Allocating and developing team roles

In your first meeting (and if you've not yet started, begin by reading the ASK handout *Introducing team work* from the *Working in groups* series) you have now all shared and discussed your learning style preferences *(see* ASK handout *Starting to understand team strengths).* You have begun to see where the strengths of the team lie and what gaps need to be adapted to and managed. So what roles exist in an effective team and how can those roles be allocated to individuals in the team?

Here, a simplified adaption of the team roles model originally proposed by Belbin in his 1993 *Team Roles at Work* (and subsequently updated in 2010) will be used.

Team role type	Strengths	Weaknesses (acceptable)
Plant	Envisioning. Thinks 'out of the box'. Generates inventive solutions.	Can lack attention to detail.
Resource Investigator	Outgoing. Networker. Follows options off the beaten track.	Can be unrealistic.
Co-ordinator	Leadership. Catalyses decision-making. Shares work.	Can pass own tasks onto others.
Shaper	Energetic. Deadline junkie. Not fazed by barriers.	Can lack sensitivity to others.
Monitor-evaluator	Calm. Objective. 360 vision on things.	Can be a source of negativity.
Team worker	Empathic. Mediator. Sensing.	Can find decision-making under pressure hard.
Implementer	Coverts concepts into reality. Rigorous. Dependable.	Can take time to adjust to new realities.
Completer	Attentive to detail. Precise. Meets deadlines.	Can be reluctant to share tasks with others.

A team member can perform more than one role type, for example they may undertake another role in a 'back-up' capacity. An appreciation of the roles to be performed underpins effective team performance. To develop the team you now need to explore how the profile of the team members' learning styles relates to possible roles. You can use the following, approximate mapping of learning style preference to team role type to stimulate the role allocation discussion you now need to have.

Activist	Plant	Developing/delivering presentations, contacting/liaising people, solving problems.
	Resource investigator	
Pragmatist	Co-ordinator	Chairing meetings, planning and setting goals and deadlines, researching.
	Shaper	
Reflector	Monitor-evaluator	Maintaining team communications, identifying problems, progress chasing against plan.
	Team worker	
Theorist	Implementer	Collecting/Processing data and information, quality control, finalising detail.
	Completer finisher	

To illustrate what allocations might result from such a conversation, let's use the team profile example from the ASK handout *Starting to understand team strengths* from the *Working in groups* series:

	Activist	Reflector	Pragmatist	Theorist
Nikhil	1	2	(4)	(4)
Suzie	(4)	1	2	1
Zahraa	1	(3)	1	(4)
Sam	1	2	2	(3)
'3s and 4s' total	1	1	1	3

This team's discussion produced the following outcome in relation to a new product-launch assignment; your assignment will be different so you will judge it differently!

Activist	Plant	**Suzie** works with **Sam** on networking and liaison, and developing the final presentation
	Resource investigator	
Pragmatist	Co-ordinator	**Nikhil** chairs meetings and works with **Suzie** on planning etc. **Suzie** minutes meetings.
	Shaper	
Reflector	Monitor-evaluator	**Zahraa** works with **Nikhil** on maintaining team communications and monitoring progress
	Team worker	
Theorist	Implementer	**Zahraa** works with **Sam** on detailed research and pulling ideas and concepts together
	Completer finisher	

Here roles have been identified and allocated to exploit the strengths of the team as far as possible but there are gaps. Whilst the judgements made to fill these gaps contain risks there are real personal development opportunities for all team members. They will be outside their 'comfort zone' so group commitment to support them needs to be openly discussed and agreed, for example:

• Nikhil may find himself torn between taking on too much yet wanting to delegate work to others, including his own allocated work! He shares this with the group to secure their support and feedback during the team life cycle.

• Suzie may get bored with her tasks and drift off plan. She discusses with the team how other team members can challenge her in a constructive and enabling way if this becomes an issue.

• Zahraa may encounter deadline challenges in her work with Sam even though she is co-working with Nikhil on progress chasing. She discusses this with Sam and Nikhil as to how she can be supported should this happen.

• Sam might find some tension between his two roles and discusses with Suzie that he doesn't adapt quite as quickly as her, and to clarify how she can support with him on this.

The most significant gain is that **discussion has now developed communication** between individuals about tangible matters and has helped to build rapport and trust. Continuing open and honest conversation will give payback as and when the inevitable and unplanned challenges arise.

Reference: Belbin, R. M. (2010). *Team Roles at Work* (2nd ed). New York: Routledge.

For further guidance, contact the Academic Skills Unit (ASK).

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