

Boost your EQ with Belbin

“We should take care not to make the intellect our God; it has, of course, powerful muscles, but no personality.” – Albert Einstein

Emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to perceive, control and evaluate emotions with a view to preventing feelings from getting out of control. In other words, it’s about understanding yourself and the effect that your actions and behaviour have on others.

When the idea of emotional intelligence (EQ) first came along, it answered the question of why IQ alone couldn’t guarantee success. EQ affects how we manage our own behaviour, navigate complex social situations, and make decisions to achieve results.

As part of his original research in the 1970s, Meredith Belbin discovered so-called ‘Apollo syndrome’ – that teams made up of high-intellect individuals finished last, not first. Why? Because they esteemed intelligence above all else, which made them prone to disagreement, destructive debates, point-scoring and failure.

So how does emotional intelligence help people work better together, and how can Belbin help develop your Emotional Intelligence?

Belbin helps you get to know your strengths and weaknesses.

EQ isn’t just about understanding emotions, it’s about knowing where your strengths lie and where you need help. This is what Belbin Team Role theory is all about. People with a high EQ understand which situations (and people) are likely to be stressful, and which can help promote success, so they can engineer their environment and those around them, whilst preventing weaknesses from holding them back.

Belbin stops things getting personal.

Belbin gives you a behavioural ‘vocabulary’ to prevent things getting personal. Once you have a good grip on who you are and what you’re good at, it’s more difficult to become offended when people push your buttons, and easier to face potentially problematic situations with good humour.

Belbin helps you read other people.

People with a high EQ are curious about others. They care, and they want to understand what makes other people tick. Belbin promotes EQ in the workplace by opening up discussions around who does what, who’s feeling leaned upon and who just wants a chance to show their mettle.

Belbin helps you deal with toxic individuals.

Dealing with difficult people at work can be frustrating, but it really helps if you can keep your feelings in check. The Belbin Team Role ‘language’ helps you to remain dispassionate, which not only defuses the situation, but is better for your health – not to mention your team’s.

EQ is for teams, not just for individuals.

Just as an individual can play to strengths and mitigate weaknesses, teams can do this too. When people are aware of what they have to offer together and what effect they have on their environment, they can level up their collective EQ and their performance.

At the heart of Belbin Team Roles and emotional intelligence is greater self-understanding. Getting to grips with Team Role theory and exploring how others contribute can make individuals more empathetic to one another and thereby increase the effectiveness of the team as a whole.

Building mutual trust

In order to work effectively, teams need to be aware of emotions at the group level. Is there tension? Does the team celebrate its success? Has it fallen into apathy? Harvard Business Review reports:

‘In our study of effective teams, we’ve found that ‘having norms for group self-awareness – of emotional states, strengths and weaknesses, modes of interactions, and task processes – is a critical part of group emotional intelligence that facilitates group efficacy. Teams gain it both through self-evaluation and by soliciting feedback from others.’

This is where Belbin comes in. A Belbin Team Role is defined as ‘a tendency to behave, contribute and interrelate with others in a particular way’. In other words, Team Roles are units we can use to describe those modes of interaction in an intelligent way.

Keeping sight of the individual

Team emotional intelligence shouldn't come at the expense of the individual's, and it's important that teams are able to identify when a team member is struggling with emotional demands, just as with workload or other considerations. Often, this struggle can be framed in Team Role terms. For example, the team might realise that a **Completer Finisher** colleague keeps working into the night because their perfectionism is taking hold on a particular project. They might see that a **Specialist** colleague is having difficulty giving up time on their area of expertise to engage in cross-training in other disciplines. Given a Team Role vocabulary, the team has a language to use when supporting each other and addressing the issue at hand. In other words, the team absorbs the individual's emotional reaction and works to regulate its emotions as a whole.

Looking beyond the team

The team may work well together and praise itself on its efficacy, but how is that team perceived by others in the organisation? In order to be truly emotionally intelligent, the team must be aware of how it fits into the whole. This might mean using **Resource Investigators**, (outgoing, inquisitive, outward-looking members of the team) to act as a liaison and keep them in tune with the broader context in which they're working.

Quick tips: how to boost your EQ with Belbin

Plant – you're already an advocate of change and innovation, but be sure that you accept the rejection of your ideas with good grace, rather than becoming someone who holds grudges.

Resource Investigator – ensure that you listen as much as you talk. Controlling our impulses in all areas is a good path to higher EQ.

Co-ordinator – practise your ability to read other people and use it for the greater good. Ensure that you're giving without expecting to receive.

Shaper – you're likely to be pretty thick-skinned, but just ensure that when conflict does occur, you can recover the situation with good humour, keeping people on-side.

Monitor Evaluator – embrace your rational side. It helps you to handle situations without getting emotionally involved. But remember that others struggle more with this – and they need empathy, not logic.

Teamworker – you're likely to have empathy down pat, but you may need to challenge doubts and other kinds of negative thinking which stand in your way. When faced with uncomfortable situations (such as conflict), practise separating your thoughts from the facts and moving towards a more positive outlook.