

# Identification and deployment of project roles

Projects are managed and run by teams, teams are made up from groups of individuals and it is their knowledge, attitude and skills that can make or break a project. It is therefore essential to assess what skills and knowledge is required for certain tasks and appoint the most appropriate people. It is unlikely that you will have a complete pool of people to suit your requirements; however it is good practice to be aware of the skills gaps, or potential personality conflicts and manage this accordingly.

Belbin (1996) identified 9 team roles, how they are likely to behave, and what their strengths and weaknesses are likely to be. The roles he defined include<sup>1</sup>;

Roles	Descriptions – team role contribution	Allowable weaknesses
Plant	Creative, imaginative, unorthodox. Solves difficult problems	Ignores details. Too preoccupied to communicate effectively.
Resource Investigator	Extrovert, enthusiastic, communicative. Explores opportunities. Develops contacts.	Overoptimistic. Loses interest once initial enthusiasm has passed.
Coordinator	Mature, confident, a good chairperson. Clarifies goals, promotes decision making, delegates well.	Can often be seen as manipulative. Delegates personal work.

Roles	Descriptions – team role contribution	Allowable weaknesses
Shaper	Challenging, dynamic, thrives on pressure. Has drive and courage to overcome obstacles.	Can provoke others. Hurts people's feelings.
Monitor Evaluator	Sober, strategic and discerning. Sees all options. Judges accurately.	Lacks drive and ability to inspire others. Overly critical.
Teamworker	Cooperative, mild, perceptive and diplomatic. Listens, builds, averts friction, calms the waters.	Indecisive in crunch situations. Can be easily influenced.
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. Delivers on time.	Inclined to worry unduly. Reluctant to delegate. Can be a nit-picker.
Specialist	Single-minded, self-starting, dedicated. Provides knowledge and skills in rare supply.	Contributes on only a narrow front. Dwells on technicalities. Overlooks the 'big picture'.

Through a profiling questionnaire team members are able to identify their preferred role, that is not to say that they are not capable of performing all the roles identified, it is merely the role that most suits their personality and skills. Although there is much debate over the degree of scientific methodology over profiling such as this, Belbin is often implemented by project managers and can have a positive effect on team development by understanding the roles and interactions between working parties.

A more pragmatic approach can easily be deployed without the time and cost of a Belbin study, and at the same time tailoring the requirements to your project and organisations needs. By defining and profiling key roles team members will have a greater awareness of what is expected of them and which skills they will require. Rather like drafting a job description and personal specification for a new position, the same level of time and effort should be executed to ensure you recruit the right team members for the project to be a success.

Depending on the nature of your project you will require different skills sets and personalities. Below is a list of example roles that you may require to drive your project forward.

- Administrator
- Analyst
- Negotiator
- Communicator (verbal and or written)
- Listener
- Motivator
- Decision-maker

<sup>1</sup> Project Management. Third Edition. 2003. Harvey Maylor

Once the project manager has defined which roles he or she requires a profile of the role needs to be developed considering the description, a list of behaviours and detailing how this relates to the project. Below is an example of how the administrator role might be scoped. The list is far from exhaustive and should be adapted from project to project.

#### **Administrator**

Expected behaviours

- Competent written and verbal communication
- Effective organisational skills
- Attention to detail and accuracy
- Remaining calm under pressure and deadlines
- The ability to prioritise and inject a sense of urgency
- Consideration to routines and systematic controls
- Ability to see tasks through to completion

Expected roles/tasks

- Preparing project documentation including a terms of reference, project plan, reports and meeting agendas and minutes etc
- Centrally organising, storing and updating all project material
- Managing the project communication both written and verbally
- Arranging meetings, including facilities, refreshments, travel and accommodations for participants etc
- Scheduling work plans
- Expediting information, updates and materials etc
- Alerting team members to problems

#### **Summary**

Human factors such as personalities and behavioural characteristics can not be underestimated when organising a team and managing the development of team members. Project managers must carefully select the right people for the right jobs based on these factors. Although project managers rarely have the opportunity to select a team; teams are generally 'inherited' from available resource or certain departments, dependant on the desired outcome. However, this is still a valid process even when team members are pre-allocated as it helps to identify imbalances, potential problems and skills shortages; the team members benefit by having a greater understanding of their role, strengths and weaknesses and that of their fellow team members.