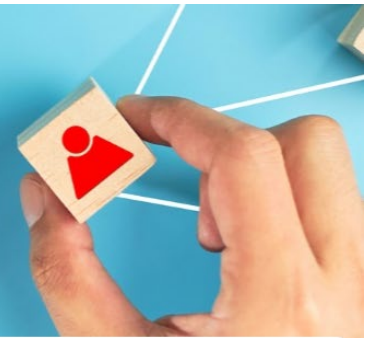


Management

# 7 reasons why collaborative leadership beats solo leadership hands down

by The Belbin Team | Victoria Brown, 17 Jun 2021



**In the past, our concepts and experience of leadership revolved around the solo leader. But there is another way.**

The solo leader takes sole responsibility for decision-making, seeks conformity and projects their objectives onto others. By contrast, team or collaborative leaders choose to limit their own role, seek out talent, promote diversity and create a mission that others are inspired to follow.

Different situations require different leadership styles. Whilst solo leadership can enable leaders to speed up the decision making process, in most situations, a democratic leadership style confers greater long-term advantages to the leader, the team and the organisation as a whole.

Let's examine why collaborative leaders often have the edge.

Collaborative leaders play to their strengths and empower their team to do the same.

Whilst bureaucratic leaders direct subordinates, team leaders develop colleagues. They understand their own contribution, because they've identified their most effective leadership styles and they cultivate those approaches. They know that playing to strengths increases engagement in the team sixfold, so they're invested in discovering what each team member has to offer and finding the right fit for them, rather than forcing individuals to meet one-size-fits-all competencies based on rigid job descriptions.

Whether it's applied to a new recruit or someone who has been working in the same team for many years, a Belbin Report can provide invaluable insights into someone's strengths beyond the skills that can be found on a CV. It can help the team learn to share information, and build trust. And it can uncover hidden strengths, aspirations and even strain, where someone is working against their natural abilities for a long period of time.

Team leadership foregrounds humility...and humble 'servant leaders' get results

Team leaders believe they have something to learn from those they lead. They don't see themselves by default as wiser, more creative or broader in their thinking than colleagues. As a result, they're more likely to seek feedback from their teams to help them grow in their leadership role. They're generally more humble and self-aware, and have a better grasp of the organisation's needs. Humility in leadership also leads to higher rates of employee engagement, more job satisfaction, and lower rates of turnover.

Since Belbin is all about observable behaviour, gaining [Observer feedback](#) from others is a key part of the process. Leaders, managers, colleagues and reports can all help to round out the picture of what someone has to offer, and where they might benefit from collaborating with others who possess complementary skills.

Team leadership promotes diversity - and reaps the rewards

*“Leadership in a team setting is much less about command and control, and more about getting the most out of a diverse and experienced group of individuals.” - EY, 2013*

Participative leadership is all about democracy. Team leaders seek to surround themselves with able individuals, not with admirers who will agree with their every word, so they ask others for their input. They seek out talent to improve the balance of the team. As a result, rather than relying upon – and being limited to – their own viewpoints in approaching a problem, they are able to benefit from cognitive diversity in their teams.

The Belbin Team Report in particular, gives an overview of how each person in a team might contribute, helping leaders to look beyond job titles and ensure that a range of cognitive approaches are represented.

Collaborative leaders increase ownership, accountability and engagement

Transactional leaders dole out specific tasks and goals, expect compliance and take no risks where people are concerned. As a result, when the leader fails (as is inevitable, at some point), they do so alone and are often discarded. By contrast, because collaborative leaders seek out others’ perspectives and possess strong communication skills, they have a clear rationale for decisions and engender trust and respect. This means that others take more ownership and are more likely to step in to help when things go wrong.

Collaborative leadership centres effective delegation

Because collaborative leaders have a greater understanding of others’ abilities, they are able to delegate effectively, according to strengths. They ensure that the individual is suited to the work in question, and engaged in it. So, they can trust that the team member will take responsibility for the outcome. With this trust in place, the leader can focus on the bigger picture, instead of micro-managing or interfering in the specifics of how things are done.

Team leadership moves teams beyond the limitations of hierarchical structures

Armed with the language of Belbin Team Roles, the two were able to articulate their relationship in terms of behavioural styles, rather than being beholden to the traditional expectations of their relative positions, which would have left each playing against, rather than to, their strengths. The organisational chart doesn’t always reflect an ideal team composition in Team Role terms, so it’s crucial to understand others’ behaviours and to use the language of Belbin to work with what – and whom – you’ve got.

Team leadership is future-proof and offers a greater bulwark against uncertainty

Almost 9 out of 10 companies surveyed by EY in 2013 agreed that the problems confronting them were so complex that teams had become essential to providing effective solutions. And in the past few years, the world has become an even more uncertain place. One person should no longer be expected to bear sole responsibility or provide direction without being able and willing to draw on the advice of others.

And neither is this the expectation of new generations entering the workforce, who do so expecting their voices to be heard. With collaborative leadership seen as the only viable method in a society underpinned by equality and power-sharing, democratic leaders who offer their teams a say will have the pick of new talent and the chance to build the highest-performing teams.

Let it go...

It can be difficult for leaders to relinquish control, especially when it seems that their reputation is on the line. But that doesn't have to mean going to the other extreme – the laissez faire leadership approach. Understanding each person's contribution – including the leader's – enables everyone to feel valued and connected, and helps with the specifics of allocating work, making decisions and managing meetings.

Whatever our strengths, and however honed our leadership skills, we'll always need others to fill in the gaps. This should be acknowledged and embraced as a source of strength in itself.

### **Why Belbin?**

The Belbin Team Role methodology helps leaders and their teams at every stage, providing valuable insights into how people work and how to make things better, whatever storm you're weathering.

Contact us to find out how: +6421 842 893 or email [info@leadershipsolutions.co.nz](mailto:info@leadershipsolutions.co.nz)

