

Understanding Team Roles

Being part of a team can have both positive and negative outcomes. The success of a team depends on various factors that determine whether it will achieve great results or fail to meet expectations.

One of the indicators of a successful team is when each member has clearly defined roles and responsibilities. However, there are instances where even with this structure in place, a team may not perform effectively. What factors could contribute to this?

Human beings exhibit different behaviors in meetings and teams. Some individuals prefer to focus on details, while others enjoy brainstorming and generating ideas. Conflicts arise when these roles clash instead of complementing each other, leading to difficulties in team functioning.

Team projects and meetings are most successful when there is a balance of diverse, complementary roles. Specifically, a group becomes more efficient when each team member utilizes their individual strengths.

In this training session, we will provide guidelines for forming teams and promoting effective collaboration among members. We will discuss typical team and group roles, which can help balance the strengths and weaknesses of individual team members. This will create a harmonious work environment and reduce stress. Additionally, we will analyze scenarios to understand the factors that contribute to the success or failure of a team or meeting.

During the lesson, you will learn how to:

- Examine the various roles individuals take on during team activities.
- Observe and analyze individuals' behaviors and actions within their respective roles during a meeting or team project.
- To achieve the best possible outcome, it is important to have a balanced and diverse set of roles in any meetings or team projects conducted in the future.

BELBIN'S TEAM ROLES

We previously examined the importance of clear responsibilities within teams and the impact of effective and efficient execution of duties. Additionally, we explored how imbalanced distribution of roles can hinder a team's performance.

An imbalance in the team's composition can have negative consequences for the project. For instance, having too many detail-oriented members can lead to a slow or stalled progress, as they may lose sight of the bigger picture. On the other hand, having an excessive number of visionaries who generate innovative ideas without taking action can result in those ideas never materializing due to a lack of foundational work.

Some team leaders make the mistake of choosing team members who are just like them. However, this is not a good way to create a team. A successful team requires members with different ideas and skills who understand the importance of working together. When there is

not a good balance, there can be gaps in skills that hinder progress. Additionally, conflicts can arise between people who are too similar and competing for power. This usually leads to frustration, unhappiness, and a lack of progress.

To prevent distractions, you can use Dr. Meredith Belbin's research. He conducted studies on groups and found that team members naturally take on different roles and behave in specific ways during meetings and projects.

Belbin identified nine team roles and categorized them into three groups based on his observations:

1. Action-oriented roles.
2. People-oriented roles.
3. Thought-oriented roles.

Below, you will find that each team role has its own specific strengths and weaknesses.

Action-Oriented Roles

Shapers

Shapers are often individuals who are extroverted and dynamic. They enjoy challenging and stimulating others, questioning the status quo, and finding the most effective approaches to problems. They are the ones who disrupt things to prevent complacency. In a team setting, Shapers strive to ensure that all possibilities and solutions are thoroughly considered.

Shapers excel in seeing problems as exciting challenges to overcome. However, in group settings, they may become argumentative, disrupting group harmony. Additionally, their confidence in their ideas can make less confident team members feel inferior and struggle to be heard.

Implementers

The practical people on a team are the ones who turn ideas into plans and actions. Implementers are reliable and get things done. They are usually conservative, disciplined, efficient, and well organized. However, their discipline and conservatism can make them resistant to change.

Completer-Finishers

Completer-Finishers are individuals who ensure projects are completed thoroughly. They pay close attention to detail and don't let any errors or omissions slip by. Meeting deadlines is a top priority for them, and they push the team to finish on time. They are perfectionists, organized, and conscientious. However, they tend to worry too much and struggle with delegating tasks because they believe they can do it better.

People-Oriented Roles

Coordinators

These individuals fulfill the role of a team leader. Their main concern is guiding the team towards achieving project objectives. They are often good listeners and value each team member's contribution. Coordinators understand the importance of delegation and use it effectively. They are usually calm and even-tempered, maintaining stability within the team. However, there is a possibility of over-delegating and passing on responsibilities that should be their own. Additionally, they may sometimes exhibit manipulative behavior.

