How team roles put our diverse strengths to work

Success in business hinges on understanding the group members and building effective teams based on their abilities. PHOTO | FILE

By SCOTT BELLOWS

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Sadly, conventional business wisdom dictates that all employees must fully possess all well rounded skills for all responsibilities that an employee could possibility fill on a team. An employee cannot provide everything for a team.

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Modern executives must understand that every employee, including themselves, holds strong positives and terse negatives.

Proper management involves accentuating team member strengths and minimising weaknesses with eyes wide open without the ridiculous belief that no one should hold negatives at all.

The faster you, a business executive, realise that such all-round role functions do not exist in any human being, the faster you build a better team and grow your business faster.

Dr Belbin in the UK pioneered the concept of team roles in the 1980s. He proposed nine ways that employees can contribute to their teams.

Now, let us modify the roles for the Kenyan context and expand to the following 10 team roles. Think carefully about your top three that you easily and joyfully provide to your team and you are also good at doing.

Then, identify the four team roles that you may perform moderately well, but you tolerate the roles while neither loving nor hating them. Finally, which three (3) team roles do you perform badly and you absolutely despise? Make a list.

First, a thinker is creative, imaginative, and unorthodox who solves difficult problems. Second, a networker proves himself or herself extrovert, enthusiastic, and communicative who explores opportunities and develops contacts.

Third, a coordinator is mature, confident, and a good chairperson who clarifies goals, promotes decision-making, and delegates well.

Fourth, a pusher thrives on pressure in a challenging and dynamic environment whereby they possess the drive and courage to overcome obstacles. Fifth, a balancer displays sober, strategic and discerning characteristics. They see all options and judges accurately.
Sixth, a team guy or gal behaves like the life of the office through their co-operative, mild, perceptive and
diplomatic personalities that listens, builds others, and averts friction.

Seventh, a get it done guy or gal proves disciplined, reliable, conservative and efficient who turn ideas into
practical actions. Eighth, a closer painstakingly, conscientiously, and anxiously searches out vital errors and
omissions.

Ninth, a perfectionist polishes and perfects, leaving no mistakes behind. Tenth and final, an expert provides
knowledge and skills in rare supply while being single-minded, self-starting, and dedicated.

Looking through the above team roles and deciding on what you enjoy and how you perform, you build your
team to compliment your skill set and the skill sets of your existing executives.

Take your bottom three team roles for example. Perhaps you love networking by meeting new people, but you
fail to finalise deals.

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That means you struggle at the “closer” role and urgently need to hire someone with skills and passion for
closing deals.

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On the other hand, suppose you and your CFO already excel as “perfectionists”, then bring on board someone
who is both a “pusher” and a “coordinator” to force tasks to get done in your office.

As a leader and entrepreneur, you must realise that hiring based on employees’ team roles equals the
importance of hiring based on traditional skill sets like accounting, law, sales, and manager. Do not miss
opportunities for great teams.

Every team member could have value in your organisation if you accentuate their job tasks to meet with their
team role skills.

Ask all your employees to assess their own team roles. Even someone like the famous crime detective Mr
Monk, on the hit television show formerly on Kenyan television, adds value to a team.

If you remember the show, you know that Mr Monk irritated many colleagues as an obsessive compulsive
perfectionist. However, he added tremendous value to his team because he possessed skills of problem solving
that others did not.

So take a moment now and think about the teams in your office. Do you have too many “thinkers” but not
enough “get it done guys and gals”? Do you need to make adjustments to your teams?
Startup entrepreneurs possess the hardest task. Companies in the early stages of growth often only retain the resources to bring on board one or two other executives.

It makes hiring based on team roles even more crucial for success. Investors and venture capitalists know this and wish that you did too. As you assess your team, the following allowable weaknesses accompany each type of team role.

As the startup entrepreneur, fill in your team based on the above strengths per role with knowledge of the downsides of each of the below weaknesses.

Thinkers often ignore incidentals and are too preoccupied to communicate effectively. Networkers can become overly optimistic and lose interest once initial enthusiasm has passed.

Coordinators can sometimes be seen as manipulative and perceived to offload personal work on others. Pushers can prove prone to provocation and offend people’s feelings.

Balancers can lack drive and the ability to inspire others. Team guys and team gals display indecisiveness in crunch situations as they prefer for everyone to like them and they would prefer to choose a side.

Get it done guys and gals become somewhat inflexible and slow to respond to new possibilities as they are so focused on accomplishing existing tasks.

Closers with all their attention to finalising are often worry unduly. Perfectionists typically fear that others will not do as good a job as if they did it themselves, so they become reluctant to delegate.

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Experts often contribute only on a narrow front and dwell on the technicalities of their particular area of knowledge.

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Entrepreneurs avoid business startup failure. Success in business hinges on understanding yourself, understanding your team, and building effective teams based on roles.

Which of the team roles do you need on your team? Where do you have too many team members overlapping similar categories?

If you run a larger company, does each of your department teams possess each role as well as the executive leadership team?
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