

BELBIN[®]

Building Intergenerational Teams with Belbin Team Roles



Think Teams, Use Belbin

Belbin provides the science behind effective teamwork to help you improve business performance

Belbin Team Role methodology was born from the original, ground-breaking research into why some teams are more successful than others.

Dr Meredith Belbin and his co-researchers, discovered nine 'Team Roles', each one being a distinct and predictable cluster of behaviours needed to facilitate team progress.

High-performing teams require a balance of all nine Team Roles. We provide the knowledge and tools to help you apply the Belbin theory and see the results with your teams.

“ *Simply putting a number of people together and expecting them to work as a team is not enough.* ”

Dr Meredith Belbin

The Belbin difference

- Genuine self-awareness shaped by feedback from the team
- A global team language that facilitates de-personalised, open and meaningful conversations
- Understand behavioural strengths and weaknesses – what we ‘do’ rather than what we ‘are’
- Supports effective allocation of the right tasks to the right person at the right time
- Delivered via an intuitive on-line, scalable platform

The global gold-standard Team Tool

The Belbin Team Role methodology has been translated into 16 different languages and is used across the globe by organisations of all sizes, supported by a network of 35 Belbin representatives and distributors.

Over 3 million Belbin reports have been generated worldwide. Some of the organisations who use and trust Belbin with their teams include:



Intergenerational research – key takeaways

- **Today's workforce is multigenerational.**

Unhelpful stereotypes can inhibit effective teamwork and focus on divides rather than helping people from different generations to collaborate more effectively.

- **The Belbin Team Role framework is a useful lens** through which to analyse intergenerational differences, since it focuses on strengths that may bridge generational divides.
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- **As we become older, our strengths become more clearly defined.** We are more aware of our weaknesses and we strengthen our strengths. People entering the workforce are generally less sure of what they contribute to a team.
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- **Those in management roles mid-career are likely to play to more Team Role strengths** than do senior managers and non-managers, so their strengths are less pronounced. As this is not attributed to low self-awareness, this might perhaps be read as a strategy for managing up and managing down.

- **Some strengths come to the fore as we progress in our careers.** Co-ordinator (and to a lesser extent, Shaper) Team Role behaviour is more common among older age groups.
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- **Received wisdom suggests that younger people are more creative and older people are more strategic thinkers.** However, our dataset showed that there were more (and stronger) analytical thinkers among younger generations. And whilst there were proportionally more creative Team Roles amongst younger people too, older generations were more effective than their younger counterparts in creative roles.
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- **In order to collaborate successfully in a multigenerational team, it is important to look past generational stereotypes,** and seek areas of commonality, such as Team Role strengths.
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- **Since some role behaviours may be less accessible for younger people,** it is important to consider strengths-based personal development and mentoring opportunities to foster personal growth.

Building Intergenerational Teams with Belbin Team Roles

Today's workforce is a multigenerational one

As age diversity at work increases, the impact of intergenerational differences on teamwork is of growing interest for organisations managing and developing teams.

Whilst we can acknowledge the value that complementary perspectives, approaches and

experiences can bring to bear at work, it is clear that intergenerational differences can also be the source of communication difficulties, misunderstandings and conflicting priorities and values.

Research into multigenerational teams

When it comes to research in this area, results are mixed. Some researchers claim that intergenerational collaboration is a source of strength: it enhances productivity; improves decision-making; increases creativity and innovation; enhances learning and development, and improves social cohesion.^[1]

However, it is also clear that intergenerational teams are prone to particular difficulties, including conflicting attitudes towards authority and hierarchy, differing expectations of work, and challenges in effective communication.

One study into diversity, conflict and psychological safety in software teams describes a “double-edged sword” – that whilst age diversity contributes to more effective teamwork (perhaps through more extensive cognitive resources, such as varied levels of experience), it also brings more conflict and identity threat as members become less similar.^[2]

To muddy the waters further, it is not always clear where generational divides lie, and whether observed differences can be generalised as generational traits and trends, or whether they are simply a product of career stage and accumulated experience which could be applicable to any generation.

For example, Ng and Feldman report that younger employees tend to be more adaptable, innovative and open to taking risks, whilst older employees show greater expertise in problem-solving, mentoring and leadership, and bring stability to teams.^[3]

However, this could be a function of the fact that opportunities for leadership and strategic roles are less likely to present themselves at the beginning of our careers.

Generational stereotypes can also contribute negatively to the discourse, causing antagonism and fruitless, circular debate which doesn't help real teams.

Enabling multigenerational teams to thrive

In order to move towards a more constructive debate, and to harness diversity as a source of strength in our teams, we need a lens through which to understand the impact of generational diversity, with a focus on fostering greater mutual understanding in teams.