Team Workers

Team Workers are negotiators. They ensure team members are aligned. They are flexible, diplomatic, and perceptive. Team Workers are well-liked. They prioritize team cohesion over their own priorities. However, they can be indecisive during discussions and decision-making.

Resource Investigators

Resource Investigators are individuals who are innovative and curious. They enjoy exploring options, making connections, and negotiating for resources on behalf of the team. They work well in a team environment and excel at connecting with external stakeholders to support the team's objectives. They have an outgoing and extroverted nature, which makes others receptive to their ideas. However, they can sometimes lose enthusiasm quickly and may be overly optimistic.

Thought-Oriented Roles

Plants

The Plant is the creative innovator who generates new ideas. They appreciate praise but struggle with criticism. Plants prefer to work independently. Their ideas can be unworkable due to their creativity. They may have poor communication skills because they are introverted. They tend to ignore stated parameters and constraints.

Monitor-Evaluators

Monitor-Evaluators excel at analyzing and evaluating ideas from others, particularly Plants. They are objective and thoughtful, carefully considering the advantages and disadvantages of each option before making a decision. They are critical thinkers and approach tasks and projects strategically. Others may perceive them as detached and unemotional, and they may struggle with motivating others and tend to react rather than initiate.

Specialists

These individuals have specialized knowledge necessary for completing the job. Specialists take pride in their skills and work diligently to maintain their professional status. In a team setting, their role is to be an expert in a specific area and they fully dedicate themselves to their field of expertise. However, their contribution may be limited due to their focus on technical details, potentially neglecting the broader perspective.

Category	Role	Traits
Action-Oriented Roles	Shaper	Challenges the team to improve.
	Implementer	Implements ideas.
	Completer-Finisher	Ensures completion in a thorough and timely manner.
People-Oriented Roles	Coordinator	Serves as a chairperson.
	Team Worker	Promotes cooperation.
	Resource Investigator	Explores potential external opportunities.
Thought-Oriented Roles	Plant	Introduces innovative ideas and approaches.
	Monitor-Evaluator	Analyzes the options.
	Specialist	Offers specific skills.

Using Belbin's Team Roles Model

One of the main practical outcomes of Belbin's research is that it assists individual team members in identifying their natural roles. With this understanding, they can further enhance their strengths and address their weaknesses to become more effective participants. Additionally, team leaders can utilize this information to create more well-rounded teams.

BENNE AND SHEATS' GROUP ROLES

A group effort, such as a team meeting or project, can have varying experiences, ranging from positive and fulfilling, or negative and futile.

Groups consist of individuals with diverse needs and goals. The goal of a team leader is to promote cooperation among these individuals. However, there is no universal solution to achieve this. Each group is unique. However, understanding what facilitates teamwork and what hinders it can help ease the process. It is especially beneficial to identify and address disruptive individuals.

Kenneth Benne and Paul Sheats are two theorists who have provided insight into group behavior. In the 1940s, they wrote an influential article titled "Functional Roles of Group Members" where they defined 26 different roles that can be played by individuals or multiple people within a group. Based on their observations, Benne and Sheats categorized group roles into three categories:

1. Task roles
2. Personal/social roles
3. Dysfunctional or individualistic roles

Task Roles

These roles are essential for progressing a project from its initial conception to action. These roles are responsible for completing the necessary tasks. They include:

- Initiators/Contributors (provide novel ideas)
- Information Seekers
- Information Givers
- Opinion Seekers
- Opinion Givers
- Elaborators (develop concepts and consider the effects of actions)
- Coordinators
- Orienters (go over and make clear the group's stance)
- Evaluators/Critics
- Energizers
- Procedural Technicians (responsible for handling logistics).
- Recorders.

