BELBIN®

How to...

Design and Run More Effective Meetings with Belbin

The laptop screen displays:

BELBIN® Sample Team Report 5

Team Role Circle: **Top Two**

Based on Self-Perception and Observer Assessments

This page gives an 'at-a-glance' view of the balance and spread of Team Roles within the team. Each team member's **Top Two** roles are shown in the relevant segments of the circle. This helps you to explore which contributions might be missing in the team and where clashes may occur.

Team Role Circle labels: Social, Thinking, Action

Circle segments: NN, BJ, GG1, GG2, RB, GG1, GG2, NN, BJ, RB

Key:
BJ - B
RB - R
NN - N
GG1 - G
GG2 - G

Role legend:
- RI — Resource Investigator
- TW — Teamworker
- CO — Co-ordinator
- PL — Plant
- ME — Monitor Evaluator
- SP — Specialist
- SH — Shaper
- IMP — Implementer

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How to… Design and Run More Effective Meetings with Belbin

We spend much of our working lives in meetings. According to Harvard Business Review, it's nearly 23 hours per week for executives. Forbes reports it's about 35% of the working week for middle managers and up to 50% for seniors. Too often, it feels like more than that.

The most common complaints are that meetings are too frequent, include too many people (or the wrong people), and are poorly-timed and badly-run.

As a result of the pandemic, teams have had to grapple with the additional challenges of meeting online. As well as developing technical skills (mastering online conferencing tools), we have identified the need to adapt our behaviours. This might include modifying conversational turn-taking when communicating through a screen or interpreting facial expressions and body language in a virtual environment.

We know that meetings are an essential communication tool in projects and teamwork. Meetings help keep us informed about progress and take part in the decision-making process in order to perform well. If done right, meetings help us to collaborate, nurture relationships and exchange information.

23hrs
per week
for executives

35%
of the working week
for middle managers

50%
of the working week
for senior managers

So how can we use Belbin to make meetings better?

When setting up a meeting, it's important to ask:

- What is the reason for the meeting?
- Who should be involved?
- How long should the meeting be?
- What is the desired outcome?

By answering these questions, the meeting can be designed – rather than simply scheduled – taking into account the team culture and the distribution of Team Roles among participants.

Let's look at each question in turn…

What is the reason for the meeting?

Before you can begin working on a specific agenda, you need to identify the purpose of the meeting.

A meeting might be called to inform, generate new ideas, evaluate, decide or perform actual tasks. This should be communicated clearly in the invitation, and the form of the meeting should be designed accordingly to support that purpose, and keep focus.

Establishing the purpose of the meeting will provide a lead on…

Who should be involved?

If you are looking to generate new ideas, you'll need people with Plant and Resource Investigator strengths. If you need to plan, you might want Monitor Evaluator and Specialist contributions.

The diagram below shows which Team Roles are required at various stages of a project.

Whilst it may be tempting to include everyone, bringing in Team Role contributions at the wrong time can have detrimental effects on an individual, team and project. For example, a practical Implementer or detail-focused Completer Finisher are likely to struggle with the ideas phase and may try to exclude certain options before they have been fully explored. By contrast, a creative, free-thinking Plant trapped in the organisational stages is likely to feel restricted and bored.

Inviting the right Team Role contributions at the right time speeds up the process and makes the best use of everyone's time. It also ensures people understand the reason for their involvement and 'buy in' to the meeting.

As Projects progress different Team Roles are required

Stage	Role		Role
Identify goals	Shaper		Co-ordinator
Ideas	Plant		Resource Investigator
Plans	Monitor Evaluator		Specialist
Contacts	Resource Investigator		Teamworker
Organisation	Implementer		Co-ordinator
Follow through	Completer Finisher		Implementer

Team size is an important consideration too

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos is famous for his 'two-pizza rule' – if the team meeting requires more than two pizzas, the gathering is too big.

Dr Belbin's ideal team size is four. This allows each person's voice to be heard, whilst the even numbers mean that the team needs to reach decisions by negotiation and consensus, rather than one person simply having a casting vote. It's important to remember that each person brings more than one Team Role strength, and that not all roles need to be represented at all times. Again, the contributions required depend on the purpose of the meeting.

Once the numbers get bigger, not only is efficiency compromised, but group mentality takes over, precluding Team Role relationships from forming.

