

# Belbin and Tuckman

## Supporting your team at every stage

In 1965, Dr Bruce Tuckman was doing ground-breaking work on group dynamics in Ohio. A couple of years later, Dr Meredith Belbin began his seminal research into team behaviours at Henley.

Tuckman studied teams from formation to completion of a task and identified crucial stages in a team's life cycle. Belbin's observations of teams uncovered the nine Team Roles which describe ways of contributing and interrelating in a team.

So how do the two fit together? What is happening in Belbin terms as the team changes, and what can be done to give teams the best chance of success at each stage?

### 1. Forming

During this stage, team members behave independently. They're just getting to know one another, so there may be politeness and goodwill, but mutual trust hasn't yet been established. Discussion is likely to focus on defining the scope of the task in hand, and how to approach it. The team relies on a leader for guidance and direction.

#### *In Belbin terms, the team needs...*

... to get to know one another's strengths and weaknesses, but they haven't worked together long enough to provide Team Role feedback on each other. Completing a Team Wheel can provide a powerful visual illustration of the spread of roles within the team. A good **Co-ordinator** can bring the team together and identify how each person can contribute.

#### *There is a risk that...*

... team members won't want to address difficult topics for fear of causing conflict. **Teamworkers** in particular might be uncomfortable about arguments, but this part of the process is crucial to the team's success. **Completer Finishers** and **Specialists** might be tempted to bring broader discussions down to a detailed or intensive level too soon.

## 2. Storming

The team begins to suggest ideas and compete with one another. People begin to form opinions about the characters of others in the team, so relationships can be made or broken at this stage. Disagreements and personality clashes must be resolved, or it can lower motivation. On the other hand, if the team is too focused on consensus, they may agree on a flawed plan simply in order to keep the team together.

*In Belbin terms, the team needs...*

... **Plants** to come up with new ideas, and **Monitor Evaluators** to analyse them dispassionately. Working Relationship Reports (which show how pairs might best interact) can highlight potential areas of synergy or conflict between individuals, giving discussion starters to work towards resolution. People focussed **Teamworkers** can help build relationships internally too. Action oriented **Shapers** can be valuable at this stage, as they're forthright, will prevent the **Co-ordinator** from getting too involved in team politics, and will help move discussion on from ideas to outcomes.

*There is a risk that...*

... too many **Plants** could be competing for ideas, or could feel de-motivated by the **Monitor Evaluator** who points out the glitches in their ideas. **Shapers** are useful, but should be deployed with caution at this stage: if their competitive streak turns aggressive or confrontational, this needs to be addressed, to ensure good relationships going forward.

## 3. Norming

There is greater agreement and consensus in decision-making. Roles and responsibilities are made clear and the team moves towards more harmonious working practices. Discussion centres on the development of working processes. The team is more aware of competition and a greater spirit of co-operation emerges.

*In Belbin terms, the team needs...*

... a clear understanding of who should do what. Knowing Team Role strengths and weaknesses within the team will enable the team leader – and other team members – to quickly identify who might be suited to which kinds of work, and when each contribution is needed. **Co-ordinators** are proficient at facilitating

group decisions, whereas **Implementers** are well-placed to make plans for efficient processes, given that they have a reliable – and unchanging – structure to work with. **Completer Finishers** can ensure often overlooked but vital details are kept on the agenda ('The devil is in the detail'). **Resource Investigators** are needed to go outside the team and gain insights into the competition.

### ***There is a risk that...***

... **Plants** might cause disruption by trying to interest the team in a new idea when work is already underway. At this stage, they might prefer to adopt a lower profile or even move on to another team where they can be involved in the earlier stages once more.

## **4. Performing**

In this era of high performance, the team understands its purpose and goals, and is motivated and knowledgeable. Team members are autonomous and are able to handle decision-making without the team manager present, according to agreed criteria. Disagreements can be positively resolved within the team.

### ***In Belbin terms, the team needs...***

... to continue to use the language and understanding that Belbin gives to ensure that they continue along the route of becoming a High Performing Team.

## **5. Adjourning**

This stage is when, with milestones achieved, past performances are reviewed, ensuring that the past contributions of both individual and team are fully identified and recognised. Team members can move on to new goals and plans, and new projects are set up. This is when individuals use their team skills in new team situations – the skills of teaming.

## **Leapfrogging to Performing**

Longstanding teams may expand, recruiting more members and building on their successes, or they may disband after the successful completion of their project.

But that's best case scenario. Plenty of teams get stuck and end up repeating the first two stages over and over again, especially if they do not frequently meet in person.

The language of Belbin Team Roles can speed up the process of moving teams from one stage to the next by giving team members insight into one another's ways of interacting and the contributions needed to help the team work. The language and common frame of reference enables individuals to engage, express preference, explain how they work best and resolve conflict with each other. This is invaluable if a team has never worked together before, or if there is a 'new' and 'old' guard scenario – Belbin is always a great leveller and aids with cohesion.

### **Next steps**

Start learning and using the language of Belbin Team Roles to help your teams along the Tuckman stages!

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