Building Teams in the 21st Century:

New Challenges, New Solutions

By Roy Childs

Increasing competition, globalisation and modern methods of working create new problems for OD professionals. We all know the critical issues: a world where change is accelerating; where the top 10 jobs today did not even exist 10 years ago; where we need to prepare students for jobs that don't yet exist, using technologies that haven't been invented to solve problems we don't even know.   The cartography of the 16th Century is no longer adequate for the SatNav age; so too, the pre-internet psychometrics no longer meets the demands of virtual, cross-organisational and multidisciplinary teams . Many OD professionals are using out-of-date models and tools. This article suggests why we are in this situation and what new tools can help us face these challenges.

The old psychometrics - conflation and confusion

40 years ago, the world was less complex and less inter-connected. Self awareness and 'other awareness' – fundamentals for better collaboration – were much lower on a workplace agenda. This means that there was less imperative for clarity and precision when using the emerging psychometric tools.

Insights leading to better understanding of oneself and others were less important and using such tools was quite novel. Any insight - no matter how rough or ready - was a significant advance on what people had before.

> "The old tools and models are at best too simplistic and at worst misleading and confusing"

Now, in our increasingly connected but competitive world, there are huge inter-dependencies requiring a much higher level of collaboration. There are important questions that have been sidelined and by-passed such as *'Why am I so different at home and at work? Is it OK for me to behave differently in different teams? How can I adapt to roles that do not suit my preferences?* These are particularly important for those who recognise the great potential for people to grow, change and adapt. Not addressing them has led to some remarkable confusion.

In the 20th Century the concept of a 'Team Role' became very popular – and the word *'role'* had a clear meaning which is 'a person's behaviour in a particular context'. This differentiates it from *'personality'* which was a general tendency to behave in a particular way across different contexts. However, the most popular Team Role model – Belbin's[i] – confuses the two. It purports to measure *roles* by asking people questions of a general nature such as 'What I believe I can contribute to a team' and 'I gain satisfaction in a job because'. Do we contribute the same stuff across all teams and contexts?   Such questions can only identify a person's generalised team behaviour across very different contexts rather than actual team behaviour. It implicitly adopts a model of a *'team personality'* rather than a 'team role'. This is not just a theoretical confusion but one that impacts hugely on how such a model is applied and how it affects individuals in terms of how they think about their flexibility to do different things in different teams.

In the latter part of the 20th century there was another trend that has affected the development of personality questionnaires. In an attempt to appear more relevant to the world of work, many questionnaires changed from inviting general responses that transcended situations (i.e. how you are in the average of situations) to inviting people to give a contextualised response (i.e. 'how you are at work'). This creates precisely the opposite confusion! These questionnaires are actually measuring behaviour in context. This means that they are either measuring a person's role or they are redefining personality.

> "It (Belbin) implicitly adopts a model of a 'team personality' rather than a 'team role'."

This can be illustrated using an extreme example. Consider The Godfather[1] who could talk caringly to his son about looking after his wife and children whilst the next minute he was planning the elimination of a rival family! Imagine the difference between his 'average of situations' versus 'how you are at work' answers. Questionnaires that invite 'how you are at work' have effectively moved away from the common view of personality as a generalised tendency across situations. They are redefining personality as something that is at least partially contextually defined – which is what we usually mean by *'role.'*

It is surprising that such confusion has gone unchallenged for so long. Perhaps it is because the world of work can be quite varied. Perhaps people can express a good deal of their personality at work. However, this is not true for a significant number of people. Some people find work narrow and limiting. It is not uncommon for people to change, blossom and discover untapped styles and talents when they leave work – either at the end of the day (in their leisure activities) or when made redundant etc. The fundamental issue here is that context is important – and the old models have obfuscated some basic but essential concepts. This issue is now hitting mainstream psychology.

> "They (modern personality questionnaires) are redefining personality as something that is at least partially contextually defined – which is what we usually mean by 'role'."

The first chapter of Professor Kagan's new book Psychology's Ghosts[ii] berates psychology for ignoring or devaluing context. If this is a legitimate challenge to general psychology there can be no doubt that it is a legitimate challenge to the old psychometrics. And perhaps we can all put our hand up in recognition of how we can be a little slow to recognise that things have changed. However, once we become aware, there is no excuse for not updating our methods, our practices, our models – and the psychometrics that represent these models.

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[1] Francis Coppola's film about the Corleone Mafia family

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The new Psychometrics – focussing on adaptability

The solution to this problem is to *deconstruct both the personality and the context.* This may sound complex but in fact sums up some fairly straightforward points:

- People behave differently in different situations and teams
- Personality influences behaviour but so do other factors
- Job demands and cultural expectations exert a significant influence.
- This situation is compounded further by the fact that people may want to behave differently than the way they actually behave.

The old models have tended to lump all of these factors together which creates a paradigm where people are in danger of thinking of themselves as stuck in one personality type or a couple of preferred team roles. We now need new models and new psychometrics to differentiate more clearly between personality and role in order to provide a much deeper, more sophisticated and more useful understanding of how we change and adapt. Such deeper insights can form the bedrock for releasing potential, increasing flexibility, accelerating personal development and enhancing team collaboration.

Type Mapping – rethinking the Team Role concept

The Type Mapping system addresses these issues directly by deconstructing what people actually do (their behaviour), what they should be doing (the contextual challenge) and how their preferences affect their ability to see, stretch and adapt.