How long should the meeting be?

How much time is needed to communicate, discuss or decide? This will depend greatly on the type of interaction and work you expect to be performed during the meeting. It is important to adhere to the timings specified, and bear in mind the balance between individual and team working time. It is difficult for individuals to be engaged in the meeting if they feel their individual workload is growing exponentially before their eyes.

For virtual meetings, it's important to remember to build in regular breaks to ensure that everyone is comfortable and able to devote their attention to the meeting.
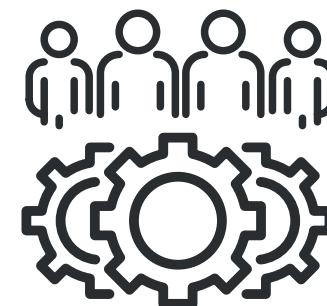
Dr Belbin's ideal team size is... 4

Differentiating Teams from Groups
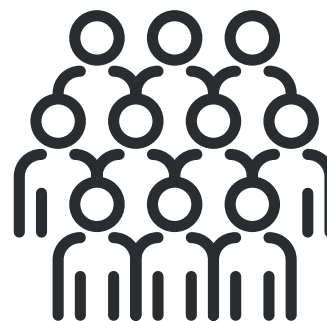
Group

People brought together for a common purpose while being too numerous to allow Team Role relationships to form

Team

A limited number of people selected to work together for a shared objective in a way that allows each person to make a distinctive contribution

What is the desired outcome?

Before embarking upon a meeting, organisers should have a clear understanding of what the meeting is expected to achieve. Again, this might influence (and be influenced by) the Team Role contributions of those present.

If there is a sense of urgency and you want the meeting to focus on results, it is important to include someone with strong Shaper behaviours. If your objective is to hold a consultation and reach a decision by consensus, a Co-ordinator approach might be required.

This diagram gives an overview of the contributions each Team Role can make, which can serve as a useful checklist.

A Team Problem – Have we got…

Question	Role
People with any good ideas?	Plants
Someone who chooses which idea would work best?	Monitor Evaluators
Someone who is going to allocate the roles and orchestrate the team effort?	Co-ordinators
Practical people who can realise these suggestions?	Implementers
People who are going to produce high standards?	Completer Finishers
People who are going to make contacts outside the group and find external resources?	Resource Investigators
Someone who is going to move the group forward and stop complacency?	Shaper
Someone who is going to stop arguments and pull the team together and improve atmosphere?	Teamworker
People who are knowledgeable in certain areas of expertise?	Specialist

Planning your meeting with Belbin Team Roles

The Belbin Team report gives you valuable insights into the Team Roles present in your team.

The **Overview of Team Role Composition** lists each person's contributions, with Team Roles ranked from highest to lowest.

The **Potential Contributions** page offers suggestions of how Team Role strengths might be used to best advantage in the team. Of course, there are likely to be other factors (technical skills, position within the organisation etc) to take into consideration, but this can provide some useful pointers and even identify talents that are not being put to use.

