

An exercise in disclosure

This exercise is very simple and ideal as an icebreaker or in a team building setting.

Activity: Ask each participant to introduce themselves as an animal and explain their choice.

They can be helped by prompting them with *Zoo Profile Cards* or by referring them to the website in advance of the workshop. However, no prior knowledge of *The Organizational Zoo* is necessary and they can choose any animal they like, not just Zoo characters. The main point is to have them talk a little about their perception of themselves to assist others understand how they see themselves.

Comments for facilitators

Some people interpret the characters as being negative. Of course every animal has both negative and positive aspects and most have a justifiable place in the zoo. The book is written with a sense of fun, so the characteristics are meant to be interpreted with an element of tongue-in-cheek perspective. Ask them to drop their guard a little and open up some of what we normally don't admit to, or try hide from others.

In the book there is a lot more detail that puts more perspective around the characters. It talks about how others see the character and how they see themselves. For example the lion is seen as being aggressive by most animals. Whilst this may appear at first to be negative and this is a very important part of being competitive and survival for them. Just as it is an essential capability to progress in industry. However, the lion sees his aggression as necessary to protect the pride, to ward off potential predators and keep competing prides at bay to protect their territory. Having people understand that how they see themselves is often different to how they see themselves is important.

Tell them not to take the exercise too seriously; getting them to talk about themselves is more important than finding an exact fit. Even if they describe a couple of characteristics they align with, rather than a complete profile. In most work places you usually find people who would identify with the Bee, Dog, Eagle, Gibbon, Kid, Mouse, Owl, Whale and Yak. You probably have people prepared to (privately) describe some other colleagues as Ants, Chameleons, Felines, Hyena, Jackals, Lions, Rattlesnakes, Triceratops, Unicorns and Vultures, but not see themselves as such. People will not usually use sloth or nematode, but most organizations do have them. X-Breeds and Insects are usually associated with external colleagues.

Do not place limits on them, allow them to select other animals or hybrids. Creativity, imagination and going beyond the rules are things to encourage. Alternatively allow them to describe who they would like to be and perhaps (if they allow) why they are not that now and what stops them from being so.

It is a good idea to do this completely without writing anything down. Some people will retreat into themselves, if they think their comments are being recorded.