

Breaking Cultural Stereotypes

Tom Robson, BELBIN



In the autumn, I was asked to run a one-day workshop for a division of a large international manufacturing firm in Switzerland. Their aim (besides having an enjoyable day together) was to learn how to assimilate new teams from Asia into their group and gain greater mutual understanding, thus improving team effectiveness.

Whilst facilitating the workshop I addressed cultural issues, but with an emphasis on Team Roles as a means of understanding the diversity of contributions required in effective teams. In other words, participants learned to replace cultural stereotypes, such as “Claude will like dealing with details because all Swiss are precise” with: “Actually Claude is a great Plant/Specialist, but his least-preferred role is Completer-Finisher”. This provides a much more accurate picture of Claude’s likely contribution to a team than his cultural background or any other form of inaccurate stereotyping. The outcome of the workshop is that team members now have a much more objective understanding of each others’ strengths and weaknesses. Their team performance should improve.

And by the way, the trains did run like clockwork in Zurich!

Tom Robson is a management consultant and runs accreditation courses, workshops and consultancy on behalf of BELBIN. You can contact him at tom@belbin.com