

The Interconnection Between Team Role Dynamics and the Trajectory of Financial Performance: An Integrated Analysis in the Context of the Belbin Model

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Abstract

Modern leadership thrives on team performance, driven by a shared vision, understanding of organizational goals, effective communication, cooperation, and adherence to common principles, norms, and values. Emphasizing the unique skills, talents, and experiences of staff, while fostering a "one for all and all for one" mentality and healthy interpersonal relationships, creates an environment for superior results. The company in the study exemplifies these elements, highlighting the critical role of human resources and teamwork in superior management. The team roles test was used to enhance teamwork effectiveness, revealing that a successful team encompasses diverse, complementary roles, as proposed by Meredith Belbin..

Key words: human resources, leadership, management

J.E.L. classification: O15, J53, M12, M5

1. Introduction

Human resources are the cornerstone of any organization, characterized by their diversity and unpredictability. Individuals bring their unique qualities to the workplace, naturally gravitating towards forming various social groups for mutual benefits, which provide a sense of existential fulfillment. However, these benefits come with costs, such as limited personal freedom and adherence to specific rules of behavior. Despite these constraints, individuals are stronger together, able to set and achieve significant goals, showcasing the fundamental advantage of group and leadership structures within organizations.

Transitioning from a group to a team involves steps that may or may not occur. Colleagues can either remain a regular group or evolve into a synergistic team. Synergy, the hallmark of a true team, generates added value, meaning the collective output exceeds the sum of individual contributions. It's crucial to understand that teamwork does not erase individual personalities or differences. Instead, it emphasizes living and working within a community, respecting organizational rules while maintaining individuality, expressing personal opinions, and respecting the personality, dignity, and interests of others.

Effective leadership recognizes that even the most valuable and experienced leaders cannot be involved in every organizational activity. Successful leaders surround themselves with competent individuals who possess strong personalities, proven abilities, specific skills, and common work habits. These individuals complement the leader's vision and contribute significantly to the organization's success. Thus, the essence of effective leadership lies in harnessing the unique strengths of each team member, fostering a collaborative environment that respects individuality while striving for collective excellence.

This is one of the reasons why leaders achieve outstanding results: building a cohesive team that is deeply and continuously engaged in the organization's major issues. This explanation is borne out in this paper, which presents an example of a successful leadership team in a company that wished to remain anonymous, but which we refer to representatively as the "Entity".

This paper discusses key concepts in team management within the broader context of human resource management. The practical section will present the findings of the Belbin test, a method developed by the English expert Meredith Belbin to build effective teams.

2. Literature review

Team spirit is fundamental to achieving exceptional performance. Success arises from mutual assistance, the capacity for individual recovery, and effective creative work, all built on a foundation of trust, respect, honesty, ethical behavior, and shared responsibility for both successes and failures. The concept of a 'team' has various definitions in academic literature, often emphasizing the transition from a mere group to a cohesive team.

For instance, G.A. Cole suggests that a team is more than just a collection of individuals with a common goal; it is a group where individual contributions are complementary. The essence of teamwork lies in collaboration and working together harmoniously.

George Militaru defines a team as a group whose collective effort results in performance that exceeds the sum of individual efforts. According to Militaru, a functioning team creates positive synergy by effectively coordinating efforts.

George Arădăvoaice adds that a team is characterized by having a clearly defined objective. Through joint and collective action, a team generates synergy, enabling individuals to achieve more together than they could separately. He emphasizes that a team is not merely a collection of individuals; its quality and performance are determined by the level of interaction among its members. This interaction creates synergy, meaning that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, with the relationships between members playing a crucial role in this dynamic.

John Pastor describes a team as a group of individuals working under the guidance of a leader. The relationships among team members are interdependent, and they carry out predefined tasks to achieve a common objective. While the quality of a team is influenced by the quality of each member, the team itself forms a distinct entity.

Constantin Rosca, Mihai Vărzaru, and Ion G. Rosca also view a team as a group of individuals organized under a leader, working together in a specific context towards a common goal. Their perspective aligns with the notion that teamwork involves coordinated efforts and collective action, resulting in outcomes that surpass individual achievements.

In summary, team spirit is pivotal for outstanding performance, relying on mutual support, effective collaboration, and shared responsibility. Academic perspectives on teams consistently highlight the importance of synergy, interaction, and collective effort in achieving goals that go beyond what individuals can accomplish alone.