Personal and/or Social Roles

These roles contribute to the effective functioning of the group.. They include:

- Encouragers (provide a hand and acknowledge others' efforts)
- Harmonizers (mediate conflicts amongst individuals)
- Compromisers
- Gatekeeper/Expeditors (allows everyone to express themselves)
- Observer/Commentators
- Followers

Dysfunctional and/or Individualistic Roles

These roles are significant components of Benne and Sheats' theory, and we have provided a more detailed description of them. These roles are the ones that hinder group progress and reduce its cohesion.

Aggressors – Aggressors engage in personal attacks by making belittling and insulting comments. For example, they may say things like, "That idea seems quite silly. I'm curious where you got it from." Their actions typically aim to undermine the status of another team member.

Blockers -- They consistently reject any ideas or opinions presented to them, while also refusing to provide their own suggestions. This has the result of hindering the progress of the group if it cannot overcome the resistance.

Recognition Seekers – They use group meetings to focus attention on themselves. They often discuss past achievements or share unrelated stories that highlight their positive qualities. Occasionally, they may engage in attention-seeking behaviors such as acting foolishly, making excessive noise, or otherwise diverting attention away from the task at hand.

Self-confessor – Individual participants in group meetings may use the opportunity to share personal experiences and emotions, sometimes disguising their comments as relevant contributions. This can include bringing up past experiences or relating group dynamics to their own personal relationships.

Disrupter/Playboys or Playgirls – Group meetings are sometimes used as a source of entertainment and a means to avoid actual work. Disrupters may distract others by telling jokes, playing pranks, or engaging in activities unrelated to the topic at hand.

Dominators – They attempt to influence the conversation and dictate others' actions. In numerous instances, they amplify their knowledge and dominate any discussion. They frequently assert to possess more understanding of the situation and propose better solutions than anyone else.

Help Seekers – Help Seekers often seek sympathy by expressing feelings of inadequacy. They tend to be self-deprecating and give the impression of helplessness and inability to contribute. For instance, they may say, "I cannot assist you as I am too confused and useless with this matter."

Special-Interest Pleadors – Suggestions are made based on the perceptions and emotions of others. Pleadors refrain from expressing their own biases or opinions by adopting a vague and generalized stance. They may say, for instance, "Those in admin might not approve of that idea..." or "Our suppliers are known for being frugal. They probably won't agree to that."

Using Benne and Sheats' Theory

It is recommended to apply Benne and Sheats' theory practically by identifying the roles being fulfilled within a group, determining any additional roles that may be necessary, and considering which roles should be eliminated. Here are the steps to follow when applying the theory.

Step 1: Identify the stage or function your team is currently in, based on the tasks or discussions you are engaged in.

Here are some commonly observed group stages/functions:

Assembling

- Talking about responsibilities and tasks
- Outlining what is expected
- Setting goals
- Idea generation through brainstorming
- Talking about alternatives
- Fulfilling obligations and tasks
- Coming to a choice
- Carrying out the solution
- Assessing work output

Step 2: Identify the roles that are most appropriate and beneficial for the current stage or function.

Example: When forming a group, start with Energizers, Procedural Technicians, and a Reporter. These roles are essential for the initial stages. As you discuss alternatives, aim for representation in various Social/Personal roles. According Benne and Sheats, the more members playing both Task and Social roles, the higher the group's chances of success.

Step 3: Recruit and/or develop the necessary roles within your group.

Analyzing a group is important to identify missing roles. Once roles are identified, the group should understand the importance of filling these gaps for success. According to Benne and Sheats, flexibility in group members is beneficial. This means members can adapt their roles based on team needs. With a flexible structure, members can utilize their talents and strengths within the team.

Step 4: Identify any roles within the group that may be causing dysfunction.

The presence of a person who sabotages the team's efforts is undesirable. Strategies such as coaching, feedback, and raising awareness among proactive group members can help decrease and eliminate this behavior. The goal is for the team's success, and removing obstacles is important.