Belbin's Approach To Leadership, Conflict Resolution and Management

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- **Team Conflict**
- Conflict is essential for teams, but it has to be handled in the right way.
- Belbin can help teams address 'argue better', addressing conflict constructively, building cohesion in the team and reaping the performance benefits.

- **How do we approach conflict?**

- Many of us are conflict avoidant. Disagreements can produce physiological responses we don't like – it can trigger our 'fight or flight' response.

- We fall into the trap of thinking that all conflict is bad or dysfunctional conflict – that it will seem unkind or hurt others' feelings, that it will consume goodwill, time and energy without producing a valuable outcome.

- 'High conflict' distorts reality, creating an 'us and them' situation.

- **The cost of conflict avoidance**

- Failure to process conflict causes untold problems for teams and businesses. They build what *Harvard Business Review* calls a '**conflict debt**' – 'the sum of all undiscussed and unresolved issues that stand in the way of progress'.

- Another danger of always seeking agreement and harmony is that it can become difficult for people to speak up and dissent, so we miss the opportunity to stop and change course when we discover that something isn't working.

- When teams take the time to disagree, they often come up with more effective and mutually agreeable solutions than whatever was first considered. It encourages us to pull apart an idea and ensure that it stands up to scrutiny and merits further consideration.

- By avoiding conflict, teams can become stuck in the 'honeymoon phase' which limits productivity and creativity and stunts growth.

- **"Clashes between parties are the crucibles in which creative solutions are developed and wise trade-offs among competing objectives are made."** *− Harvard Business Review*

Is conflict good for teams?

- It may seem counterintuitive, but functional conflict can actually be good for teams. In fact, it's crucial for effective teamwork.

- Professor J. Richard Hackman, a professor of social and organisational psychology at Harvard University, discovered that [arguments were good for a team](#), so long as they were handled well and focused on the team's objectives.

- So-called 'creative friction' leads to better work outcomes – working on more creative, better- considered solutions, rather than settling for the first suggestion.

Positive team conflict

- Conflict allows teams to acknowledge and synthesize diverse perspectives – this means greater inclusivity in the workplace, through the acknowledgement of diverse perspectives. This has an impact on the bottom line.

- Disagreements within the team provide opportunities for learning and growth. The more the team practises listening to, and integrating, feedback, the more it evolves.

- Surprisingly enough, conflict also improves relationships and job satisfaction, because we gain a better understanding of our colleagues and what makes them tick, and because problems are addressed rather than being swept under the carpet.

Constructive Conflict

- **What do we need for constructive conflict?**

- Fostering the environment for constructive conflict in teams is a big ask. Conflict aversion is strong and it isn't enough to tell people that disagreement is healthy and hope for the best.

- In order to use conflict effectively, we need the skills and mindset to do so.

Rules of engagement

- 'Conflict rituals' or commonly agreed rules of engagement can help people to engage with conflict in a constructive way.

- This might be specifying that people should go first to the person they have a problem with, that they should offer proposed solutions, or at which point to involve a third party as a mediator.

- This can make disagreements more of a process and remove some of the unknown elements from the equation.

- **What are Belbin's team roles?**

- Belbin's team roles is a concept that offers insights into how individuals function within a group setting.

- Developed by Dr. Meredith Belbin, a British researcher, this theory emphasises the importance of understanding and utilising different strengths and skill sets in a team environment.

- The goal is to achieve higher levels of productivity and efficiency through effective collaboration and communication among team members.

- **What is the theory and core principles behind Belbin's team roles?**
- The core principle of Belbin's nine team roles is that individuals have a natural tendency to behave, contribute and interact with others in a specific way. These characteristics affect team composition and success.
- The Belbin model classifies team member [behaviour](#) into nine distinct roles that are needed for a well-functioning group. Each team role complements the others, working together to accomplish goals.
- By understanding and utilising the different team roles, managers and team members can create stronger, more effective teams. The key aspects of the Belbin team role theory are as follows:
- Recognising individual strengths and weaknesses for appropriate team role allocation
- Ensuring a balanced team composition with a mix of relevant roles
- Enhancing communication and collaboration for improved results

What are the nine Belbin team roles?
- The Belbin team roles are divided into categories based on an individual's behaviour, preferences, and abilities. These roles are:
- **Coordinator:** Brings focus and clarity to team goals, while delegating tasks appropriately
- **Monitor Evaluator:** Provides critical analysis and unbiased judgement, helping the team make informed decisions
- **Implementer:** Translates team ideas into practical actions and brings a systematic, disciplined approach to tasks
- **Plant:** Generates creative ideas, solving complex problems through innovative thinking.

What are the nine Belbin team roles? (Cont'd)
- **Teamworker:** Encourages cooperation and supports team members, often acting as the glue that holds the group together
- **Completer Finisher:** Ensures high-quality outputs, focusing on detail and polishing the team's work
- **Resource Investigator:** Explores new opportunities, engaging resources and contacts for the team's benefit
- **Shaper:** Drives the team forward, providing energy and direction when faced with challenges or obstacles
- **Specialist:** Contributes unique expertise and in-depth knowledge, playing an essential role in specialised areas
- Each person may demonstrate multiple team roles, but their preferences lie in one or two dominant areas. By understanding these roles, teams can achieve balance, optimise performance and tackle challenges effectively.

