

TIPS FOR FACILITATING REMOTE BELBIN TEAM WORKSHOPS

If you're used to delivering training in person, moving your Belbin team workshop online might seem daunting, unfamiliar territory. Don't worry – we've run plenty of online sessions. Here are our top tips.



IN ADVANCE

Ensure that any relevant workbooks and handouts are made available in advance.

Send each person their Individual Belbin Report electronically – around 24 hours prior to the session.

Ask them to read it and to familiarise themselves with the nine Team Roles.

Technology

It sounds obvious but ensure that you have the appropriate technology and platform for your purpose.

And ask questions:

- How many participants are there, and can the platform cope with this number?
- Will the participants be together in one place? (Not at the moment...)
- Will each be in a different place and do you want people to see each other at the same time?
- Will you be sharing slides and documents?
- Do you want these to be interactive? (Some platforms allow a PowerPoint slide deck to run in tandem with the session.)

If the participants are all familiar with using a particular platform internally, it's worth considering whether you can adapt to minimise time for them to get to grips with new technology.

Once you know what platform you are using, test, test and test again. Try running with your family and friends before you go 'live'.



Invites

Send out the invitations to the session in plenty of time. The participants may not be 'au fait' with the tech/platform either.

Make sure you cover more than just the basics:

- How should people dial in?
- What do want them to bring to the session?
- An electronic or hard colour copy of their report?
- Particular information?
- Do you want them to have access to specific equipment (technology or e.g. pen and paper)?

Check that all has been received and understood a couple of days before the session.

ON THE DAY – IMMEDIATELY PRIOR

Check the setup with a remote participant or other person.

Ensure that you can be seen from where you intend to sit (or stand but bear in mind that you are likely to have to remain in that place, so ensure that you're comfortable).

Double- and triple-check that you know how to mute everyone. If you are going to share your screen, ensure that the right documents are there. No-one wants to see your emails...

Check that all your training aids (e.g. flip charts, split/shared screens, presentations etc..) are all prepared and well-positioned.

TIP: It's best to position cameras just above eye level and far enough back for you to be seen to at least chest height, so that your hand gestures are visible when necessary. Wearing a headset will make it much easier for participants to hear you clearly.



THE SESSION

Ground rules

Set the ground rules.

- Clarify issues of confidentiality.
- Ensure everyone knows when and how interventions will be made, and what to do if someone wishes to leave temporarily.
- Ask participants to close all other windows on their screens and ensure that you do the same.
- Mobile phones can interfere with some platforms, so these need to be turned off, not just put on mute.
- Manage expectations that some frustrations such as delays, or technical glitches are inevitable.
- One top tip would be to establish various hand-signs – thumbs up for OK, etc. It makes for a good icebreaker too.

Rapport

It is usually more difficult (and takes longer) to establish rapport in a remote session. Don't be thin-skinned about this! Use your prior knowledge of the Team Role make-up of the individuals and the team to decide on how best to open. For example, if you have a predominance of Resource Investigator behaviours, perhaps a reveal about yourself or something humorous can help. If there are a lot of Monitor Evaluator strengths in the group, you might choose to focus first on the fact that Belbin Team Roles arose out of nine and a half years of research at a management college.

Alternatively, you might want to ask participants to engage in some show-and-tell icebreakers. Get creative with what most people have around at home. Who can make the longest paper chain or tallest paper tower in 30 seconds? Who can make the most inventive sculpture from household items or draw the best artwork in under two minutes? Bear in mind that some of these exercises will also be useful for observing and drawing out Belbin Team Role strengths in action.





Engagement

Agree and keep to the timetable, including frequent short breaks. Remember that it can be easier for individuals to become disengaged when they are sitting alone. They may physically present, but not actively engaged. Don't talk in long bursts and ensure that you check understanding even more frequently than in a face-to-face session. Variety of delivery and content is essential, preferably changing things every 5-10 minutes and asking people to stand up every 30 minutes or so.

Build in short bursts of physical movement, if possible. For a light-hearted exercise, why not ask participants to watch the Team Role cameos, then encourage them to film their own short clips, personalised to reflect their own selection of strengths, which could be submitted later? They might choose to shoot in the style of a nature documentary, reality TV or horror movie diary entry. You could even make things a bit more competitive by offering redeemable online vouchers as prizes!

Content

This will be similar to that of your usual team workshops:

- Establishing the purpose of the team
- Explanation of the Belbin Team Roles behavioural model
- Definition of the nine Team Roles and the three categories of People, Thinking and Action
- Understanding the Belbin Individual Report
- Participants sharing their top and bottom Team Roles to draw up a Team profile
- Using the understanding of individual and collective strengths and weaknesses to establish actions, in the light of the team's purpose

However, information should be broken down into smaller chunks. When explaining the nine Team Roles, ask for input from the participants. For example, after your brief explanation of each, they could describe when they have seen this behaviour exhibited (in their workplace, in a film, in politics etc..).

When talking through a report, ask participants to refer to their own Belbin Individual Report on specific points and to make comments. To engage people in drawing up the Team Profile, you could ask people to stand up/wave* if they have Completer Finisher as their top Belbin Team Role, for example, and then you write their name on the Belbin Team Role Circle poster. This is continued until each person's top and bottom two Belbin Team Roles are on the chart.

Encourage discussion of the Belbin Team Circle in the light of the purpose of the team. Since it is more difficult for people to pick up on cues when working remotely, ask each person to speak in turn.* If appropriate, display the Team Averages and Overall Observer Responses pages of the Belbin Team Report for discussion.

Always end the session with actions being agreed. If these are not easily captured on screen, you should ensure that they are written up and emailed to participants immediately after the event.

Contributions from participants

In a team workshop, you will likely want to hear from participants throughout the session. Agree whether microphones will be on all – or just some of – the time, and whether the chat facility will be used.

In a remote session, it becomes more important for you to use your knowledge of participants' Belbin Team Roles to help you manage contributions. Who might you need to draw out? Who needs to be kept from dominating the session? Bear in mind that even with usually talkative roles (such as Shaper and Resource Investigator), there is usually less interaction in a virtual environment than when participants are face-to-face.

AFTER THE SESSION

Depending on what arises from the workshop, multiple follow-up sessions with sub-teams and/or managers may be appropriate. It might also be recommended to follow up with a face-to-face meeting when circumstances permit, to consolidate the insights from the virtual session.

Do you have any top tips to add? Have you been running successful Belbin workshops online? We'd love to hear from you.



* These suggestions assume that everyone can see each of the other team members, even if each is remote from the other, which requires a lot of bandwidth. If you only have people's voices, ask each person to say their name when they speak and be even more aware of the need for you as facilitator, to ensure that everyone contributes. Maybe everyone could have their own 'noise'...