As Emma Waldman writes in Harvard Business Review, we need to challenge harmful and limiting

stereotypes, communicate openly and respect boundaries.

In order to harness the plethora of benefits that effective intergenerational collaboration has to offer, we need to move away from an “us versus them” dynamic and foster mutual respect through a greater appreciation of one another's strengths and perspectives.

“There are ways to bridge the generational gap. It begins with communication, humility, and a deeper curiosity about the strengths and limitations of our team members and ourselves. It begins with the acceptance that we are fundamentally different people with equally valuable insights to offer.”[4]

Organisations which are able to understand, and work with, the dynamics of intergenerational teams, are best placed to leverage the strengths of a multigenerational workforce.

Understanding multigenerational teams with Belbin Team Roles

Belbin Team Role theory is an effective lens through which to study intergenerational differences, because it focuses on behavioural contributions, rather than relying on age-based assumptions or stereotypes.

Dr Meredith Belbin identified nine key clusters of behaviour (Team Roles) which are needed to facilitate team progress. This framework allows us to focus on those behaviours which are useful to the team and analyse how these contributions might vary with age.

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We analysed over 60,000 responses to the Belbin Self-Perception Inventory or SPI (the instrument which measures Belbin Team Roles) from candidates in 183 countries, across 22 industries.

In this study, we asked participants to select an age group category, rather than to identify to which generation they belonged.

However, at the time of publication, the age categories correspond broadly to generational boundaries, especially given that these boundaries can vary according to the source.^[5] We looked at Team Role trends across these groups, along with data on the strength of contribution, and responses to questions which can help us understand more about individuals’ self-awareness.

Our objective was to identify any patterns in terms of Team Role contribution which could facilitate intergenerational team dynamics. We sought to identify any important distinctions in Team Role contribution which could be better managed, and to find common ground which could bridge divides between different age groups.

Here’s what we discovered.

Generation	Birth Years (approx.)	Ages in 2025	Corresponding age group in this study
Baby Boomers	1946–1964	61–79 years old	56-65 years old
Generation X	1965–1980	44–60 years old	46-55 years old
Millennials (Gen Y)	1981–1996	28–43 years old	26-35, 36-45 years old
Generation Z	1997–2012	13–28 years old	18-25

Finding #1:

With age comes more certainty about our strengths

Team Role Distribution

We analysed Team Role scores across different age groups to assess the distribution of their Team Role strengths – the distance between their highest and lowest Team Role scores.

The Belbin Self-Perception Inventory (SPI) consists of eight sections. Each section presents a situation or team-related activity, and a list of ten statements. The individual is asked to distribute ten points among the ten statements, to best reflect how they believe they contribute to a team.

This distribution of scores across the statements influences the shape of the Team Role profile which emerges.

Some profiles indicate very distinct Team Role strengths. Others are less definitive, with scores spread across a large number of Team Roles.

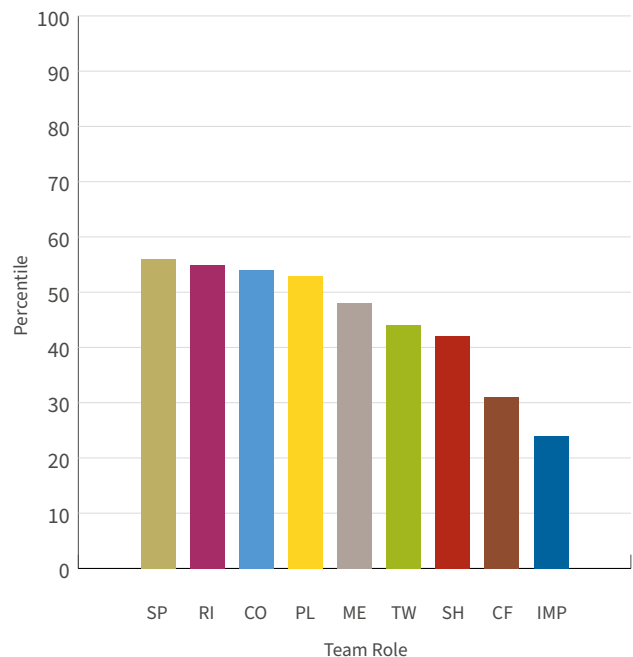
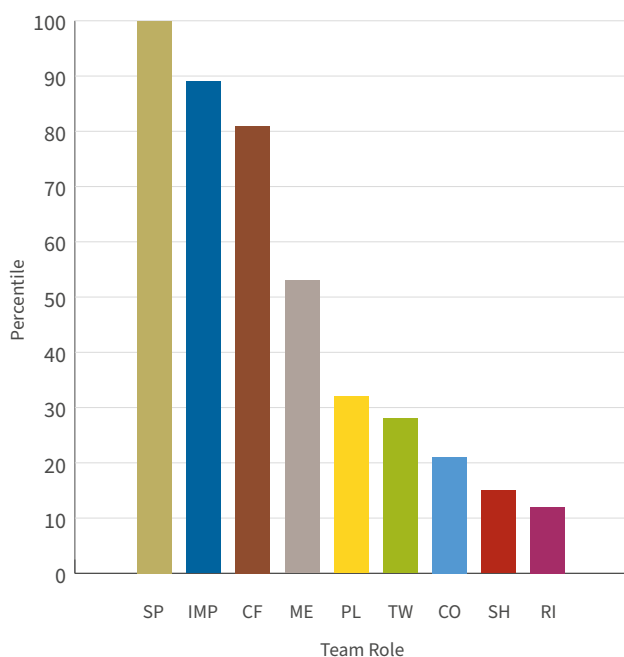
The distribution of scores in the SPI can provide an indicator as to certainty of role.

