noticed how in addition to the 'hunting band' team of up to 10 people, there seems to be a natural and extremely effective human grouping of four, a sort of 'Council of Elders'. And if you look at the nine team types more closely, you see that they divide into five whose preoccupation and orientation is to the world outside the team, and four who are principally concerned with the world inside the team.

OUTWARD LOOKING      - Co-ordinator, Plant, Resource Investigator, Shaper, Specialist.

INWARD LOOKING      - Implementer, Monitor Evaluator, Team Worker, Finisher.

It is also particularly interesting to note that it is the outward looking team who show up as dominant in the psychometric tests, whereas the inward looking, while not necessarily being submissive, are not especially characterised by dominance. You can also look at the listing as four inward-outward pairs, taking the Co-ordinator with the Implementer, the Plant with the Monitor Evaluator, and so on. Each pair comes into its own at a different stage of an operation; the structure is very close to that of, say, an army in the field.

Belbin and others such as myself are helping companies to apply his theory and it has a growing number of adherents. Introducing team-typing into the management of a company can be a slow process, but it can be of immediate value in the creation of project teams or in starting new enterprises.

It ought to be stressed that the building of teams by balancing of team roles is not of the same importance in every kind of operation. It is far less significant for instance, for a group whose principal role is to supervise a more or less steady and continuous process without much change over the years and with no great need for alteration or innovation. On the other hand when the team operates in areas of rapid change in the work force, manufacturing techniques, products, markets or costs, where there is competition, pressure and need for quick decision, then having all the different team skills available becomes of paramount importance.

All those who have written on team work have stressed the need for a balanced or blend of team members. Belbin (1981) himself stresses the need for balance and this is echoed by writers such as McGregor (1960) who wrote of the need for a balance of roles within the

managerial teams. McGregor was concerned that the creative (Plant in Belbin terms) and dynamic (Shaper in Belbin terms) roles should be counterbalanced by critical thinking (Monitor Evaluator in Belbin terms) role within the team. In order to test for team role types Belbin developed the 'Interplace' (1986) computer programme that produces a profile and a series of reports. Interplace is marketed as a recruitment aid as are other tests e.g. Cattell's 16PF and Saville & Holdsworth's O.P.Q. which use similar terms to 'Interplace' to describe team roles.

Belbin's (1981) research shows that effective teams were comprised of between five and seven members and contained a blend of team role types. As there are nine team role types people need to use more than one type i.e. a person may act as a Plant at the beginning of a project but as a Specialist later on etc. Teams containing members who all had high I.Q. scores (Apollo teams) were not especially effective and teams containing only two or three roles were very ineffective. A team of Plants might be very creative but be unlikely to implement the ideas, conversely a team of Implementers might be very practical but would lack the creativity to break new ground. Work with teams to facilitate this study has shown the same results as Belbin's. The norms for his self perception inventory that Belbin quotes are based on a sample size of 759 respondents and gives both the spread and scores and the average score for each team role type.

When referring to team role types it is quite normal to use an abbreviation and a list of the abbreviations is as follows:

Plant	-	PL
Resource Investigator	-	RI
Co-ordinator	-	CO
Shaper	-	SH
Monitor Evaluator	-	ME
Team Worker	-	TW
Implementer	-	IMP
Completer Finisher	-	CF
Specialist	-	SP

However, I think it is important to point out that in his original work Belbin (1981) used the term Chairman - CH instead of Co-ordinator and Company Worker - CW instead of Implementer. The role of Specialist is a later addition and does not figure in the original research.

In a recent conversation I had with Dr. Belbin we discussed where the role of Specialist came from, and in his opinion, the role of Specialist has always been there, but was not, however, clearly identified until the development of 'Interplace' in 1986.