Aurel Burciu identifies the following defining characteristics of a real team:

- A limited number of members
- Complementary skills and qualifications
- A clear understanding of the team's purpose
- A collaboratively produced product or service
- A well-defined understanding of tasks and roles
- A sense of mutual responsibility

As we have seen above, one of the reasons for outstanding results by leaders is to build a cohesive team that is deeply and continuously engaged in the organization's major issues.

To build a successful team, it is essential to build on the fundamental research of Meredith Belbin and her team. This research has shown that teams composed exclusively of highly intelligent people can be disastrous. Belbin and her team identified eight roles (later adding one) that team members can play.

Belbin's Team Role Theory, the result of over nine years of research, was first published in 1981 and is recognised as a vital tool for human resource management. Belbin defines team role as "the specific tendency of a person to behave, contribute and interact with others". This led to the

identification of nine unique roles, with positive and negative traits, that each team member can perform.

Assessment of behavioural characteristics is done through self-perception and that of observers, gathering feedback from multiple sources to identify dominant traits. Thus, team building and management is based on understanding and integrating these roles to achieve effective balance and maximum performance.

Comparing own perception with that of observers is essential in management teams. It is crucial to align these two perceptions and understand the reasons for differences when they arise. To do this, it is necessary to carry out further investigations, facilitate assessments and open discussions with different types of observers, such as managers, colleagues and subordinates. By encouraging them to provide feedback and paying particular attention to understanding it, we can get a fuller and more accurate picture of our performance.

Profiling individual roles in the team allows us to get to know each other better and understand our preferences in terms of contribution to the workplace. By exploring the nine types of team behaviour and contribution, we can identify our approaches and preferences. If we recognise ourselves in these roles, we can use this understanding to better interpret and understand the behaviour of our colleagues. Through these team roles, we can better understand and interpret information about ourselves and other team members, facilitating more effective communication and collaboration.

Roles in the team according to the Belbin model can be divided into three distinct categories:

1. **Action-oriented roles:** These are roles that focus on making quick decisions and implementing them effectively. These include:

- **Shaper (SH):** A person who proposes new and bold solutions, focused on achieving goals and overcoming obstacles.
- **Implementer (IMP):** The team member responsible for turning ideas into concrete actions, with a pragmatic and detail-oriented approach.
- **Completer Finisher (CF):** This is the person who ensures that tasks are completed on time and accurately, with attention to final detail and quality of work.

2. **Relationship-oriented roles:** These roles focus on developing interpersonal relationships and maintaining a harmonious work environment. They include:

- **Coordinator (CO):** The person who encourages collaboration and communication between team members, ensuring that everyone knows their role and contributes to common goals.
- **Teamworker (TW):** A team member who supports cohesion and cooperation, is empathetic and has the ability to resolve conflicts in a constructive way.
- **Resource Investigator (RI):** This is the person who explores and brings new ideas and external resources to the team, and is skilled at making and maintaining connections.

3. **Cerebral roles:** these are roles characterised by creativity and deep analysis. They include:

- **Plant (PL):** creative and innovative person who brings new ideas and unconventional perspectives to problem solving.
- **Monitor Evaluator (ME):** is the team member who provides an objective and analytical perspective on ideas and decisions, contributing to informed decision-making.
- **Specialist (SP):** is the expert in a particular field or subject, providing knowledge and technical expertise essential to achieving the team's objectives.

Individual team role profiling can provide valuable guidance to identify areas to focus on to improve individual performance.

The first step is to compare the nature of the tasks we currently perform with the profile of our team. By identifying the discrepancies between them, we can determine what secondary roles we should develop to naturally address the aspects of our work that require these roles. Understanding the skills required for specific tasks and behaviours of team roles helps us decide where we need to develop and how to do it. This decision is crucial, especially in terms of future career planning and associated requirements.

The second step is to compare our own perception with that of observers and take steps to align these perceptions. By correlating these two perspectives, we can make informed decisions about what actions to take. We can choose to adjust our own perceptions based on feedback from observers or to better promote our positive aspects in order to be perceived appropriately.

The third step involves assessing the team's requirements for specific roles. If there are gaps in the natural approach to a particular role, we may decide to develop this skill to complement the team. This decision can be seen as an opportunity for personal development or as a sacrifice for the benefit of the team. It is important to make sure that this sacrifice does not affect our long-term motivation.

Team role development objectives should be integrated into our overall personal development plans and assessed within performance appraisal systems. By repeating the team role profile assessment at regular intervals, we can track progress and adapt our development strategies accordingly.

