

USING BELBIN'S TEAM ROLE THEORY TO FIND RELATION BETWEEN TEAM ROLES AND TEAM PREFERENCES IN ORDER TO IMPROVE TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

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ABSTRACT: *The aim of this paper is to show the relation between individual team roles and team preferences which increases the effectiveness of project teams. By analysing Belbin's team role theory, team preferences should be chosen carefully in order to get maximum effectiveness from team members. The research shows that MBTI (Myers-Briggs type indicator) tool can also be used to find the behaviours of team members which in turn can be used to complete a project successfully.*

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

‘Information relating to the optimal interaction of individuals in teams could have a significant impact on project success’. Given this thinking, evaluate how an understanding of Belbin’s team role self-perception inventory can help the project office construct an ‘optimal team’.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Belbin (1993) opined thus: “The more you understand how / why people act the way they do and the more you are able to align them to your goals the more successful you will be.” Team role is a tendency to behave, contribute and interrelate with others in a particular way. It is a pattern of behaviour that characterizes one person’s behaviour in a team process. It is important to identify the roles that the team member possesses in order to improve the team effectiveness. Teams having a balance of personality types perform better than those with duplicated personalities.

By way of analyzing the topic, the author will use three theories based on project teams, team roles & personality traits. Williams (2002) argues the importance of project teams in obtaining the required objectives of the project. Hence the second chapter deals with the nature, size, composition & life cycle of project teams along with the challenges faced by them in successfully completing a project. Identification of team roles of the individual team members by using Belbin’s self perception inventory and identifying personality traits by Myers & Briggs type indicator helps the project teams to mainly improve the interaction within the teams. However this research shows that there are critical acclaims of these tools in practice. By way of conclusion the author will try to identify the relation between team roles and team performance.

2.0 PROJECT TEAM

Williams (2002) showed that creating effective teams is one of the main factors for project success. Teams possess basic characteristics which include having a common goal or objective, teams work together to achieve those objectives, each team member has different defined roles and each team member is expert in at least one field relevant to the project. Team size and team members are allocated based on the demands of each project. Small teams involve less than 5 project members in which their cooperation is comfortable but involves less idea sharing. Large project teams give different views which lead to creativity but may be ineffective to perform a given task. Williams (2002) identifies that teams normally go through different stages during the life cycle of the project. They are forming stage which involves building the team needed for the project, storming stage in which team members express individual views that may contradict with each other,

norming stage involving acceptance of other team members' views, performing stage involves team members starting to work and lastly, adjourning stage which shows completion of the project by teams.

However, project teams faces many challenges and problems during the project life cycle. The root cause for many problems arises due to lack of interaction within the team members. To decrease the communication gap, it is necessary to understand Belbin's team role theory and its contribution to the success of a project.

3.0 BELBIN'S TEAM ROLE THEORY

Belbin (1993) came up with a theory on the roles of individual team members which states that every team member is unique and possesses unique behaviour which might affect the performance of the project as a whole. Belbin used self perception inventory questionnaire in his research in order to identify team roles. He found nine different roles with its unique characteristics that are shown below in Table 1.

Table 1: Team roles and characteristics

S/no	Team roles	Strengths	Weaknesses
1	Coordinator	Knows the team and enables agreement in the team.	Runs the risk to decide hastily and no marked creative power.
2	Shaper	Demanding, dynamic and outgoing. Highly productive under stress conditions, stimulates actions & progress and strong influence on decisions.	Exerts pressure on others, often pushing and provocative.
3	Plant	Highly imaginative with intelligence, inspires the environment, individualistic, unorthodox and serious minded.	Sometimes lacking relevance for reality or practice orientation

4	Specialist	Critical thinking ability, objective mind, analyses problems and evaluates ideas.	Hypercritical, likes disputes, serious.
5	Implementer	Conservative, dutiful and organized. Carries out agreed plans systematically and effectively make clear and realistic plans.	Lack of flexibility, unresponsiveness to new ideas that remains unproven.
6	Resource investigator	Extroverted, creating external contacts that may be useful to team, exploring on ideas, resources and developing team objective from outside the group.	Over enthusiastic, easily involved in discussions.
7	Completer	Forces perception and 100% execution of tasks, protects team from mistakes, Focus on guidelines, standards, schedules.	Hinders progress because of over anxiety and intolerant.
8	Monitor – evaluator	Accurately judging, strategic oriented, researches all options.	Sometimes forget to include details.
9	Team worker	Socially oriented, supports team members and team communication, forces team spirits and fairness.	Lack of decisiveness, avoids friction and avoids competition.

Source: Inferred from Belbin (1993)

As seen from the table, every team role has strengths and weaknesses. Understanding each team role plays a vital role in making the teams. High performing teams utilize all combinations of team roles in order to increase team effectiveness. On the other hand, a team role can be compensated for non availability of individual team roles that are shown below in Table 2. However, this theory faced critical acclaims from Furnham and his co-workers. They explained that individuals normally self exaggerate themselves while solving the self perception inventory which leads to false results and with restricted choice given in the questionnaire, the problem gets diminished.

Table 2: Team roles and their compensation.

S/no	Team roles	Compensated by
1	Coordinator	Nominate team member, decisions can be taken by rotating team members.
2	Shaper	Substitute by other team members who can make regular process check using checklists.
3	Plant	Nominate team members who conduct brainstorming, mind mapping sessions.
4	Specialist	Using finisher, including other department members.
5	Monitor – evaluator	Using team worker
6	Implementer	Splitting the work and by outsourcing
7	Resource Investigator	Conducting regular meetings, social events, assigning roles for each team member and rewarding.
8	Completer	Assigning clear goals for thinker or shaper along with company man may help.
9	Team worker	Substituting with coordinator, employ team member with social skills.

