



**Meredith Belbin asks**

## Does Size Matter?

The “Non” vote by founder members of the European Union should be no surprise for those who have worked for long in HR Management. The belief that membership could be expanded from an original seven to 25 within virtually the same type of organisational structure conflicts with everything we know about optimal sizes for human working. The human group of *Homo sapiens* remained relatively small for the first 150,000 years. Evolution brought about mutual adjustment between human behaviour and size of group. The growth of small hunter-gatherer communities grew into larger settled habitations and eventually cities and empires. That change has, by evolutionary standards, been relatively sudden. Given such a pedigree it is little wonder that the behaviour of (small) teams contrasts so sharply with the behaviour of (larger) groups to the detriment of the latter. There is a growing awareness that small is beautiful. But that poses a dilemma. Large companies and public service organisations are inevitably locked into large unit sizes. Such inflation in size makes them unwieldy in comparison with small teams. Is there a solution? Yes there is, if account is taken of **The Theory of Concurrent Teams** first advanced in my last book on teams – **Beyond the Team**. Briefly, this states that, when effective decision-making is required, three selected teams of four are better than one group of twelve. The only proviso is that these teams work concurrently and shortly afterwards share their outputs so that decisions are not unduly delayed. How can one deal with 25 nations within a single organisation? Not by resorting to one huge meeting. On the other hand, small teams deliberating separately can quickly reach significant decisions.

<b>BELBIN</b>	<b>Six differences between a team and a group</b>		
	 <b>TEAM</b>	 <b>GROUP</b>	
	<b>Size</b>	Limited	Medium or Large
	<b>Selection</b>	Crucial	Immaterial
	<b>Leadership</b>	Shared or Rotating	Solo
	<b>Perception</b>	Mutual knowledge and understanding	Focus on Leader
	<b>Style</b>	Role spread Co-ordination	Convergence Conformism
<b>Spirit</b>	Dynamic interaction	Togetherness Persecution of Opponents	



# Belbin Conference 2006

We are delighted to announce that the 2006 Belbin Conference will be held at Downing College, Cambridge on the 13-14th July. We have yet to decide the full agenda, but details will follow in the near future. We hope that the 2006 Conference will be a special occasion as it is also Meredith's 80th year.

Last year's conference, which had the theme of Teams and Organisation, was a great success, with Fons Trompenaars receiving tremendous feedback for his talk, Teaming Across Cultures. Perhaps we could have predicted the Ashes victory after a fascinating talk from Robert McClements and Michael Fordham from The Bradford School of Management. They have been working closely with the England and Wales Cricket Board to provide cricket managers and coaches with an insight into their own behaviour and an understanding of ways to engage with their players, the Captain, other coaches and Club staff.



Meredith Belbin, Fons Trompenaars and Philip Merry

If you would like to be kept informed of Conference updates, please contact Jo Keeler.

## On-line Belbin

# www.belbin.com

After 4 years and over 20,000 completed self-perception inventories later, we decided that it was time to treat our on-line service to a makeover!

As from the beginning of October the on-line process has been updated so that:

1. All questionnaires are now accessible for 2 years from date of purchase
2. Administrators can personalise the email that is sent out to individuals
3. The process to add observer assessments has been simplified
4. You can bookmark your web-link easily for future reference
5. An instruction and FAQ page has been added to help you through the process

And most importantly, we have tried to de-jargon the process as much as possible!

The cost has remained at only £25 per person – this includes the self-perception inventory and up to 6 observer assessments.

If you have already used the on-line service, we hope that you like the changes. If you haven't yet experienced Belbin on-line, please get in touch with Jill Cooper and she will be delighted to talk you through the process.

## Important news for all e-interplace® users

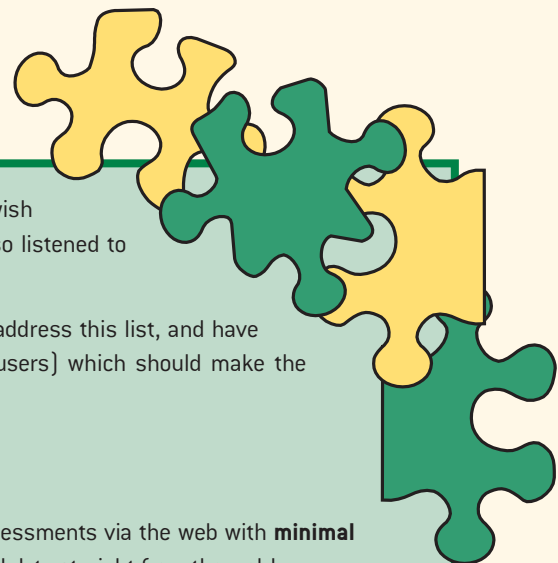
Since the launch of e-interplace in 2001 we have been compiling a 'wish list' of features which will make your life even easier. We have also listened to your feedback – after all you use the software on a regular basis!