We analysed Team Role scores from the SPI across generations to find out whether scoring patterns changed – and what this might indicate about our understanding of our strengths as we age.

When we did so, a pattern emerged.

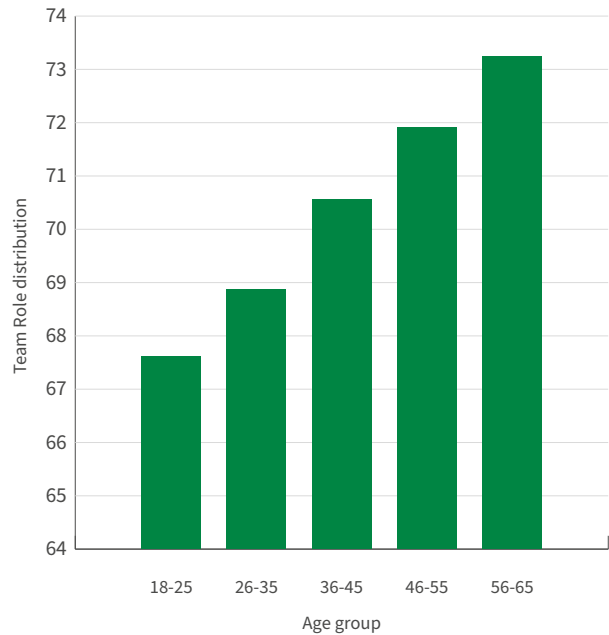
As we grow older and progress in our careers, we become more definitive when it comes to declaring our Team Role strengths. As we might expect, young people entering the workforce tend to have flatter profiles – on average, their Team Role strengths are less pronounced.

It stands to reason that those who are new to work (and who, perhaps, have not had as much experience of



teamwork as their older colleagues have), are likely to be less certain of the contribution they make to a team.

At the beginning of our careers, we are perhaps more malleable when it comes to the roles we adopt at work. We are more willing and able to try out different roles, approaches and behaviours to see what fits. As we progress through our careers, we seek out work which enables us to play to, and hone, our strengths, and these become more and more established over time.



Strength of role

Along with distribution of Team Roles, we also analysed strength of role.

Belbin measures Team Role strength in terms of percentiles – an individual’s score relative to the rest of our database.

Someone who scores in the 80th percentile for a particular Team Role demonstrates this strength more than does 80% of the population of our database.

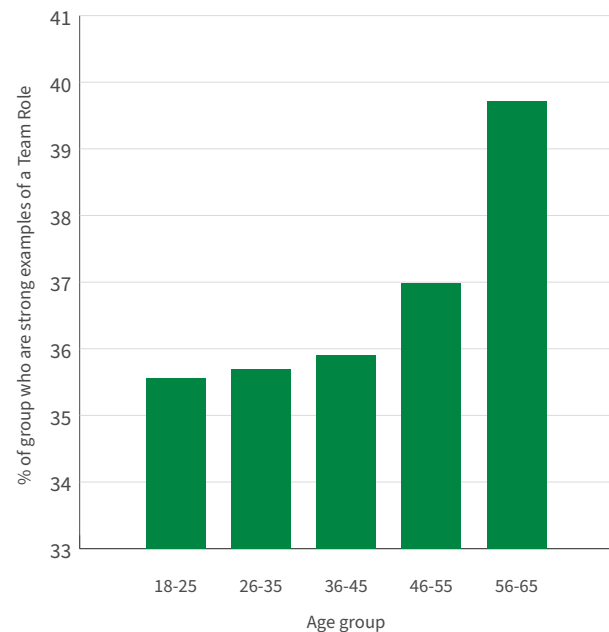
This is our threshold for stating that someone is a strong example of a Team Role. A strong example is someone who appears to play a particular Team Role to especially good effect: they articulate this strength well, and display it so that others in the team know that the individual can be called on to provide that behavioural contribution.

