

The Organizational Zoo Blog references

Victorian Public Service Center for Continuous Improvement

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[The Organisational Zoo](#)

Posted by Coordinator 3 November 2006



A lunch time session on [“The Organizational Zoo”](#) was presented today, at the [Airlie Leadership Development Centre](#) (ALDC). The session provided an enticing and entertaining peek into [Arthur Shelley’s](#) world of work place relations using the perspective of animal metaphors.

The dining area was decorated with stuffed animals and all the dishes had animal names to help get everyone into the animal theme. After a quick, but delicious lunch the group decamped to the seminar room to hear Arthur speak about his book; “The Organizational Zoo.” [The book](#) outlines many different animal types one might meet in the work arena, it identifies their strengths and weaknesses which can enable you to better communicate, coordinate or manipulate as you see fit.

One of the main premises of the book is that work groups need certain behavioural characteristics to accomplish certain goals, e.g. you need lions to sell where as you need ants to get a job done. One of the key characteristics of this form of type casting using animal metaphors, from a change management perspective, is that all animals have both good and bad traits, so it is the context which deems a particular type appropriate or not.

Effective teams need a cross-section of animal types or put another way, they need diversity. It is in evaluating your team for their types and translating that into the behaviours required in your project or organisation, which enables you to harness the value of this concept. One of the exercises the group completed was the selection of 20 words into 4 groups; 5 x strongest trait, 5 x next strongest, 5 x not like you, 5 x least like you. In reviewing the resultant lists we were able to see how peoples’ self assessment could be helpful in defining the role that person would best play in a given scenario.

The session provided a good overview of the concepts and paradigms, but as with most things, it is through knowing and understanding the detail that application becomes possible. I eagerly await the delivery of *The Organizational Zoo*, due to be available in Australia shortly, and I’m sure the American metaphors and spelling won’t be a problem for me. (NB: The author is Australian but the book has been published in the USA) I think “The Organizational Zoo” may well become an asset in my stakeholder management toolkit.

The CIN would like to thank both Arthur Shelley and ALDC for what was a highly professional and valuable session.

For more information on this session contact elizabeth.lee@iird.vic.gov.au or have a look at the [knowledgefutures blog](#) where this session has been reviewed also.

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8 Responses to “The Organisational Zoo”

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1. *Linda Martin* Says:
[November 3rd, 2006 at 11:11 pm](#)

You will never look at your work colleagues or bosses the same way again - a fascinating insight into understanding human behaviours in the workplace. I just have to figure out what animal I am ! This would be a great team building exercise.



2. *Michael De Sousa* Says:
[November 3rd, 2006 at 11:22 pm](#)

I thoroughly enjoyed and was enlightened by Arthur Shelley's workshop on the characteristics of the organisational zoo animals. I realise that each of these animals which when combined in a team can achieve greatness. I really look forward to reading Arthur's book to establish what species I am.

I get the feeling that most who attended the workshop were similar in character. Perhaps we should attract other animals to such a workshop to better understand their behaviour and strengths. I see it important that I truly know myself and how I portray myself to others. The picture slides of people used by Arthur and my rating of them from 1 to 5 did vary as he gave me more information about them. This shows how tricky initial perceptions can be ! I certainly would like to emulate the good characteristics of other animals and be able to spot the right ones to help me reach my goals.

I wish to commend the CIN for picking such a useful workshop that strikes at the heart of character - keep up the good work.

Michael De Sousa
Quality Coordinator
Metropolitan Fire & Emergency Services Board
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3. *Luke Naismith* Says:
[November 3rd, 2006 at 11:28 pm](#)

A great workshop Arthur and a shame we did not have longer. I think it just goes to show that there is a little bit of animal in everyone. Or as we discovered, a lot of animal in certain people. And, as a former Zoologist like Frank, I've always said that I wanted to work with animals and now I realise that I have finally achieved my dream - the moral of that story is to be careful of what you wish for !
The personal profiling was really valuable.

4. *Jodie Saunders* Says:
[November 3rd, 2006 at 11:31 pm](#)

What a great day was had by all. Very interesting concept and I really want to know the animals in more detail, so when I look at people at work I can link

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the animal to each as a way of memory skilling - just hope I don't call one of the executives a lion or a hyena !



I am really looking forward to the whole concept and the book.