David Bainbridge and Peter Lancaster have been working hard to address this list, and have produced an upgrade (free of charge to all current e-interplace users) which should make the running of the software as simple as possible.

Some of the new features include:

- Easier and **faster creation** of team and group reports.
- Completion of self-perception inventories and observer assessments via the web with **minimal administration** – no more attachments to file, just download data straight from the web!
- New **handouts** to help with team building sessions and individual feedback.
- **Easier** printing and editing options.
- **Masking** of Observer names.

If you would like to upgrade, please contact Peter Lancaster in the office. He will be very disappointed if you don't!



# New - The 2006 Belbin Team Challenge

After months of developing our latest management team exercise, we are delighted to announce that the 2006 Belbin Team Challenge is underway!

Our inaugural event was a two-day residential course held at Hemingford Grey House, situated by the side of the river Ouse and precariously close to the flood plain. More accustomed to being used as a venue for Murder Mystery Weekends, it set the atmosphere for a rather exciting and original event.

We were privileged to have four actual working teams – Game Stores Group, Yell Ltd, Obsidian Consulting and Bowles Development Group. Running the event were our experienced facilitators and trainers – Barrie Watson and Deborah McGovern, whilst at the same time Peter Lancaster, Jo Keeler and Nigel Belbin were running the Business Exercise.

Working as four competing property development companies, the objective of the Belbin Team Challenge is to make the most money by utilising the strengths in the team.

The main focus of the exercise is learning how the Belbin team role theory can help individuals and teams develop their strengths, identify their weaknesses, and use this information to maximise their team effectiveness.

Congratulations go to Obsidian Consulting for winning the prize for The Best Performance Team, and Yell's hard work and determination made them winners of The Most Improved Team prize for their rags to riches transformation!

After the great success of the event we are now actively looking for in-place management and project teams ready to compete and learn about themselves for 2006.

And it doesn't end there. **We will be awarding the 2006 Belbin Team Challenge Cup, and a cash prize of £500 to the best team of the year.** Various criteria will be taken into account – best financial result, greatest learning and most cohesive team.

If you have a team or teams containing between 4-6 individuals, that would like to participate in this new exciting two day residential challenge, please contact Jo Keeler at our office on 01223 264975. She will be happy to tell you more.



*Delegates from the inaugural Team Challenge with our trainers, Deborah McGovern, Barrie Watson and Nigel & Meredith Belbin*

May the best team win.



# Meredith's travels

I never know quite what to expect when I visit a country for the first time on professional business. On the subject of "Management in a New Era" I had the pleasure of talking to Conferences in Warsaw, Moscow and Athens and each presented me with a different experience. In each case my trip was facilitated by first class agents who had received training at Bennell Court. In Warsaw I spoke to 400 delegates and to 200 delegates at a so-called smaller meeting!

Poland, freed from the German and Russian yoke (I heard some terrible stories) exhibited a sense of liberated optimism and long queues awaited signature of copies of my book in Polish. Moscow was a great contrast with a smaller meeting attended by some impressive intellectuals, especially from St Petersburg, and a far deeper sense of pessimism. One can see that corruption-inclined bureaucracy and teamwork don't mix. I must confess that in my luxury suite with butler service I felt like an oligarch! Still it was gratifying that Open University Russia is running a Management module which includes "Belbin" for 17,000 students. Athens proved a contrast again. As far as I could gather Greek firms were singularly absent. Multinationals were making the running and were proud of using their ethos to good effect. My next trips planned for the Baltic States had to be cancelled due to an acute family health crisis. Still all was not lost. Cambourne, just up the road, with its excellent video conference centre provided the substitute for personal presence. It felt strangely exhilarating to wave to people in Estonia and for them to wave back!

I think these experiences underline the growing appetite for new ideas in a changing world. Yet the overriding impression is that each country will need to find its own way forward.

## Staff News

Those of you who keep in touch with our office may like to hear of staff activity:

In spite of having nobody leaving and nobody joining Belbin in the past year, we can therefore (perhaps wrongly) presume we have great contentment amongst our work force! We are happy to announce that Jo Keeler is back full time from maternity leave after giving birth to Tess. Peter Lancaster is coming up to his tenth anniversary of working for Belbin. Meanwhile our trainers are busier than ever and working further afield including India and the USA.



**BELBIN®**

3-4 Bennell Court, West Street, Comberton, Cambridge UK CB3 7DS

Tel: +44 (0) 1223 264975

Fax: +44 (0) 1223 264976

e-mail: [info@belbin.com](mailto:info@belbin.com)

Website: [www.belbin.com](http://www.belbin.com)