The graph (right) shows the number of strong examples in each age category.

Again, as we age, it appears that we strengthen our strengths.

It stands to reason that if Generation Z are spending more time ‘trying out’ or developing a range of strengths, less energy is expended on honing a few key strengths.

By contrast, Baby Boomers might have had more opportunity to refine their strengths and spend less



time trying to manage weaknesses. They might have been promoted to positions where they can more freely articulate and display their strengths, so that others see and understand their contributions more clearly.

This might indicate a valuable mentoring and coaching opportunity for young people, focused on honing key strengths associated with their top Team Roles.

Self-understanding

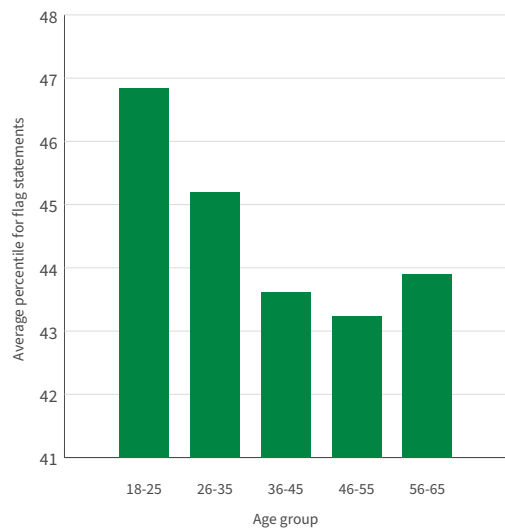
In addition to Team Role measurement, there are also some areas of the Belbin SPI which are designed to help us flag up limitations in self-knowledge and self-understanding.

A high score in these areas indicates that the individual might be unsure of what they contribute to the team.

Whilst the distribution of Team Role scores increases as we age, our second measure – responses to those statements that flag low self-awareness – tends downwards as age increases.

Whilst the Baby Boomer group was a little higher than the Generation X cohort, overall, age seems to bring greater self-awareness.

This finding supports the conclusion that younger people have a lesser Team Role distribution (the gap between highest and lowest roles), because they are unsure of what their contribution should be, rather than that they are deliberately playing different roles in different scenarios.



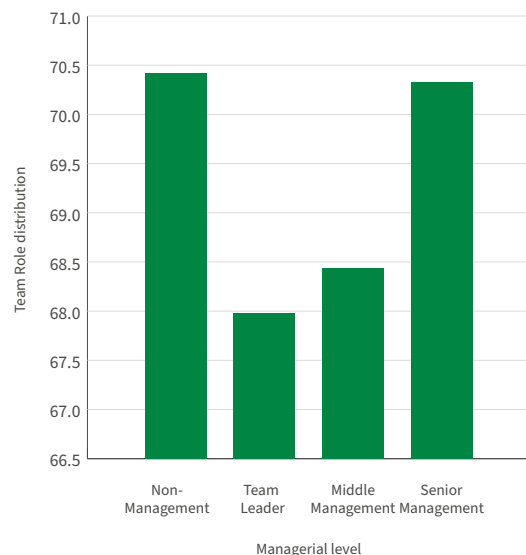
Self-awareness among middle managers

When we analysed data according to managerial level, we found a different pattern. Team leaders and middle managers were more likely to have more evenly-distributed profiles than non-managers and senior managers, even though they did not score significantly more highly than the other two groups for our flag or self-awareness statements.

If a wider Team Role distribution among middle managers cannot be attributed to lower self-awareness (as appears to be the case for our younger cohort), then how can we interpret these results?

One conclusion could be that **middle managers** have a more even distribution of Team Roles not because they are unaware of their strengths, but because they are using a greater variety of Team Role strengths strategically as required – when managing up and down, for example. They might be required to play a driving Shaper role when managing their team and a supportive Teamworker (or practical Implementer) when responding to the needs of their own manager.

In this case, the deployment of different Team Role behaviours might be a deliberate strategy, rather than being born out of uncertainty or low self-awareness.



Finding #2:

Some Team Role strengths align with age

As part of our analysis, we wanted to discover whether particular Team Role strengths are more popular amongst particular age groups.

For some Team Roles, no particular relationship emerged between age and the incidence of the Team Role within our dataset. These roles are: Implementer, Specialist and Teamworker.