To understand this necessary development it is useful to answer three questions: what has changed, how does the Type Mapping model address these changes and does it generate practical and useful ideas?

1. **What has changed?**
   A new model should address two main components:
   a. People can no longer learn and then repeat a static 'skill.' They need to keep learning and relearning. Any new approach must help develop greater flexibility and better adaptation.

   b. Modern workplaces must fulfil much more than 'pay and conditions' – contemporary employees also demand job satisfaction and personal development. Fulfilling this psychological contract generates critical commitment and loyalty in an increasingly mobile world. A new approach shifts emphasis from what people do to why they do it and this necessarily means focussing on people's values.

2. How does Type Mapping address these changes?

This will be expanded in a future article but two key points are presented here in summary:

a. The philosophy behind Type Mapping is that people are not locked into their own preferences but can exhibit a wide range of behaviours when they have the awareness and motivation. Hence the model explicitly separates what people actually do from what they prefer – and by adding what the situation requires it allows people the chance and the choice to adapt to their circumstances thus encouraging greater flexibility and adaptation. This is re-enforced by using verbs (Innovating) rather than nouns (Plant) to represent the roles.

b. Type Mapping is grounded in theory rather than historical research. In a changing world this can free it from a context that has become out-of-date. The similarity between Type Mapping and Belbin is noticeable[3] but it is the differences that are most critical. Unlike Belbin, Type Mapping captures an essential part of the modern work environment – the motivation required to perform well (i.e. the 'why' of work). It is understandable that an empirical approach based on what was observed in the 1970's may not have revealed this critical contribution. The concept of a values-led organisation was in its infancy, the psychological work contract was quite different and its empirical base was the observation of mainly male managers playing an artificial game (Teamopoly). Today we are much clearer that teams that have no 'why' can hardly be expected to show the drive and the energy required to become a truly high performing team. The Type Mapping model, on the other hand, captures this contribution in a mission critical role called Campaigning[4.]

3. Does it generate practical and useful ideas?

Belbin is practical and so is Type Mapping. However, Type Mapping also brings useful team discipline. We know that many teams benefit from the introduction of a process which can reduce the 'Ricochet Team Effect' (i.e. the bouncing about of the loudest voices and the biggest egos). Type Mapping helps them to 'cover all the bases' in a more systematic way. Each role has a sweet spot – a time when that contribution is most useful and appropriate. We can consider the following sequence as an approach to almost any task – a model for introducing a behavioural discipline (sometimes seen as a decision-making process):

1. **Clarifying** – clarify the problem or decision to be made; collect facts and information that relate to the problem
2. **Analysing:** Analyse the problem to identify the cause; identify any related situations where this problem/issue may have been encountered before
3. **Innovating:** come up with alternative solutions to the problem; allow all ideas to be aired, no matter how radical

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[3] See appendix 1
[4] Full descriptions of the Type mapping roles can be found in Understanding Team Roles published by Team Focus Limited

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4

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4. **Campaigning:** consider the value of each idea and decide with to accept/reject; prioritise those ideas, identifying the solution that is preferred
5. **Harmonising:** consider who else needs or would want to be involved; consider how to win their commitment/involvement
6. **Exploring:** try out or pilot the chosen solution to see what impact it has; sound out other people on the proposal to see how they react
7. **Conducting:** identify plans of how to implement the chosen solution; identify resources, responsibilities and timescales
8. **Activating:** take action to bring the chosen solution to fruition; tackle unexpected implementation problems as they arise

Each of these steps is a behavioural contribution that is captured by the Type Mapping roles.

"introduces a useful team discipline …. which can reduce the 'Ricochet Team Effect' (i.e. the bouncing about of the loudest voices and the biggest egos)."

In conclusion

The 21st Century may currently be viewed as 'The Information Age' but there is an even bigger challenge facing us. With luck, by the end of this century, people will look back and say it was the 'Age of Collaboration.' Collaboration is the biggest challenge we face today. As we become more and more global we face increasing diversity and the need to make it work. As we face an accelerating information explosion (90% of the data in the world was created in the last 2 years) no single person can hold both the breadth and depth of information required for the next step. Our research, working practices and relationships must become more collaborative. Only this way can we act as responsible stewards of this planet. We need new and better models for encouraging collaboration which acknowledge people's preferences, motivations and, just as important, their behavioural flexibility. Type Mapping is offered here as one such model.

Appendix 1 – Type Mapping Roles versus Belbin's Team Roles

Below is a best estimate matching of two models compiled by Roy Childs based on separate matching done by Steve Myers (author of the Managing Team Roles Indicator – MTRi) and by Henley Management College (originators of the Belbin Team Role Model in the 1970's)

Type Mapping	Belbin
Clarifying	Monitor Evaluator
Analysing	Monitor Evaluator, Specialist
Innovating	Plant, Resource Investigator
Campaigning	-
Harmonising	Team Worker
Exploring	Resource Investigator
Conducting	Co-ordinator/Chair
Activating	Implementer, Completer Finisher, Shaper

[i] Belbin, Meredith (1981) *Management Teams – How they succeed and fail*, Butterworth-Heineman
[ii] Kagan, Jerome (2012) *Psychology's Ghosts,* Yale University Press