In particular, you might want to consider varying who chairs the meeting. People with strong Co-ordinator strengths tend to take naturally to this role, since they're good at building consensus and ensuring that diverse perspectives are heard, whilst keeping the focus on objectives. It's worth noting that, in a team, the Co-ordinator may not be the team leader.
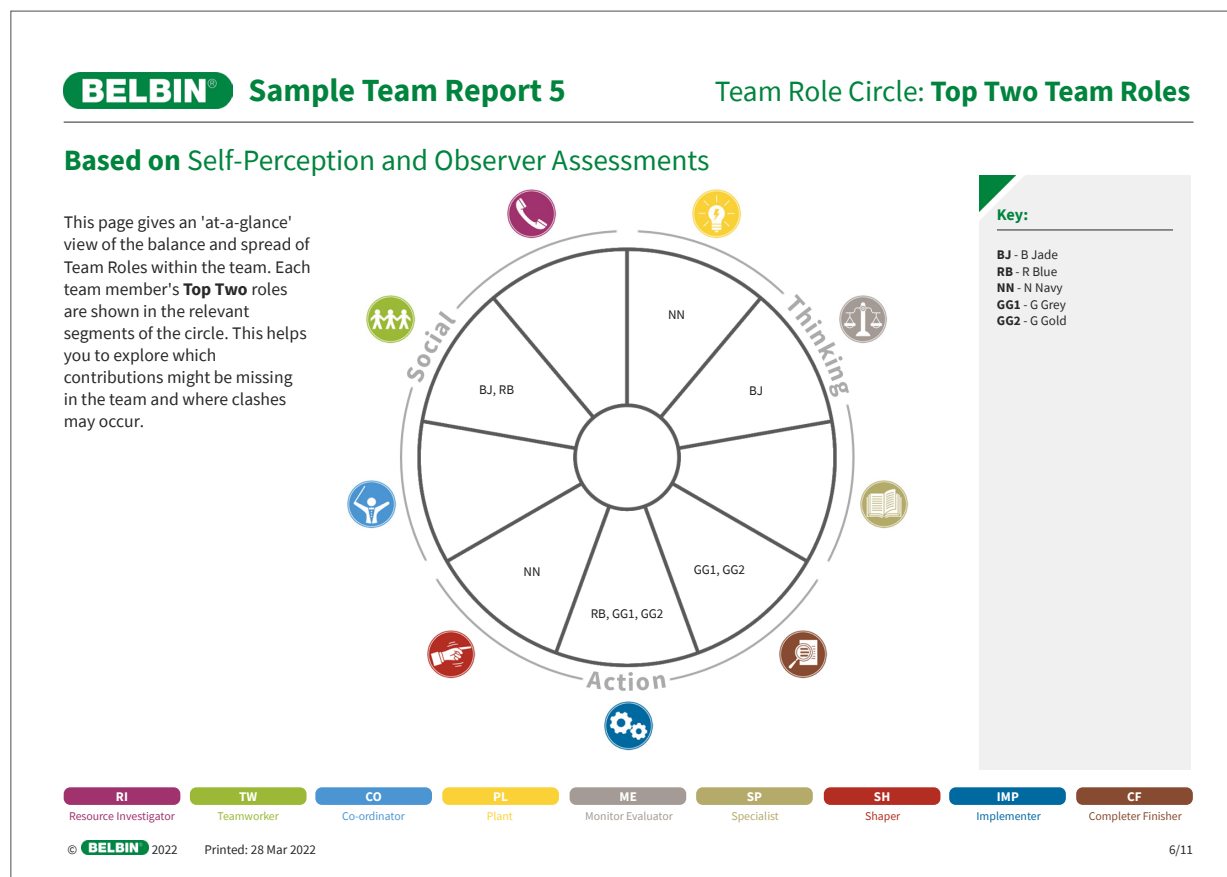
Meeting in progress: how Belbin can help set the ground rules

By now, many of us will be familiar with the ground rules around the technology – raising a 'hand' to speak, switching on cameras for visual cues, and ensuring that microphones are muted for larger gatherings to avoid distracting background noise.

Similarly, you can use Belbin – and your knowledge of the behaviours present in the team – to ensure that individual contributions don't throw the meeting off course.

It's a good idea to begin the meeting by representing the Team Roles of all participants on the **Team Role Circle**. (This is available as part of the Belbin Team report or can be replicated on a flipchart, if you have the results of everyone present.)

The Team Role Circle gives everyone an at-a-glance view of the contributions present. You can ask participants to identify their top two Team Roles and can even add lowest roles on the outside of the relevant segment of the circle.

BELBIN® **Sample Team Report 5**   Team Role Circle: **Top Two Team Roles**

Based on Self-Perception and Observer Assessments

This page gives an 'at-a-glance' view of the balance and spread of Team Roles within the team. Each team member's **Top Two** roles are shown in the relevant segments of the circle. This helps you to explore which contributions might be missing in the team and where clashes may occur.

Key:

BJ - B Jade
RB - R Blue
NN - N Navy
GG1 - G Grey
GG2 - G Gold

RI	TW	CO	PL	ME	SP	SH	IMP	CF
Resource Investigator	Teamworker	Co-ordinator	Plant	Monitor Evaluator	Specialist	Shaper	Implementer	Completer Finisher

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Before the meeting begins, ask those present to 'predict' how the meeting will run, based on the behaviours of those present. This can be used to highlight (and hopefully mitigate) problems that may arise.

For example, if the meeting is full of Resource Investigators, it's likely to be a talkative gathering! Discussions might centre around how to ensure that everyone is given sufficient airtime. If there are lots of Specialists present, in-depth discussions are likely to follow, but you might want to beware of becoming mired in extensive discussions that lose sight of the bigger picture.