Co-ordinator

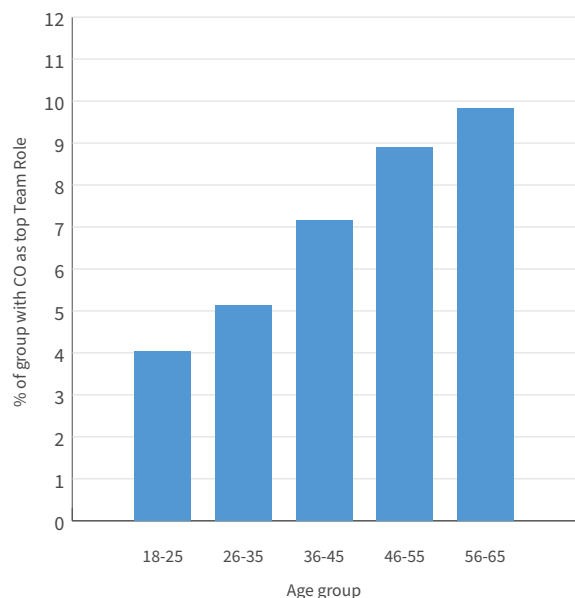


Co-ordinators are confident and mature team members who excel at seeing the bigger picture, drawing out and using talent within the team, and delegating effectively to enable the team to meet shared objectives.

Given that these behaviours are more likely to come to the fore in functional roles which entail delegating and assigning work, chairing meetings etc., and that these roles are often not available at the early stages of our careers, it is perhaps unsurprising that we find that the incidence of Co-ordinator Team Role behaviour increases with age.

What does this mean for younger Co-ordinators? There is a risk that younger people with Co-ordinator strengths may not be given the chance to cultivate this Team Role.

Organisations interested in ensuring that these strengths are developed amongst Generation Z employees might consider opportunities for young Co-ordinators to chair some meetings or take on management responsibilities specific projects, allowing them to hone their skills



as far as possible within the bounds of organisational hierarchy, and their allocated functional role.

Shaper



Shapers are challenging, competitive and assertive individuals who thrive on pressure and provide the necessary drive to ensure that the team meets its goals.

The incidence of this Team Role also increased with age, although the trend was not so pronounced as for Co-ordinator.

In practice, playing a Shaper role to good effect can involve causing disruption when necessary, speaking out and taking

difficult or unpopular decisions when required.

It is perhaps the case that younger employees are not as frequently in a hierarchical position where these behaviours would be appropriate (or approved).

However, whilst it may be the case (as with Co-ordinator) that opportunities to take on this role are less frequent in our early career, maturity is not a prerequisite, so it follows that the pattern is less pronounced than for Co-ordinator.

Monitor Evaluator



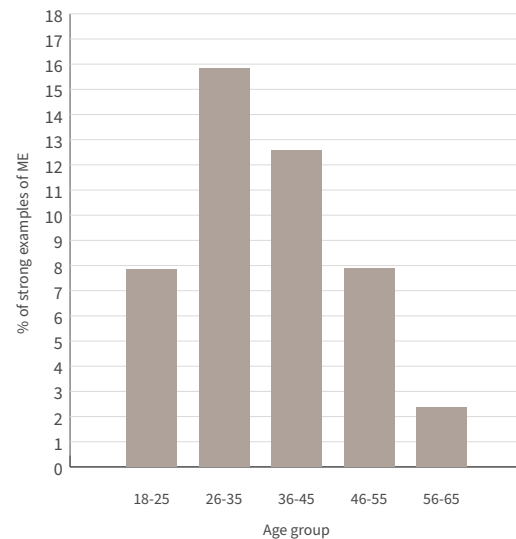
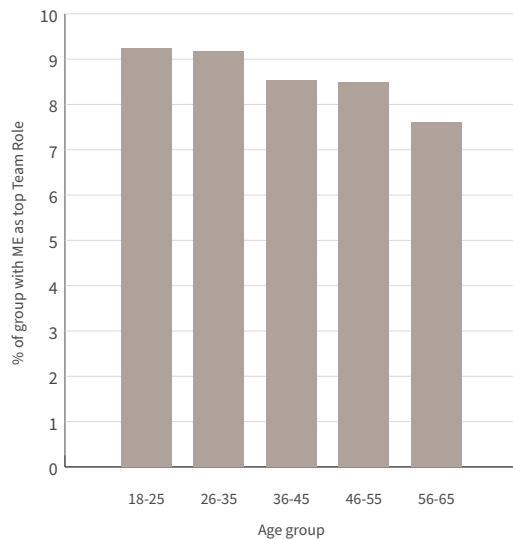
Along with Co-ordinator, Monitor Evaluator is the other Team Role associated with wisdom and experience. Monitor Evaluators are logical and impartial. They take a strategic, analytical approach to problem-solving, assessing ideas carefully and weighing up options before reaching a conclusion.

It might be assumed that this is another Team Role we grow into, but in this case, the data showed the opposite.

