

What's become of our meetings and where next?

"A meeting is an event at which minutes are kept and the hours are lost"

-Unknown

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Start with the 'why' – it informs the 'who'

With so many meetings moving online, one of the positive reported changes in behaviour is the death of the blanket invitation according to job title or where people sit in the office. It's essential to know – and share – the purpose of the meeting before thinking about invitations. Is it to generate new ideas or discuss strategy? Is it a crisis meeting or a final check on the small print?

An awareness of each attendee's Belbin Team Roles can help ensure that you've got the right people present and can keep meetings small and productive. Need to bounce ideas around? Find those with Plant and Resource Investigator tendencies. Only add Monitor Evaluator influence to the mix once those ideas are ready for scrutiny. Finalising plans and checking the details? You'll need those with strong Implementer and Completer Finisher behaviours. Keep out the predominant Resource Investigators, as a planning meeting is unlikely to hold their interest.

Name the elephant in the room

During 2020, Belbin conducted a survey to discover how our preferred working styles can influence our experience of virtual meetings. We discovered that those who were meeting exclusively online rated the effectiveness of virtual meetings more highly than those who had adopted hybrid working or remained in the workplace during that time.

It's unclear whether this was because the exclusively remote group "bought in" and developed strategies to make online meetings more effective or whether the availability of in-person meetings to the remainder shifted perspectives on effectiveness.

What is clear is that the debate around hybrid working is quickly becoming a bipartite conflict and some may be fearing an 'us and them' situation between those in the office and those at home. It's important to be candid about those divisions and to acknowledge - if applicable - that the organisation is feeling its way and trying to align individual needs and preferences with business priorities. Ask for suggestions when it comes to meetings, so that the team has ownership over the solutions to the problems of hybrid working.

Be willing to try new things and keep the lines of communication open to identify potential problems arising before they can be allowed to hamper the team's performance.



Use a common language

The move to virtual working has challenged effective communication. With cameras switched off, we lose body language and other physical cues. When emailing or instant messaging, rather than turning in our seats, we lose tone and inference.

Belbin Team Roles offers a different kind of language, which can help plug this gap and bridge misunderstandings, as well as to recognise and value others' strengths. When Belbin becomes a shorthand, enthusiastic Resource Investigators can say, "Let's not ME (Monitor Evaluate) this idea until we've found out more," or an impatient Shaper can state, "Let's CF this at a later date". This understanding can help keep foster new kinds of communication, as well as keeping meetings to time, and to the point.

Change the chair

Virtual meetings are an opportunity to change things up and see what works. Those with strong Co-ordinator tendencies (in Belbin terms, people who take a broad outlook and draw out contributions from others) make the most effective chairs, because they give everyone airtime, seek to build towards consensus and don't get bogged down in details. However, the team's most effective Co-ordinator might not be the team leader. Working with Team Role strengths provides an opportunity to look beyond hierarchical or functional considerations and shake things up a bit.

Don't underestimate the informal gathering

With the rise of virtual and hybrid working, informal knowledge sharing has dwindled, because these kinds of meetings aren't the ones scheduled in the diary. We don't tune in to useful conversations or we're not given introductions to passers-by, helping us forge new connections and relationships. In our survey, those with Resource Investigator tendencies, who enjoy networking and building new relationships, told us they suffered the most from the lack of those opportunities. Consider mentoring schemes and building communities of practice to help foster tacit knowledge sharing within your organisation.

Know what every person in the room has to offer

Of course, success rides on knowing the behaviours present in your team. Only a Belbin Individual Report can provide the insights you need, but in the meantime, on the next page is our quick guide to Belbin Team Roles in meetings, not forgetting that each of us has strengths in more than one role!



Plants

Should be invited to brainstorming meetings or to think-tanks to find new ways to navigate existing problems.

Resource Investigators

Are likely to be enthusiastic when discussing new ideas. Need to be able to communicate their findings from the outside world to the team, but should be wary of talking too much and not letting others speak.

Co-ordinators

Are ideally suited to chairing meetings, allocating actions to the most appropriate people and ensuring that everyone has a chance to speak.

Shapers

Are likely to be impatient (vocally so!) if the meeting drags on. Will want to focus on actions and outcomes, not just debates.

Monitor Evaluators

May well sit back in their chairs or at a distance from the team, as a physical manifestation of their objectivity. May take their time to weigh in on issues being discussed while they formulate opinions, and then are likely to enjoy debate for its own sake.

Teamworkers

Will try and bring people together. May struggle to communicate their views, especially on issues which prove controversial or divisive.

Implementers

Will want to talk practicalities and make concrete plans, so this contribution should not be present in meetings designed to generate new ideas, but in those where ideas need to be turned into actions and deadlines.

Completer Finishers

Are likely to focus on the details, which might frustrate Shapers. If the meeting is intended to be 'broad brush', Co-ordinators might have additional work in ensuring that the meeting does not delve into an unnecessary level of detail.

Specialists

Are ideal for providing specialised expertise as and when needed, but the timing of their contribution might require careful thought, so that they don't bring all discussions back to their area of expertise, at the expense of other considerations.



Next steps

Some of these may sound familiar, but at Belbin, we believe in evidence, not hunch. The only way to find out your Team Roles - and those present in your team - is to complete a Belbin Report.

Contact us to find out how: +6421 842 893 or email info@leadershipsolutions.co.nz