3. Research methodology

This research aimed to identify the roles within the first line of management in the organization. After consulting with the manager, we decided to administer the Belbin questionnaire to all seven members of the management team. The Belbin questionnaire, which consists of various statements grouped into categories, helps determine team roles. These statements describe different behaviors and attitudes within the team and are ranked in ascending order. A comprehensive evaluation includes both self-perception and the perception of others, with teammates completing the same test for their peers. While primary profiles remain consistent, secondary profiles may vary slightly.

Detailed reports generated by the Belbin profiles can be accessed on www.belbin.com, and a computer program is available to automatically calculate employee profiles. Participants were allowed ample time to complete the test, and in addition to the questionnaire, they were asked to provide their department, full name, and current position.

The questionnaires were evaluated using a specialized scale to determine scores for each profile. The profile with the highest score indicates the dominant role, while descending scores reveal secondary roles. Some individuals have a limited number of profiles, but most adapt and "play" different roles depending on the situation. The roles with the highest scores are the ones most frequently utilized by team members.

The results showed that each member of the management team has a distinct primary role, with secondary roles varying based on circumstances. This adaptability allows team members to effectively contribute in various situations, enhancing overall team performance. The Belbin test provided valuable insights into the strengths and dynamics of the management team, helping to optimize team performance through a better understanding of individual roles and interactions.

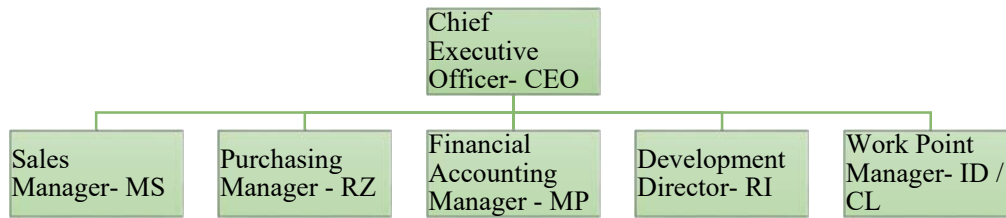
Respondents can use this information to develop roles necessary for their work and align their career plans with roles that suit them best. If a team lacks certain roles, some employees might choose to enhance their secondary roles to fill the gaps, but this should be temporary to avoid demotivation. Re-evaluating team roles can help track changes in personal profiles. A comprehensive assessment, including self-perception and observers' perceptions, can aid individuals in aligning these views by either adjusting others' perceptions or highlighting unnoticed strengths. This process helps improve team dynamics and individual performance.

4. Findings

Meredith Belbin believes that there are no good or bad roles in a team; the important thing is to have all the roles for a successful team.

The Entity's front-line management team is composed of 7 members, each representing a specific role within the organisational structure.

Figure no.1 Organisation chart of the entity's management team



Source: processed by the authors

The diagram shown in Figure 1 is the organisation chart of the company in which the Belbin test was carried out and shows the hierarchical structure and the relationships between the different roles within the entity. Each role is followed by the initials of the person occupying it. From left to right, we have the following positions:

- ✚ Sales Manager - MS
- ✚ Purchasing Manager - RZ
- ✚ Director General - DC
- ✚ Financial Accounting Manager - MP
- ✚ Development Director - RI
- ✚ Work Point Manager - ID / CL

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is at the top of the hierarchy and coordinates the work of the other departments represented by the Directors of Sales (MS), Purchasing (RZ), Finance Accounting (MP), Development (RI), and Point of Work (ID/CL). This suggests that the CEO has ultimate authority within the company, and the other directors report directly to him.

After applying the employee test, the following results were obtained:

Table no. 1 Entity Team Roles

Name	Perception	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
DC	Own	CEO	CO	TW	RI	IMP	CF	HS	SP	PL
	Assembly	ME	CO	TW	RI	IMP	CF	HS	SP	PL
ID	Own	TW	CO	RI	PL	CF	SP	ME	IMP	HS
	Assembly	TW	CO	RI	PL	CF	SP	ME	IMP	HS
RI	Own	PL	RI	HS	ME	CF	CO	IMP	SP	TW
	Assembly	PL	RI	HS	ME	CF	CO	IMP	SP	TW
CL	Own	ME	TW	CO	IMP	CF	HS	SP	RI	PL
	Assembly	ME	TW	CO	IMP	CF	HS	SP	RI	PL
MP	Own	CO	IMP	CF	HS	PL	RI	SP	TW	ME
	Assembly	CO	IMP	CF	HS	PL	RI	SP	TW	ME
MS	Own	TW	ME	CO	HS	RI	CF	IMP	SP	PL
	Assembly	TW	ME	CO	HS	RI	CF	IMP	SP	PL
RZ	Own	TW	PL	CF	SP	IMP	HS	RI	ME	CO
	Assembly	TW	PL	CF	SP	IMP	HS	RI	ME	CO