When we are considering management teams then obviously the ideal management team would be an equal spread of team roles. However, experience has proved that this is not to be the case and very often the management teams that we are investigating can have a bias towards one particular team role. Some of the teams that we investigated during this study had a high bias towards Team Worker role. Handy (1976) considered that the Team Worker type of role being less task orientated than the others is often neglected with a cost to group efficiency. The research for this work shows that it can have too greater a preponderance, a



concept also considered by Blake and Moulton (1964) who coined the term “Country Club Management”, for organisations that were highly person orientated but had a low task orientation. Generalising about team roles, Buchanan and Huczynski (1985) split them into two main sections - task roles and maintenance roles. The task roles were: initiator, information seeker, diagnoser, opinion seeker, evaluator, decision maker, whereas the maintenance functions were: encourager, compromiser, pace keeper, clarifier, summariser, standard setter. These categories can be easily equated with the Belbin roles.

If certain team roles predominate in a particular profession or occupational group then there is a danger that any team formed from these members of that group will not function as effectively as possible. The research set out to look for such imbalances and the following chapters show the results of the research areas for those involved in team building in a work situation to consider and possible future areas of research.

Dimmock (1986) conducted experiments to see how the balance between what he defined as task, group and individual roles differed over time. Dimmock concluded that a group role becomes more prominent over a number of meetings as the relationships between the individual members of the group become clearer. Much of the work for this study was conducted using teams that carried out three or four tasks. The visibility of the team roles became clearer after the second or third task perhaps indicating that team roles come into play after the forming and norming stages of the forming, storming, norming, performing stages of group development (Handy 1976).

Homans considered the formation of groups in his book, “The Human Group” (1951). He argued that any social system such as a group exists within a three part environment. This includes a physical environment (terrain, climate, layout), a cultural environment (norms, values, goals) and a technological environment (state of knowledge). If we also consider that Tuckman and Jensen (1977) considered Handy’s original model inadequate of Stage 1 - Forming, Stage 2 - Storming, Stage 3 - Norming and Stage 4 - Performing, so they added Stage 5 which is Adjourning. This is a stage that I think we need to consider with any team, where having performed and accomplished the task that the team was constructed to do, it then needs to adjourn, consider, regroup, reflect, reform and refocus.

As stated earlier in this chapter Belbin (1981) began his work by using four categories to identify different types of teams. These being teams that showed Stable Extrovert (SE), Anxious Extrovert (AE) or Stable Introvert (SI) or Anxious Introvert (AI) characteristics. The characteristics were determined according to the following criteria.

*“Stable Extroverts* are well known to fulfil themselves and excel in jobs which place a premium on liaison work and where co-operation is sought from others. They flourish as sales representatives and do well in personnel management.

*Anxious Extroverts* are commonly found where people need to work at a high pace and exert pressure on others. Anxious extroversion seems to confer an occupational advantage among sales managers, works managers and editors.

*Stable introverts* seem to do well in work where good relationships with a small number of people need to be maintained over a period. They flourish as administrators, solicitors, local and central government officials and in industry as corporate planners.

*Anxious Introverts* distinguish themselves in jobs which call for self direction and self-sustaining persistence. They predominate among research scientists and specialists committed to long term assignments. Some of the most creative people belong to this group.”

Management Teams Why They Succeed or Fail, Belbin R.M. (1981) P20

Discussions with subjects for this study showed that by and large they agreed with the above statement although most could quote exceptions to the rule. I know of one particular member of an accounts department that is a raving Resource Investigator and he is the hinge pin and link man to all of the other departments within the organisation. As for his accountancy skills they were abandoned long ago.

Belbin set out to study the performance of homogeneous teams based on these four types using management games etc. as a suitable vehicle. He found that the Stable Extrovert teams pulled well together and enjoyed working in a group and were able to utilise a variety of approaches with good utilisation of resources. However, they were inclined to a lazy approach and were very dependent on each other. Anxious Extrovert teams were, generally, dynamic and entrepreneurial and good at grasping new opportunities but were easily distracted and performed best in times of rapid change. Stable Introvert teams were good at planning and had strong organisational tendencies but were liable to neglect new factors in a situation; their performance was indifferent. Anxious Introvert teams, whilst capable of generating good ideas lacked cohesion and usually performed poorly. Given the money that has often been poured into think tanks in order to generate ideas this latter finding has great significance and participants from three high tech organisations were able to give practical examples of where highly creative research and development departments had suffered due to a lack of team cohesion. Belbin (1981) concludes that teams of stable extroverts will generally perform better on management tasks than any other category mainly because of their good use of external resources although they were more prone to making errors than other categories.