Source: Inferred from Belbin (1993)

4.0 RELEVANT TOOLS

Another tool designed by Katherine Cook Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs Myers known as Myers-Briggs type indicator (MBTI) can be used as an effective tool for identifying the personalities of individuals which can help project team become aware of their team member behaviour. This indicator focuses on four personality types and those four types are again divided into two sides. This tool focuses on how individuals draw energy, their view towards information gathering & how they arrange surroundings. The personality types by this method are shown below in Table 3. Research suggests that the teams may increase effectiveness when there exists a balance of these personalities.

Table3: MBTI personality types

Extrovert – E	Introvert – I
Approachable, open minded, takes initiatives for discussion.	Reserved, thinker, focus on details on own experience.
Sensing – S	Intuition – N
Oriented towards reality, facts based, focus on what is real and actual.	Oriented towards future possibilities, creative, clarifies ideas before enacting.
Thinking – T	Feeling – F
Logical oriented, structured way	Harmony, empathy, emotional.
Judging – J	Perceiving - P
Eager to know in advance, takes early decisions.	Living in the present, situational decisions.

Source: Inferred from Eric chong (2007)

5.0 CONCLUSION

An analysis of the Belbin's team role self perception inventory shows that team roles play important roles in developing project teams. Also Myers- Briggs type indicator helps the project manager to find the behaviour of teams and accordingly place them in relevant projects. However, both theories have faced critical acclaims showing the difficulties faced by project teams to enact these tools in reality. Hence, more research in project team role characteristics and team preference along with their relationship with regards to team effectiveness is imperative.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Belbin, M., 1993. *Team roles at work*. Oxford: Reed

Williams, J., 2002. *Team development for high tech project managers*, London: Arctech house

Chong, E., 2007. Role balance and team development: A study of team role characteristics underlying high and low performing teams. *Journal of behavioral and applied management*, 8(3), pp.202

Furnham, et. al, 1993. A reply to the Belbin Team role self perception Inventory by Furnham, steele and Pendleton, *Journal of Occupational and Organizational psychology*, 66, pp. 259 – 260

REFERENCES QUESTIONNAIRE

I. Belbin, M., 1993. *Team roles at work*. Oxford: Reed

- 1.0 What is the purpose (context) of the writing?
To show the importance of team roles on team preferences.
- 2.0 What is the main question that the writer is raising?
How team effectiveness is affected by individual team roles?
- 3.0 What information does the writer rely on?
Self Perception Inventory questionnaire.
- 4.0 What are the inferences that the writer draws?
Roles played by individuals have significant impact on project success.
- 5.0 What are the concepts and ideas that are fundamental to argument?
Belbin's nine different team role types.
- 6.0 What are the writer's main assumptions?
While answering the questionnaire individuals will not pretend or exaggerate themselves.
- 7.0 What are the implications or consequences of the writer's inferences or conclusions?
Roles played by individuals have significant impact on project success.

II. Williams, J., 2002. *Team development for high tech project managers*, London: Arctech house

- 1.0 What is the purpose (context) of the writing?
To illustrate the team characteristics and team developments.
- 2.0 What is the main question that the writer is raising?
Whether teams have certain unique characteristics which have to be identified and used accordingly?
- 3.0 What information does the writer rely on?
Teams possess basic characteristics like having a common goal etc...
- 4.0 What are the inferences that the writer draws?

Creating effective teams will be one of the main factors for project success.

- 5.0 What are the concepts and ideas that are fundamental to argument?

Team size, Life cycle, Team composition.

- 6.0 What are the implications or consequences of the writer's inferences or conclusions?

One implication would be large project teams gives different views about the project but may be ineffective to perform the given task.

III. Chong, E., 2007. Role balance and team development: A study of team role characteristics underlying high and low performing teams. *Journal of behavioral and applied management*, 8(3), pp.202

- 1.0 What is the purpose (context) of the writing?

Study of high and low performing teams

- 2.0 What is the main question that the writer is raising?

Is there a relation between team roles and team preferences.

- 3.0 What information does the writer rely on?

Belbin's team role self perception inventory and team roles.

- 4.0 What are the inferences that the writer draws?

Communication within teams can be increased based on the behaviour and roles of team members.

- 5.0 What are the concepts and ideas that are fundamental to argument?

Relation between team roles and effectiveness of team members.

- 6.0 What are the writer's main assumptions?

That Belbin's team role theory

- 7.0 What are the implications or consequences of the writer's inferences or conclusions?

Project manager should consider all possibilities of combinations of team roles while choosing project teams.

IV. Furnham, et. al, 1993. A reply to the Belbin Team role self perception Inventory by Furnham, steele and Pendleton, Journal of Occupational and Organizational psychology, 66, pp. 259 – 260

- 1.0 What is the purpose (context) of the writing?
Author's Perception on Belbin's team roles.
- 2.0 What is the main question that the writer is raising?
How effective it is while using self perception inventory in reality?
- 3.0 What information does the writer rely on?
Belbin's team role theory.
- 4.0 What are the inferences that the writer draws?
There might be a relation between the team roles and project teams but degree of correctness is uncertain.
- 5.0 What are the concepts and ideas that are fundamental to argument?
Contradicting views on Belbin's team role theory.
- 6.0 What are the implications or consequences of the writer's inferences or conclusions?
Belbin's team role self perception inventory reduces individuals options on viewing the problems, so it cannot be used to find the unique team roles that team members possess.