Source: Belbin questionnaire results processed by the authors

Table 1 shows the Team Roles, arranged from most obvious (first column) to least obvious (last column) for each team member. For each person, the first row represents Own Perception; the second row reflects the aggregate views of the Observers. This exhibit provides suggestions about who should take on the tasks of each individual Team Role within the team. Some roles are shared; some individuals have more than one suggested role.

To provide new and innovative insights, it is recommended to consult RI, which has a creative approach according to Belbin's findings, reflecting strong trends like Plant (PL). Also involve RZ, who has Completer Finisher (CF) qualities and can therefore ensure that new ideas are achievable.

When it's time to discover new opportunities, you should rely on ID's Resource Investigator (RI) skills. Include RI in the process to benefit from his creative skills.

In situations where effective coordination of team efforts is needed, the CEO and MP are best suited, with strong Coordinator (CO) tendencies. For support and a balanced approach, involve the MS as well.

RI is the go-to person when quick decisions need to be made, with Monitor-Evaluator (TW) skills that allow him/her to objectively analyze situations.

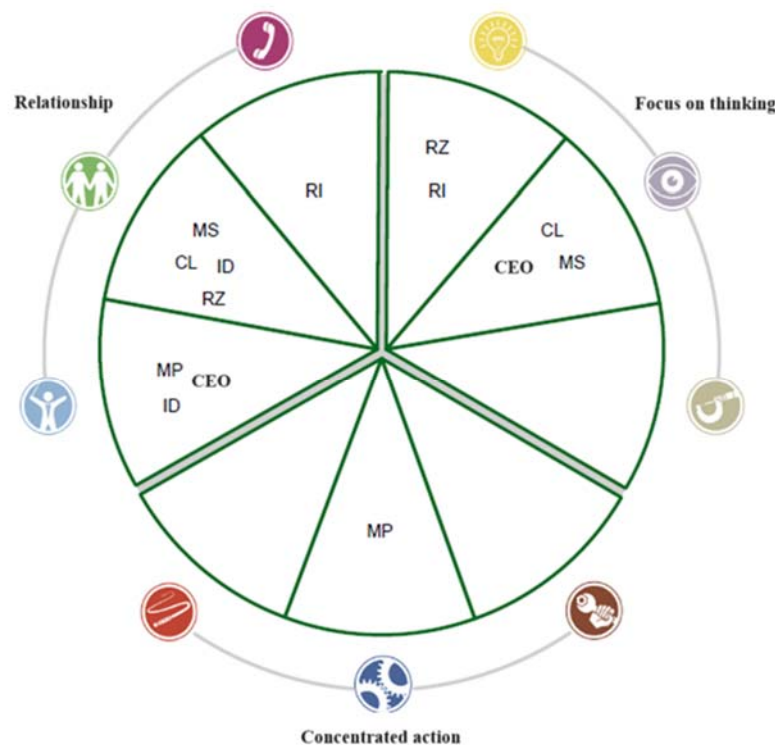
In order to mediate between different opinions and to reach consensus, the DC and CL are valuable resources, having the skills of Coordinator (CO) and Monitor-Evaluator (ME) respectively. The IR and MS can also add balance to these discussions, both having similar roles.

When tensions in the team rise and diplomacy and calm are needed, ID, MS and RZ are best suited to restore harmony, thanks to their abilities as Shaper (SH) and Specialist (SP).

For the transformation of decisions into practical actions, the PM is the right person, with an obvious tendency as Implementer (IMP).

When high standards are needed to complete plans, RZ can play a key role, thanks to its Finaliser (CF) skills.