Consider which contributions are missing from those assembled and whether those are important, given the purpose of the meeting. Do you have someone who will make a plan of action and attend to the details? Is that needed at this stage?

Lastly, take care to observe Team Role opposites, as these are potential sources of tension. For example, the Resource Investigator's enthusiasm for a new prospect or venture might be quickly dampened by the Completer Finisher's tendency to ask for too many details too soon. These interactions will need to be carefully managed.
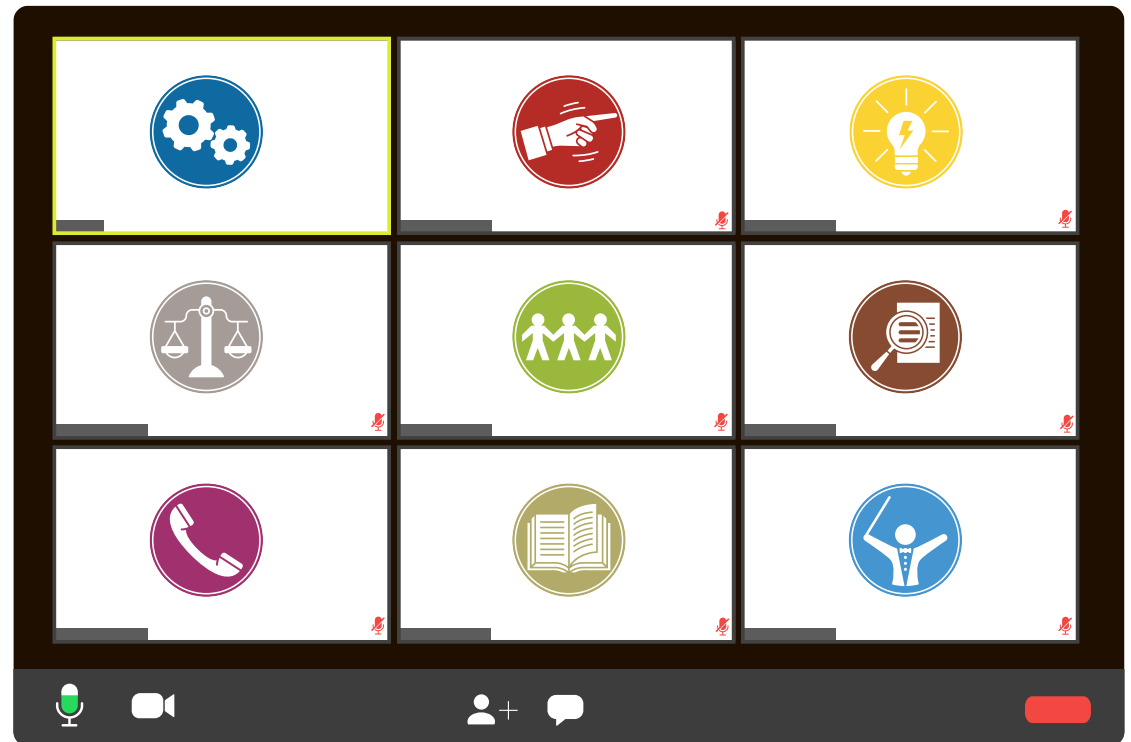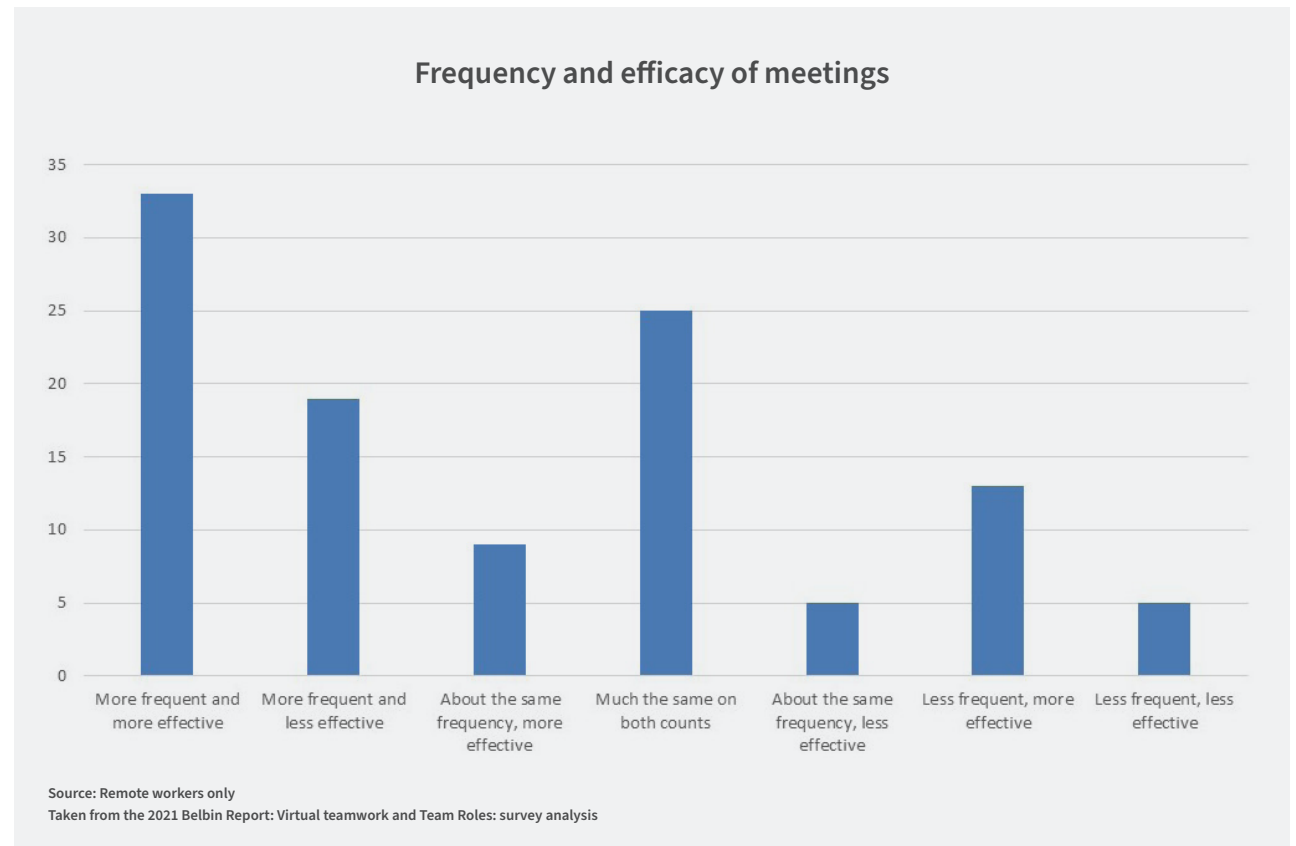
Hybrid Teams