Using the information gained from these experiments the results of participants 16PF psychometric tests, the Cattell Personality Inventory, he was able to isolate a team type who was disciplined and conscientious and who appeared to be present in the majority of successful teams. These individuals were low in anxiety and high in trust and had a lack of self-conflict. This key role was termed a Company Worker (although the current term used by Belbin Associates is Implementer). Whilst Belbin considered the Implementers crucial to teams and in organisation success, few of the participants tested showed a propensity for wishing to recruit such workers, dwelling more on the weaknesses rather than the strengths of the role. Results of a test conducted during this study where participants were shown part of the video “Nobody’s Perfect but a Team Can Be”, Belbin Associates (1991), where actors and actresses played the Belbin types in an organisational context and were asked to allocate 20 marks between them based on their desirability as employees. The results are as follows:

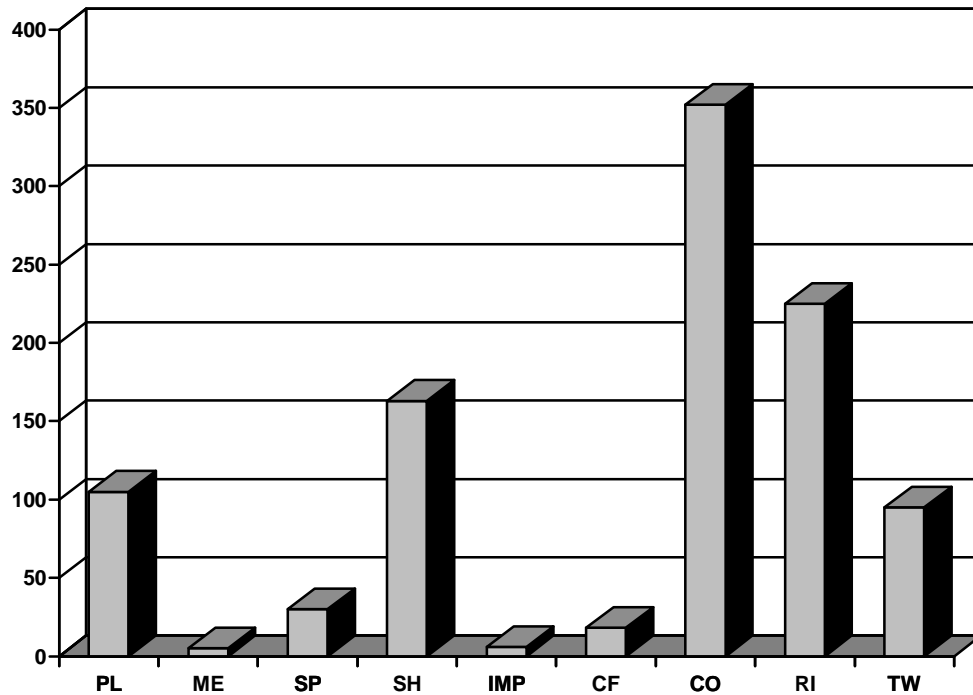


Figure 4.1 *Team Role desirability study*

Whilst only based on a small sample who were unaware of the team roles prior to the exercise, and whose views changed after seeing the video, “Nobody’s Perfect but a Team Can Be”, (Belbin Associates 1991), the results are indicative of a perception gained during this study from conversations with those responsible, that creativity and resourcefulness are qualities that are perhaps too highly sought after at times to be to the detriment of the organisation and performance if other roles are not fulfilled. On repeating the exercise after the video had been shown in its entirety, and after discussion of the team roles, the participants felt unable to objectively rank the roles as before given the demonstrated need for balance within the team.

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