Part II

Resolving conflict

- The Belbin's team role model helps teams resolve conflicts, as all team members understand their roles and responsibilities. It highlights thought-oriented, people-oriented, and action-oriented roles, fostering an atmosphere with mutual respect and understanding.

- **Developing people skills**

- Belbin's approach emphasises developing people, with team roles motivating individuals to focus on their strengths and fill skills gaps. This increases job satisfaction and allows teams to grow.

- **Organisational benefits**

✓Organisations using Belbin's team roles experience improved team building, clear communication, and a productive workplace. Additionally, the model promotes

✓Enhanced problem solving

✓Common sense and accuracy in decision making

✓Efficient allocation of tasks

✓Increased employee engagement.

- **Psychological safety**
- In order for people to argue effectively, psychological safety needs to be an integral part of the team's make-up.
- Psychological safety is the idea that, in order to succeed, people in teams need to feel safe to take risks and make mistakes without fear of recrimination.
- Establishing psychological safety frees up time and cognitive energy so that the team can expend it on projects, rather than threats from within.

A proactive approach

- Rather than waiting for conflict over a particular issue to arise, take a proactive approach.

- This might involve identifying how people like to work, and where areas of misalignment or tension are likely to occur.

- Ask the team to provide ideas and feedback on tackling these differences and to devise strategies for handling them.

- This helps everyone with the identification process and gives them a vested interest in making the solutions work.

7 Practical steps to build psychological safety in teams

- "In the best teams, members listen to one another and show sensitivity to feelings and needs."

- That was the finding of Google's ground-breaking Project Aristotle – the concept of psychological safety.

- Put simply, it's the idea that, in order to succeed, people in teams need to feel safe to take risks and make mistakes without fear of recrimination.

- Establishing psychological safety frees up time and cognitive energy so that the team can expend it on projects, rather than threats from within.

- **"Psychological safety is not nearly as complicated as it may sound. After all, it's really about truly making a team come together as one and putting forth an environment that sets up everyone for success." – Forbes**

- **Step 1: Treat others as they'd like to be treated, not as you would.**

- Our default can be to work and interact on our own terms, but our own behavioural styles don't sit well with everyone.

- We need to learn how others communicate, learn, interrelate and contribute to a team in order to understand how best to approach and work with them.

- Belbin Reports are a great starting-point, giving you a rundown of each team member's preferences – and where they fit.

- **Step 2: Encourage mistakes.**
- Organisations have long tried to eliminate the language of weakness from industry, because it can be difficult subject-matter.
- But too often, the result is a blame culture or one where mistakes are brushed under the carpet.
- Belbin Team Roles, or behavioural styles, encourage us to understand and own our weaknesses as a flipside to a certain behavioural strength.
- This approach gives a framework to talk about what goes wrong and why, and helps develop strategies to counteract these difficulties.

- **Step 3: But keep accountability.**

- Whilst it should be OK to make mistakes without fear of blame, this doesn't mean tolerating loose cannons who undermine the team's efforts.

- Team members still need structure, purpose and boundaries.

- Accountability could mean committing to articulating our strengths effectively, sacrificing our preferred roles in the team where necessary in the short-term, and taking responsibility for own shortcomings by working in partnership with others.

- **Step 4: Encourage conflict.**
- Richard J. Hackman's study found that disagreements were good for a team, so long as they were handled in the right way.
- Whilst it might be tempting to work with others who take a similar approach to our own, behavioural diversity offers a better outcome, since important factors for success are less likely to be missed.
- At each stage, consider which contributions the project requires, not which selections will make for a quiet life.

- **Step 5: Allow creativity to flourish.**

- Some team members (***Plants and Resource Investigators***, in Belbin Team Role terms) need space to explore new, left-field ideas and even to present incomplete work, without being too constricted.

- So long as they have the team's brief in mind, they should be given this space.

- This might mean restricting the influence of other team members (the analytical ***Monitor Evaluator or the practical Implementer,*** to name but a few) until these ideas have had a chance to blossom.

- **Step 6: Promote honest, constructive feedback.**

- Leaders need to lead from the front by showing vulnerability, and accepting and acting upon feedback where necessary.

- This example of growth reverberates throughout the team, letting others know that they can and should take constructive feedback on board.

- Belbin helps teams situate this feedback thoughtfully.

- We exclude overly-positive and overly-negative responses, and we identify potential areas for development along with helpful advice, based on our decades of experience in guiding teams.

- **Step 7: As a leader, balance the needs for guidance and autonomy.**
- Each team member needs something different from their leader.
- Some need work delegated in detailed, specific terms.
- Others will resent intrusion and seek to be left to their own devices.
- Understanding how your Belbin Team Roles influence your leadership style gives you the tools to meet your team members' individual needs and help them reach their full potential.

- **Conclusion**

- Role theory in team building highlights the importance of understanding each team member's natural role preferences. It helps in forming balanced teams, distributing tasks effectively, and motivating employees to perform in their areas of strength.

- Belbin's team roles theory offers significant benefits to organisations and teams, ensuring optimal team performance, conflict resolution, and skills development.

- **Exercise:**
- Disagreements within the team provide opportunities for learning and growth. Discuss
- Highlight seven Practical steps to build psychological safety in teams
- What are the nine Belbin team roles?

- **END**
- **THANK YOU**