Hybrid teams may face additional challenges here. According to our 2020 research, teams who were interacting solely online tended to rate meeting effectiveness more highly than hybrid teams. This could be because teams working only online were more committed to developing strategies to boost the effectiveness of virtual meetings. Alternatively, it could be that the availability of in-person meetings to hybrid groups shifted perceptions of effectiveness.

In hybrid teams, it's important to consider how team members present on-site will be arranged so that everyone is audible and included? How will the chair manage contributions within the room and from participants online, to ensure that all voices are heard?

If the team's Shaper is in the room, pushing for a goal and a deadline, and the Monitor Evaluator is dialling in, how will the team ensure that that voice is heard, so that the team doesn't plough ahead with an ill-considered plan? With Team Roles in mind, those present can ensure they make the most of each contribution and keep the meeting on track.

Frequency and efficacy of meetings

Source: Remote workers only
Taken from the 2021 Belbin Report: Virtual teamwork and Team Roles: survey analysis

Change up the decision-making process

Most meetings include decision-making. Instead of a sequential (and frequently time-consuming) process where each participant is invited to express his or her opinion on a particular matter, consider changing things around by allowing certain Team Roles to take the lead, depending on the stage.

For example, the decision-making process could be managed as follows:

☐ **What is the problem?**
The Shaper defines the problem and the Co-ordinator explains why we need a solution, inviting participants to contribute.

☐ **What are our options?**
Plants and Resource Investigators lead the process of generating ideas, ensuring that we have a range of alternatives.

