

Animal Metaphors: “Strategic like a fox...”

Goals:

- Help organizations appreciate their current organization’s strategy and approach;
- Assist individuals to look at their organizations in new ways.

Time: 10-20 minutes

How it’s done:

Many activist organizations suffer from being demoralized. “We’re obviously bad at strategy,” they declare. “Just look at how bad things are right now!”

Yet, even the most dilapidated organization has something that keeps it together. Each group has some underlying strategy. Rather than focusing on failure, this tool opens up groups to begin looking at their strength.

This tool can work even with people that rarely think about their organization strategically. This tool provides an easy doorway into larger conversations about strategy. Plus, it can fun to have an image for one’s organization to rally around!

The tool is very simple. You might begin with some warm-up (great if it includes animals to get people primed). All except the last stage is done in small groups (best three or four).

Step 1: Explain that metaphors can be very powerful. You might have examples from your own life, or simply hear some of the examples from the group. Metaphors can be powerful ways to see things in a new light. Then invite participants to think about their organization. “If your organization were an animal, what would it be? Describe it.”

Step 2: Hear from the group a sampling of the animals they came up with.

Step 3: Explain: “So all animals have learned something about change and survival. In evolution, every animal comes to be the way it is because it had the best-adapted strategy available. So using the animal you picked as a metaphor for your organization, what are you doing well? What positive strategy or strength does that animal suggest about your work?”

Step 4: Again hear a sampling. Then pose the next question: “If that animal had a suggestion about using that strategy better, what would it say? What can you learn from the animal?”

Step 5: Finally, list up the various lessons on newsprint people are learning (make sure to write them in a general way so people can apply that lesson beyond just that metaphor).

You might want to give people a chance to move towards application and thinking about changes in their organization, or simply offer this as a starting point for a meeting.

****OPTION:** In some groups, people may not know a wide variety of animals or feel less comfortable making metaphors out of animals. Find the type of metaphor that best works for your group. You can use music, objects, trees, and much more.

Where tool comes from:

Daniel Hunter, Training for Change, 1501 Cherry St, Philadelphia, PA 19102 • www.TrainingforChange.org