

Collaboration Exercises - Exploring Stereotypes

Biomimicry is an interdisciplinary endeavor. Therefore, the ability to collaborate across disciplines is critical to doing biomimicry well. The purpose of these two activities is to call out the differences among disciplines and make them easier to talk about. Doing so will aid you in establishing effective ways of communicating and collaborating in a multidisciplinary work environment.

Discipline Bumper Sticker

1. Have each member of your team spend 5 minutes brainstorming stereotypes about people in their discipline then create a bumper sticker* slogan that sums up either how they suspect others perceive them or how they truly perceive themselves.
2. Have each person present their results and bumper sticker, and then ask those from other disciplines to share additional stereotypes they have about that group.
3. Reflect on the stereotypes presented and discuss possible strategies or ground rules that will help your team members succeed in collaborative work.

**A bumper sticker is an adhesive sign with a message, usually attached to the bumper of an automobile. These messages are short and try to quickly capture the idea of a particular philosophy or political position, or are sometimes just meant to be funny.*

Pros and Cons

1. Sit together in a semi-circle in front of a large white board or several large pieces of paper. Create columns and write the name of a discipline at the top of each one (e.g., biologist, business person, architect, designer, engineer).
2. Start with the first column and brainstorm all of the stereotypical characteristics of that discipline. (E.g. for a biologist, you might say things like "Nerdy, loves nature, data-driven, curious," etc.) Do the same for each category. This can be a pretty funny experience with everyone poking fun and laughing at themselves.
3. Once you've gone through each discipline, rate each characteristic as positive, negative, or neutral, based on how it effects the team. (Do this kind of fast or it drags on.)
4. As you go through this process, you will see that the things that may be annoying about a given discipline are often actually really helpful and necessary for success. An engineer, for instance, can be very driven by numbers and often require analysis to make a decision. This might make some teammates crazy, but you can all recognize the value of having that perspective at the table.