

Thought Starter

Organisational Behaviour: Teambuilding

George Mendes

Team-work, in terms of co-operation as the quote below states, has collaboration and mutual support between members of that team at the very heart of its definition. In the study of management, we take a deeper look at groups of people, and define clearly what a team as opposed to a group of people is.

team-work (team-work) *n.* organised co-operation.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary

Groups may share a collective identity quite unintentionally, communicate in a similar fashion between each member and consider themselves as part of a definite and identifiable unit. Teams in contrast, will hold a shared or common goal, have selection to that group as a key factor of its existence, and within it have a sense of rotating leadership, to wherever it may naturally shift. Perhaps one of the most important factors observed in teams in its relation to the work place is an apparent 'synergy effect', and value-added to the process.

Meredith Belbin (b. 1926), developed a landmark set of role characters which has since become an extremely popular method for categorising roles within a team. These are summarised as the nine roles of a; Plant, Resource-Investigator, Co-ordinator, Shaper, Monitor-Evaluator, Teamworker, Implementer, Completer-Finisher and Specialist.

Beyond Belbin, further research has developed the ideas that there are other team roles which come to fore in the interactions of a team, such as a 'networker', 'peacemaker' and even 'cheerleader'.

Belbin suggested that a team holding all these nine roles (but not necessarily consisting of nine people) would be a team of success, or a 'Dream Team'¹. The importance in this lies with any preferred roles complementing each other, and any apparent 'gaps' being filled. The clustering of groups, within these roles further describes the three-dimensional aspect of Belbin's work. Grouping shapers, completers and implementers (Action-orientated); co-ordinators, team-

workers and resource investigators (People-orientated); plants, monitor-evaluators and specialists (Cerebral-orientated) people together, presents a clear three-school system of thought. Knowledge of these three clusters, and teambuilding by integrating them is, as Belbin argued, key to the success of a (management) team.

Critiques of these team-roles, include that the 'Belbin-Test', is not necessarily very accurate or valid, as bias and perception can alter the true results of the assessment. Using multiple tests for one person, and aggregating the results, may solve this, but at a cost in terms of time and money. Similarly, questions of context and cultural differences arise, and

prevent the test as being used as a general rule or formula.

Further issues with this team-building instrument, include the fact that the transition from theory to practice can be difficult. Managers will seldom have the luxury to pick and choose a team from scratch, and even if this is possible, rarely on the basis of their apparent 'team-role characteristics'. However, Belbin would argue the aim would be to allow a functional and team role to coincide. Yet, a further difficulty arises in that there is little empirical evidence supporting success or failure of teams due to a mismatch of roles. – This might simply be due to any number of other factors.

Sources

1. Dream Team, suggested first by Roan Hollison 1978

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