Not only did the incidence of Monitor Evaluator decrease slightly over time, but the average percentile for the role also declined.

Even though Baby Boomers tended to be more definitive in their responses overall, the highest concentration of strong examples of Monitor Evaluator was found among Millennials.

This challenges the notion that younger people should not be called upon – or should defer to older colleagues – when it comes to long-term, strategic decision-making. In fact, according to our data, Millennial employees most strongly and consistently represent that Team Role behaviour.



Plant and Resource Investigator



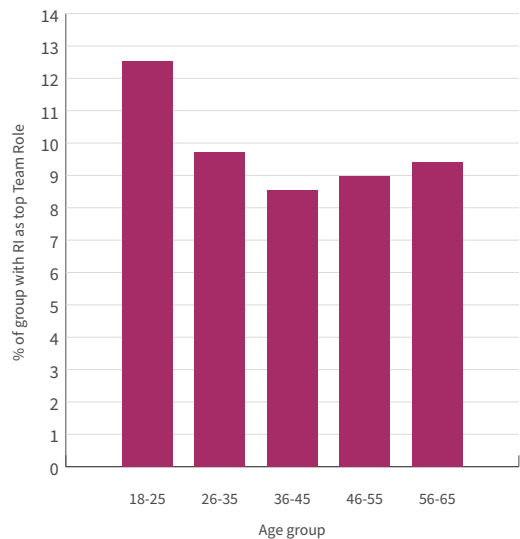
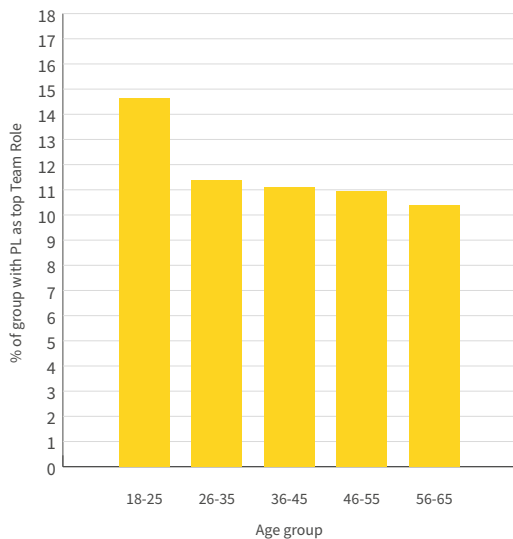
The Team Roles of Plant and Resource Investigator are both concerned with ideas, but differ in their approach. Whilst Plants think laterally to provide the team with original and imaginative ideas, Resource Investigators explore opportunities outside the team, making connections and bringing back ideas from external sources.

In both cases, there was a slightly higher incidence of each Team Role in younger populations.

On the surface, these findings support those of Ng and Feldman, demonstrating greater levels of innovation amongst younger generations.

However, contrary to those findings, the analysis of average percentiles for these roles indicated that strength of role did increase considerably with age.

For these two Team Roles, then, we can conclude that **whilst a general proclivity towards innovation is more prevalent in younger age groups, the roles are played more effectively by older employees.** In practice, this could mean that older Plants come up with fewer (but more valuable) ideas that are appropriate to the team's needs, and that they are better able to communicate these ideas effectively.

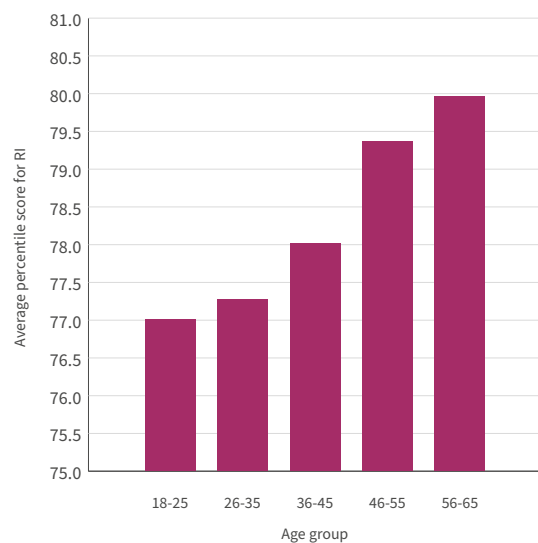
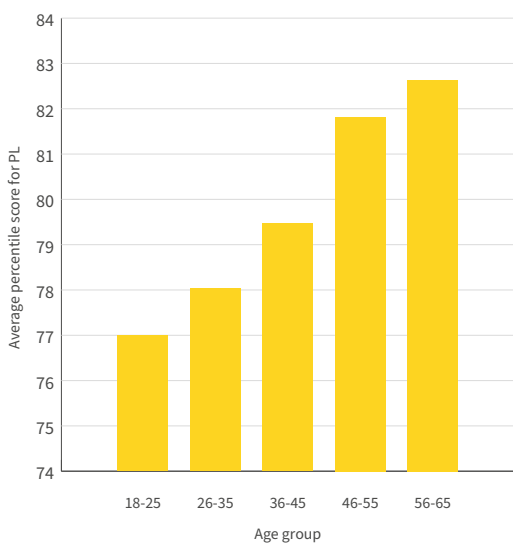


