

Chemistry: Idea to Market

Teams and Teamwork

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This resource was produced as part of the National HE STEM Programme



A few notes on Teams and Teamwork

The reality is that in most work situations you will find yourselves working as part of a team. This is partly due to the way organisations and their work packages are structured and partly because, when effective, a team can function better than the sum of its parts.

What makes a successful team?

There is no such thing as the universal ideal team as different tasks and projects require different combinations of people to achieve them. Below are list of the characteristics of a good team taken from the websites of two different organisations, Friends of the Earth¹ and Firovia Consulting²

Friends of the Earth

- Equally valued opinions
- Shared goals
- Clearly defined roles
- Diverse backgrounds
- Similar backgrounds
- Recognising strengths
- Active membership
- People who take on tasks and do them
- Proactive
- Positive thinking
- Achievable goals
- Sceptics – people to pick holes in ideas
- Communication
- Idealists and realists
- Inclusion
- Leadership (brings people together)
- Responding positively to constructive criticism
- Respect
- Motivation
- Being open about what you are doing (make sure your membership is kept informed)
- Self awareness (individually and as a team)
- Time to reflect
- Have a plan (check performance)
- Recognition and celebration and thank you
- Recruitment and nurturing

Firvovia

- Strong Leadership
- Clear roles and responsibilities
- Team members understanding their roles
- A shared commitment towards individuals roles
- Clear Objectives
- Shared sense of purpose
- Good decision making processes
- Effective communication
- Emotional intelligence
- Trust, co-operation and support
- Conflict management skills
- Understanding of peoples strengths, weaknesses and preferences
- Transparent decision making process

You can see that there is some commonality (e.g. leadership, communication, shared commitment and goals) and both outcomes and process are important. To be a successful team

member you need to appreciate the contribution you are expected to make and be able to build effective relationships with other team members through empathy and good communication.

Understanding your role within a team

In the session you acted as part of a team and subsequently had the opportunity to reflect on the role(s) you performed. If you want to take a more formal look at how you function as part of a team then you will eventually come across the name of Dr Meredith Belbin; a man who has studied how teams work for many years. He believes people in teams tend to assume different 'team roles', that is, they have "a tendency to behave, contribute and interrelate with others in a particular way"³. The team roles are listed in the accompanying handout. You may find these roles useful in understanding how you work in a team or if you are a team leader in creating a balanced team.

Given what I've said that there's no such thing as the universal ideal team, but using a Belbin approach here's a combination that gets close⁴

- One Co-ordinator/shaper
- One Plant
- One Monitor Evaluator
- One or more Teamworkers, Implementers, Resource Investigators or Completer-Finishers
- Specialists as needed

Balance can also be improved by ensuring the following areas are covered

- Advisory (specialist knowledge, procedure and enquiries)
- Organising (collecting and evaluating info, marketing)
- Exploring (innovation, selling, investigating resources and alternative)
- Controlling (planning and implementing systems and procedures)

A note of caution

Belbin analysis is just one way of looking at how teams work.

These are roles you may take within a team-working situation, they are not personality traits and don't reflect your worth as an individual.

You may take on more than one role in any given situation and the roles you take may change in another situation, though it is likely you will have 1-3 preferred roles.

References (all accessed 3 March 2011)

1 http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports_on_events/good_team.pdf

2 <http://www.firovia.com/What-Makes-A-Successful-Team/63>

3 <http://www.belbin.com/>

4 Taken from a presentation by Bill Metcalf (Cambridge Strategic Management) given at University of Leeds on 14 Jan 2003