☐ **Which solution is most attractive?**
The Monitor Evaluator and Specialist contribute to the selection, using their accurate judgement and particular knowledge.

☐ **How do we keep shareholders happy?**
The responsibility to "sell" the vision and expected outcomes to the shareholders should be given to the team's Resource Investigator and Teamworker.

☐ **How do we put this idea into practice?**
This might be a separate topic to be discussed at a later meeting. However, once the solution is accepted, Implementer and Co-ordinator contributions are needed to set up a workable action plan and match tasks and responsibilities with people.

An opportunity for change

Meetings have great potential that is often wasted. We can realise that potential by taking the time to understand what each person brings to the meeting, and to the collective endeavour.

Find out how to get more from your team today at www.belbin.co.nz

Notes:

Accreditation

The Belbin model has numerous other applications. To ensure that you are using the Belbin Team Role reports to their maximum potential, and making the most of your investment, we would recommend attending the Belbin Accreditation Course.

Belbin reports –
The intelligence your team needs

Our personalised behavioural reports focus on the nine key clusters of behaviour (Team Roles) needed for team success. They help people to better understand their strengths, cultivate hidden talents and work more effectively together.

It all starts with the Belbin Individual report. This details someone's Team Role 'fingerprint' and gives in-depth advice and guidance on how they can articulate and promote their strengths to best effect.

But it doesn't end there. Once you have a set of Individual reports, you can generate a suite of additional Belbin reports, most of which require no additional input from you or your teams.

To find out more, contact the Belbin NZ and Pacific office or visit belbin.co.nz.

Further Reading

Team Roles at Work – offers managers a practical guide to improving their teams within the workplace to deliver significantly better results for their organisations. This reflects well on them as a manager whilst also saving them time and energy, by using each team member to their best advantage to achieve overall team goals.

R Meredith Belbin, Team Roles at Work, (Butterworth Heinemann, 2nd ed., 2010ISBN: 978-1-85617-8006

For more information on Belbin products and training, please call +64 (0) 21 842 893 or visit www.belbin.co.nz

Belbin Team Role Descriptions

Resource Investigator

Strengths:
Outgoing, enthusiastic, communicative.
Explores opportunities and develops contacts.

Associated/Allowable Weaknesses:
Over-optimistic. Loses interest once initial
enthusiasm has passed.

Plant

Strengths:
Creative, imaginative, free-thinking.
Generates ideas and solves difficult problems.

Associated/Allowable Weaknesses:
Ignores incidentals. Too preoccupied to
communicate effectively.

Shaper

Strengths:
Challenging, dynamic, thrives on pressure.
Has the drive and courage to overcome obstacles.

Associated/Allowable Weaknesses:
Prone to provocation. Offends people's feelings.

Teamworker

Strengths:
Co-operative, perceptive and diplomatic.
Listens and averts friction.

Associated/Allowable Weaknesses:
Indecisive in crunch situations.
Avoids confrontation.

Monitor Evaluator

Strengths:
Sober, strategic and discerning.
Sees all options and judges accurately.

Associated/Allowable Weaknesses:
Lacks drive and ability to inspire others.
Can be overly critical.

Implementer

Strengths:
Practical, reliable, efficient. Turns ideas into
actions and organises work that needs to be done.

Associated/Allowable Weaknesses:
Slow to respond to new possibilities.
Somewhat inflexible.

Co-ordinator

Strengths:
Mature, confident, identifies talent.
Clarifies goals. Delegates effectively.

Associated/Allowable Weaknesses:
Can be seen as manipulative.
Offloads own share of the work.

Specialist

Strengths:
Single-minded, self-starting, dedicated.
Provides knowledge and skills in rare supply.

Associated/Allowable Weaknesses:
Contributes only on a narrow front.
Dwells on technicalities.

Completer Finisher

Strengths:
Painstaking, conscientious, anxious.
Searches out errors. Polishes and perfects.

Associated/Allowable Weaknesses:
Inclined to worry unduly.
Reluctant to delegate.

BELBIN®

The only sanctioned way of finding out your Belbin® Team Role strengths and weaknesses is by completing the official Belbin® Self-Perception Inventory online, and receiving a Belbin® Individual Report.

Over 3 million Belbin® Reports have been generated worldwide for individuals, managers, teams and organisations.
We can help you every step of the way.

Contact us at belbin.com to start your Belbin® journey.

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