5. *Ken Tucknott* Says:
[November 3rd, 2006 at 11:43 pm](#)

What an enjoyable day and it whetted the appetite for more on the creatures in the zoo. Nematode will certainly take over from my coprolite salutation.

Perhaps I was the odd man out, but unlike Michael(above)I felt I certainly differed in my traits from some other attendees. Although there were some seemingly contradictory traits (aggressive vs caring, reliable & procrastinating) in my inventory, I believe differing situations require differing responses, and rather than being rigid in my approach, I actually liked the notion of the Chameleon (but not in today's context as the sycophant)rather for their adaptability and survivability. It is an excellent ability to have in a dangerous environment and the enemy never knows where you are coming from and shies away from confrontation.

Once again thanks for the great session and I hope to take the lessons further in due course.

Ken Tucknott
Planning & IT Manager
Region 4 (North East)
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6. *Coordinator* Says:
[November 3rd, 2006 at 11:59 pm](#)

I went to today's session knowing that I would meet up with twenty or so of my VPS colleagues, but I ended up seeing a couple of thousand of them as the workshop unfolded !

I have been fortunate enough to use Arthur's personality profiling tool before along with a whole of Govt Innovation group and it proved (as it did again today) to be a valuable and amusing way of establishing who's who in the zoo (sorry !). It has great potential in activities such as team building and stakeholder engagement.

I wonder ... if the HMS Beagle had visited the VPS isles rather than the Galapagos, would Charles Darwin have formulated similar evolutionary theory ? (I suspect so.)

Many thanks to Arthur Shelley for the valuable workshop and ALDC for the exceptional hospitality and zoologically themed lunch.

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7. [Organisational Zoo - VPSCIN lunch « Knowledge Futures](#)

Says:

[November 4th, 2006 at 8:05 pm](#)

[...] More on this session here at the VPSCIN blog [...]



8. *Kathryn* Says:

[November 8th, 2006 at 1:37 pm](#)

This was a really interesting workshop. Arthur gave us a brief introduction to the organisational zoo. Using the animal metaphor Arthur makes it much easier to recognise and understand the types of people we work with and how they all contribute to an organisation's success. I look forward to reading the book and sharing it with my team.

“The Organisational Zoo” by Arthur Shelley

Posted by Coordinator 16 March 2007

“The Organisational Zoo: A Survival Guide for Workplace Behaviour” is an educational guide to understanding workplace relationships and how to improve them. The book profiles common behaviour types found in organisations through animal metaphors and shows how the mix of animals in the hierarchy determine the organisational culture.

Readers can immediately relate to the simple profiles and learn how to include them in practical exercises for building productive teams. Each animal profile described includes a caricature and the tongue in cheek style (with serious intent) and clever descriptions of animal interactions, provide a light yet thought generating read.

The most important feature of the book is its quick turn around into practical application. Because we can so readily relate to the character traits described in the animal metaphors, it becomes a fun, and more importantly a safe way, to quickly generate a broad idea of the character types in your team or meeting. Using the metaphors described in the book can help to:

- *better understand those around you and aid in building better relationships. helping*
- *to understand the emotional impacts of decisions and reducing politics.*
- *helping to understand your team dynamics and better engage stakeholders, and*
- *have some serious fun while developing collaboration and trust in your team.*

Other interesting applications for the use of these metaphors is being able to very quickly bond and learn about your your colleagues in a meeting setting. This can be done in a few minutes without resorting to the complexity of other profiling methods.

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The metaphors are also an easy way to ensure you have a diversity of personality types in your project teams. A good mixture of people/animals are required to successfully see a project through the various stages to successful implementation.



A unique and handy resource for anyone wishing to work more effectively with those around them.

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One Response to ““The Organisational Zoo” by Arthur Shelley”

1. *Henry Pym* Says:
[March 16th, 2007 at 9:59 pm](#)

The practical applications of this are numerous. I am really looking forward to a follow up publication (by the same author) providing more ways to apply this in the workplace.
Nematodes I love it !

2. *Arthur Shelley* Says:
[March 19th, 2007 at 9:41 am](#)

Henry,
Thanks for your comments, the thing I like most about the characters is the way readers easily identify with them (or in the case of Nematodes, identify OTHERS as them).

You may be pleased to know I am working on a series of exercises that will be available through www.organizationalzoo.com (free) as downloads. I am currently restructuring the site to enable this (a couple of weeks work). I will notify this forum when the new work is available. (There is also a second book on the way, but this will take longer).
Regards Arthur