



BGA CLUB MANAGEMENT GUIDES

Group Dynamics

Group Dynamics

Ever wondered why some teams just seem to work and others hit the rocks? When things don't work, it is obvious to all and it often has a profoundly damaging effect on the people involved, as well as the project or objective to be achieved.

In a perfect situation, a Committee would be comprised of a full range of people (styles, skills and experience).

There are many frameworks for group dynamics and many forms of analysis of individuals available. It doesn't much matter which system you use, but it is well worth considering the strengths and weaknesses of the team overall, to build a collective understanding of:

- the team's natural bias in decision making;
- preferences and aversions to specific types of activity;
- where additional attention or time may be required to get work completed;
- when external expertise should be sought;
- and so on...

One of the potential frameworks is the Belbin Theory, which includes the healthy concept of 'allowable weaknesses'.

Belbin Team Role Theory from www.belbin.com

In the 1970s, Dr Meredith Belbin and his research team at Henley Management College set about observing teams, with a view to finding out where and how these differences come about. They wanted to control the dynamics of teams to discover if, and how, problems could be pre-empted and avoided. As the research progressed, the research revealed that the difference between success and failure for a team was not dependent on factors such as intellect, but more on behaviour. The research team began to identify separate clusters of behaviour, each of which formed distinct team contributions or 'Team Roles'.

A Team Role came to be defined as:

"A tendency to behave, contribute and interrelate with others in a particular way."

It was found that different individuals displayed different Team Roles to varying degrees.

The nine Team Roles

The first Team Role to be identified was the **Plant**. The role was so-called because one such individual was planted in each team. They tended to be highly creative and good at solving problems in unconventional ways.

One by one, the other Team Roles began to emerge.

The **Monitor Evaluator** was needed to provide a logical eye, make impartial judgements where required and to weigh up the team's options in a dispassionate way.

Co-ordinators were needed to focus on the team's objectives, draw out team members and delegate work appropriately.

When the team was at risk of becoming isolated and inwardly-focused, **Resource Investigators** provided inside knowledge on the opposition and made sure that the team's idea would carry to the world outside the team.

Implementers were needed to plan a practical, workable strategy and carry it out as efficiently as possible.

Completer Finishers were most effectively used at the end of a task, to "polish" and scrutinise the work for errors, subjecting it to the highest standards of quality control.

Teamworkers helped the team to gel, using their versatility to identify the work required and

complete it on behalf of the team.

Challenging individuals, known as **Shapers**, provided the necessary drive to ensure that the team kept moving and did not lose focus or momentum.

It was only after the initial research had been completed that the ninth Team Role, '**Specialist**' emerged. The simulated management exercises had been deliberately set up to require no previous knowledge. In the real world, however, the value of an individual with in-depth knowledge of a key area came to be recognised as yet another essential team contribution or Team Role.

Balance is key

Whilst some Team Roles were more high profile and some team members shouted more loudly than others, each of the behaviours was essential in getting the team successfully from start to finish. The key was balance. For example, Meredith Belbin found that a team with no Plant struggled to come up with the initial spark of an idea with which to push forward. However, once too many Plants were in the team, bad ideas concealed good ones and non-starters were given too much airtime. Similarly, with no Shaper, the team ambled along without drive and direction, missing deadlines. With too many Shapers, in-fighting began and morale was lowered.










Strengths and allowable weaknesses

As well as the strength or contribution they provided, each Team Role was also found to have an 'allowable weakness'; a flipside of the behavioural characteristics, which is allowable in the team because of the strength which goes with it. For example, the unorthodox Plant could be forgetful or scatty; or the Resource Investigator might forget to follow up on a lead. Co-ordinators might get over-enthusiastic on the delegation front and Implementers might be slow to relinquish their plans in favour of positive changes. Completer Finishers, often driven by anxiety to get things right, were found to take their perfectionism to extremes. Teamworkers, concerned with the welfare and morale of the team, found it difficult to make decisions where this morale might be compromised or team politics, involved. Shapers risked becoming aggressive and bad-humoured in their attempts to get things done. The Specialist had a tendency to focus narrowly on their own subject of choice, and to prioritise this over the team's progress.

Granting all volunteers an 'allowable weakness' seems an enlightened move.

Perhaps this level of tolerance is something else to build into your club's culture...

Team Role Summary Descriptions

Team Role	Contribution	Allowable Weakness
Plant 	Creative, imaginative, unorthodox. Solves difficult problems.	Ignores incidentals. Too pre-occupied to communicate effectively.
Resource Investigator 	Extrovert, enthusiastic, communicative. Explores opportunities. Develops contacts.	Over-optimistic. Loses interest once initial enthusiasm has passed.
Co-ordinator 	Mature, confident, a good chairperson. Clarifies goals, promotes decision-making, delegates well.	Can be seen as manipulative. Offloads personal work.
Shaper 	Challenging, dynamic, thrives on pressure. Has the drive and courage to overcome obstacles.	Prone to provocation. Offends people's feelings.
Monitor Evaluator 	Sober, strategic and discerning. Sees all options. Judges accurately.	Lacks drive and ability to inspire others.
Teamworker 	Co-operative, mild, perceptive and diplomatic. Listens, builds, averts friction.	Indecisive in crunch situations.
Implementer 	Disciplined, reliable, conservative and efficient. Turns ideas into practical actions.	Somewhat inflexible. Slow to respond to new possibilities.
Completer Finisher 	Painstaking, conscientious, anxious. Searches out errors and omissions. Polishes and perfects.	Inclined to worry unduly. Reluctant to delegate.
Specialist 	Single-minded, self-starting, dedicated. Provides knowledge and skills in rare supply.	Contributes on only a narrow front. Dwells on technicalities.