Figure no. 2 Distribution of Team Roles



Source: Belbin questionnaire results processed by the authors

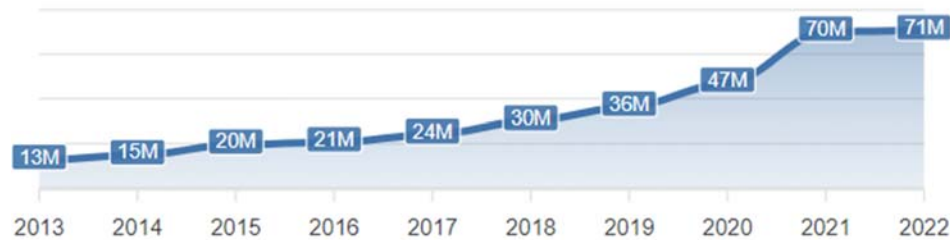
Figure 2 is a graphical representation of the distribution of team roles according to the Belbin test, organized into three main areas of activity: Relating, Thinking and Acting. Individuals' initials are placed in sections corresponding to each person's dominant team roles. This type of chart is used to visualize how team members' competencies are distributed according to the team's needs and to identify any areas that need development or balancing.

The distribution of team members in these three sections provides the following information:

- **Focus on thinking:** There is a relatively balanced distribution between different thinking styles, with a good representation in the strategy and analysis area (RI, RZ, CL, DC, MS). This suggests that the team has members capable of providing well thought-out plans and innovative solutions.
- **Relationship:** Several sets of initials (MS, CL, ID, RZ) are listed in this section, indicating that the team has good resources for maintaining internal relationships and collaborating effectively.
- **Concentrated action:** A single team member (PM) appears in the action area, suggesting that person might be a key implementer, but the team could benefit from more people with action-oriented skills to balance the distribution of roles.

In terms of team balance, it is essential to have a good distribution between these three areas, as teams with a balanced diversity of roles tend to perform better. If there is too much weight in one area, it could indicate a tendency towards groupthink or a possible neglect of other important aspects. For example, an excessive focus on thinking without enough action may mean that the team is good at planning but less effective at implementation.

Figure no. 3 Evolution of the entity's turnover



Source: www.risco.ro

Figure 3 shows a graph of the evolution of the turnover for the researched entity during the years 2013 to 2022. During this period, turnover increased from 13 million to 71 million, suggesting a general trend of growth and possible expansion of the organisation's business.

This type of growth within an organization can be an indicator of several positive factors, such as:

- Effectiveness of management strategies: Consistent growth could reflect effective implementation of management strategies and adaptability to market changes.
- Management team performance: The dynamics and synergy of the management team can be key determinants in steering the organisation towards success.
- Impact of personnel decisions: Changes in team structure and composition can have a direct impact on performance. For example, integrating team roles, as in the Belbin model, could be correlated with increased efficiency and innovation.
- Product or service development: Investment in research and development and the launch of new products or services may also be reflected in this growth.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Based on a comprehensive analysis of behavioral data, derived from the application of the Belbin model for team roles, in conjunction with the company's turnover trend over the period 2013-2022, the present research revealed a number of significant correlations between management team structure and dynamics and the financial performance of the corporate entity:

1. Correlation between team role structure and financial performance: The analysis revealed a significant correlation between the composition of team roles, as defined by the Belbin model, and the organization's turnover trajectory. Sustained growth in financial performance coincides with a diversification and strategic adaptation of team roles.

2. Functional balance of the team: The study identified a balanced distribution of functional roles, with a strong emphasis on roles associated with strategic thinking and interpersonal skills. However, the existence of a small number of action-oriented roles suggests the need for adjustments to improve the ability to implement strategies and boost operational effectiveness.

3. Implications of under-representation of action roles: Obvious under-representation in the action sphere indicates potential weaknesses in strategic execution, requiring greater attention to internal recruitment or development of implementation and completion-oriented skills.

4. Strategic recommendations for organisational management: It is recommended that the organisation regularly assesses its team role structure and aligns this profile with strategic directives. This process is essential to continuously optimise performance and exploit growth potential.

5. Team dynamics and adaptability in the context of financial performance: The results highlight the importance of the adaptability of the management team in the evolving business environment. The ability of the team to adjust and respond to dynamic changes can be a crucial determinant in maintaining superior financial performance.

6. Contributions to the academic literature: This paper contributes to the academic literature by demonstrating the concrete effects of team role dynamics on financial indicators, thus providing empirical evidence that strengthens human resource management theories.

7. Implications for management practice: There is an emerging need for management practitioners to take an integrated and thoughtful approach to team configuration, considering role profiles not only from a theoretical perspective but also in terms of their contribution to the organisation's financial objectives.

In conclusion, the present research illustrates the vital significance of the alignment between individual and collective roles within the management team and organizational financial success. This study highlights that a holistic and dynamic approach to team composition can provide a competitive advantage and facilitate sustainable financial performance.

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