Those with Resource Investigator strengths are likely to have the benefit of networks and connections built up over the course of their career, and to be able to leverage these to greater effect owing to experience. It is also possible that greater self-awareness with age increases the ability to manage and mitigate associated weaknesses of the role, such as the risk of Resource Investigators losing interest after the initial excitement has worn off.

Our findings on the roles of Monitor Evaluator, Plant and Resource Investigator not only call into question stereotypes regarding creativity and strategic thinking. They also serve to underline the importance of feedback, when it comes to understanding our contributions to a team.

Since Belbin measures behaviour at work (and not personality), our Team Role strengths are subject to change throughout our careers, shaped by our experience and changes in functional role and work environment.

Where self-understanding may be limited, Observer Assessments (observations of our behaviour from colleagues, managers and other stakeholders) can serve as a 'reality check' when it comes to our strengths, and the impact of our behaviours on others in the team. This feedback is especially important for younger colleagues, who may be exploring different contributions and wish to hone their strengths without being 'pigeon-holed'.



Completer Finisher

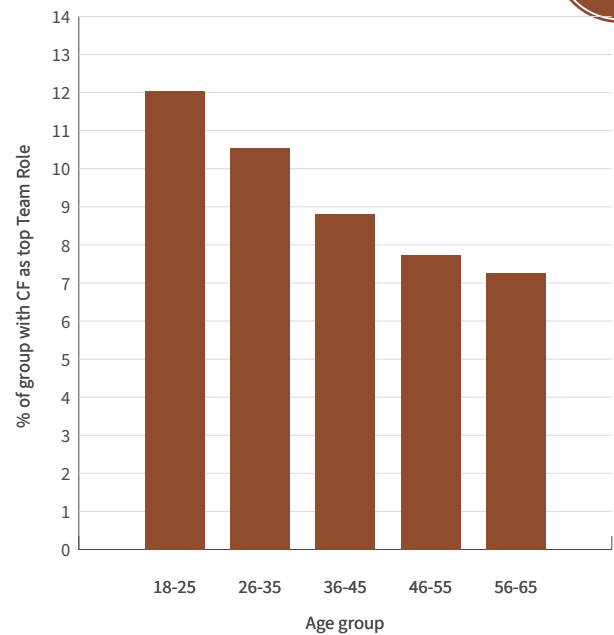


The Completer Finisher Team Role is needed to ensure accuracy and high quality in work produced. Completer Finishers seek out errors and omissions and prevent them from spoiling a project or product.

In contrast to the Co-ordinator role (which is focused on the ‘bigger picture’), the Completer Finisher role appears to decline as we get older, although there is no particular pattern regarding strength of Team Role in this case.

Perhaps it is the case that, as we progress in our careers, we are more often able to adopt a Co-ordinator role, spending more time on broader, strategic issues in preference to the finer details.

For younger employees, a hierarchical consideration comes into play once again – if there is no one to whom the final checks can be delegated, this responsibility rests with them, thus the Team Role strength is more pronounced.



^[1] “Understanding Intergenerational Collaboration: Exploring Challenges and Collaboration Strategies in the Multigenerational Workforce”, Adnan Iqbal, Journal of Economics, Business & Organization Research, 2024, vol:6, issue 1, pp.15-43 <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/3816574>

^[2] “The Double-Edged Sword of Diversity: How Diversity, Conflict, and Psychological Safety Impact Software Teams”, Christiaan Verwijs and Daniel Russo, Nov 2023, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2301.12954>

^[3] Ng, T. W. H., & Feldman, D. C. (2010). The relationships of age with job attitudes: A meta-analytic review. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 77(2), 196–210. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2010.04.004>

^[4] <https://hbr.org/2021/08/how-to-manage-a-multi-generational-team>

^[5] Source: Pew Research Center

Conclusion

In order to work effectively with an increasingly intergenerational workforce, our findings suggest that it is important to look beyond generational stereotypes and assumptions to find areas of common ground, where team members of different ages can collaborate more effectively.

It is clear that age brings greater self-understanding, confidence in our strengths, and ability to manage and mitigate those areas of work which don't come naturally to us.

