



Self-Development: addressing areas of weakness or capitalising on strengths?

By, Jane Arthur-McGuire

Today I heard about a team within a financial services organisation who were told that they should all be focusing on becoming completer-finishers, even if this isn't their natural style. A completer-finisher is one of the 9 team roles that Belbin identified in his Team Inventory- an assessment to determine the likely behaviour of individuals in teams depending upon their natural preferences. This is a time of high, technically-challenging workload and looming deadlines for this team so the leader was clearly trying to ask the team to focus on accuracy of output and a polished finished project, natural behaviours of the completer-finisher. I don't suppose for one minute that this particular leader really believes that there is only room for this particular style in their team, but it got me thinking about how often 'self-development' within organisations means ignoring our strengths and focusing on activities to improve in areas of 'weakness'.

This seems logical; we should all work on our areas of weakness to ensure that we are rounded individuals. But, what if we all just focused on our areas of strength, the areas in which we have natural talents, where work seems to just flow effortlessly.....

Have you ever been so engrossed in what you were working on that time literally flew past? If so, you were probably working in an area of strength. Contrast this with when you've put off a task, it just keeps dropping down the to-do list and you keep finding reasons not to get started on it. Then, when you finally do start you scratch your head, sigh a lot, and you notice every single minute that passes. I'd bet money on the fact that this was probably not a task that played to your strengths.

If we take the example of the team I mentioned earlier, they have all been asked to be completer-finishers. Some of the team members will naturally behave in this way, but others will positively hate the final checking process, they will be irritated when asked to check and recheck work, and for this reason will likely fail to spot errors or flaws. On the other hand, these individuals might be fantastic implementers, able to knock up a project plan in no time at all and carry it out effortlessly.

Is it really best for organisations to ask everyone to be good at everything, to become all-rounders? Or should we listen to our natural strengths and preferences and focus on developing extra-ordinary abilities in these areas? By focussing on strengths we stand to gain increases in quantity and quality of output, and more satisfied team members. Anyone up for developing their strengths?!

For more information on Belbin's Team roles, their website is: www.belbin.com