Those entering the workforce understandably have lower levels of self-understanding when it comes to their contribution at work, but are possibly more malleable and willing to explore different Team Role strengths.

Middle managers mid-career are able to take advantage of a middle ground. They are versatile enough in their strengths – and possess the self-awareness – to adapt their Team Role behaviours according to the situation or relationship.

Contrary to received wisdom, our data indicates that older people are stronger (though less prevalent) in creative Team Role contributions, and that younger people can be strong analytical thinkers.

However, whilst the tendency towards analytical thinking may be present, business experience and acumen may be lacking, for example. Other Team Roles (such as Co-ordinator) might only come to the fore as promotions or changes in functional role or hierarchy present more opportunities for the young person.

Where these strengths are identified, this could indicate an opportunity for mentoring within the team or organisation, to allow younger individuals to hone their strengths as they progress in their careers, and to learn from older colleagues. This would also serve to build and strengthen intergenerational relationships within organisations.

The Belbin framework can help businesses address the challenges of intergenerational teaming and make age diversity a source of strength in their teams.



Recommendations

1.

Teams should assess strengths and capabilities using a behaviour-based model such as Belbin Team Roles, rather than making assumptions based on generational stereotypes. Analysing behaviour rather than personality – and providing advice and guidance on this basis – offers scope for change and growth throughout our careers.

2.

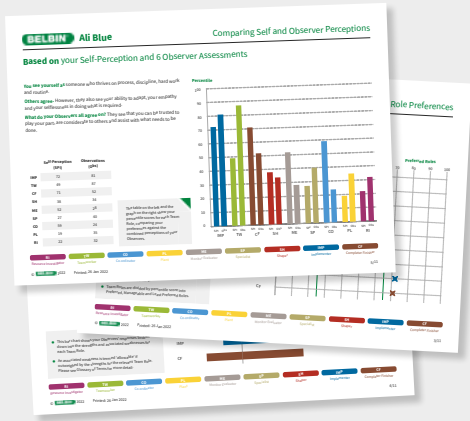
Intergenerational teams should be apprised that self-awareness increases with age. Using Observer Assessments (feedback from within the team) can help all team members to hone their strengths and uncover latent talents that others see. This is perhaps especially useful for those new to the workplace.

3.

Team members should understand one another's strengths so that team members can (where possible) be included in meetings or projects according to their potential contribution, and not simply age or seniority level.

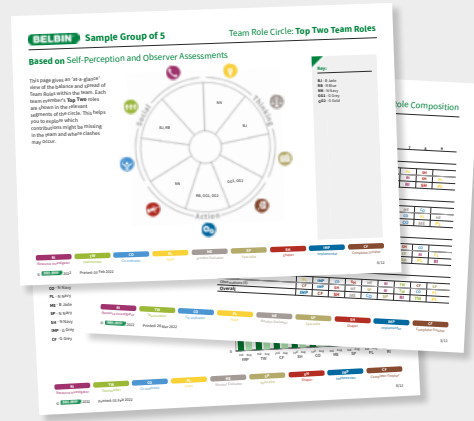
4.

Senior team members can help develop and mentor younger colleagues who share their Team Roles, helping them to better understand their behavioural contribution in light of experience.



Belbin Individual report

- Provides in-depth detail and analysis of an individual's Team Role profile. Identifies their behavioural strengths (and weaknesses).
- Contains guidance on how they can make their best contribution to the team and workplace.



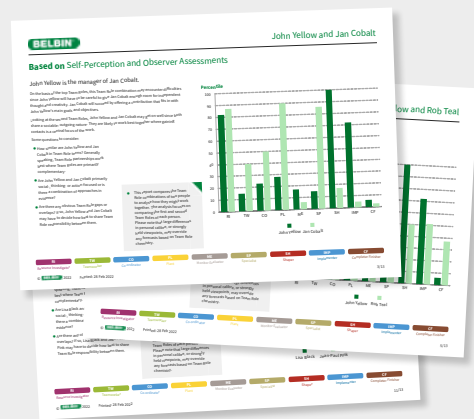
Belbin Team report

- Assesses how individuals will work together as a team.
- Explores the strengths and weaknesses in the team, diagnoses reasons for poor team performance, identifies gaps and provides guidance as to how they can be filled.



Belbin Team Role Circle

- Provides an at-a-glance visual of the Team Role strengths – and gaps – in a team.
- Use the intelligence provided in the Team report and Individual reports to explore and discuss how gaps can be filled to improve team performance.



Belbin Working Relationship report

- Identifies key differences in behavioural tendencies and pinpoints potential areas of conflict.
- Helps depersonalise conflict and provides an effective way to get to grips with different relationships in your team.

Think Teams, Use Belbin.

Talk to us today about adding Belbin to your toolbox.

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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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