

# Eggs-ercises

*Simple innovation games  
designed to help groups explore  
shared creativity*

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## ***Egg-based exercises***

You'd be surprised what you can do with an egg. It's a versatile component in a range of activities designed to help explore innovation. The basic structure of the exercise remains the same – groups work fast (15-20 minutes) towards a creative solution to a problem, using just the materials provided.

Teams are given a set of materials – card, flexible straws, string, Blu-tak, elastic bands, etc. There is no specific requirement as long as each team receives the same materials; their job is to find some way to move an egg without breaking it. Eggs are a vital ingredient because they are fragile – if you drop them they tend to break! So they bring in a simple element of risk to the challenge – if the team's inventions don't work the egg will break.

### **Facilitator briefing:**

A typical example of the game would be as follows. Begin by explaining to the students:

The challenge: - how to unlock the natural creativity in individuals and how to exploit the particular benefits when groups of people work together in terms of volume and variety of ideas.

We need to understand more about how this happens so we can begin to design systems and create the conditions under which such behaviour could flourish within an organization  
Let's set up a brief laboratory to study the phenomenon in more detail.

Split them into teams – 4 to 6 per team is ideal. Offer a token prize as an extra motivator.

Give them the following instructions:



- Your team is asked to find and implement a creative solution to an unusual problem.
- An egg will be placed on a chair and a cup on the floor nearby.
- You are asked to get the eggs into the cups without cracking or breaking them.
- You may use only the materials provided to enable this to be done.
- You have 15 minutes to prepare and then up to 3 minutes to get the eggs into the cups.
- During the 3 minute 'action phase' no one may be within 1 metre of the eggs at any time.
- In the event that more than one team succeeds, the fastest team will be the winner.

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Materials supplied can vary but bags usually contain elements like:

<i>Drinking straws</i>	<i>Clothes pegs</i>
<i>Postcards</i>	<i>Bulldog clips</i>
<i>Blutak</i>	<i>Paper clips</i>
<i>Rubber bands</i>	<i>String</i>
<i>Balloons</i>	<i>Drawing pins</i>
<i>Scissors</i>	<i>Matches</i>
<i>Sellotape</i>	

You'll also need something to cover the floor (!), masking tape, watch (for timing) and, most important) eggs!

But the teams aren't given the egg to experiment with – that adds a further element of tension and challenge since they have the added uncertainty of having to guess the weight, size and other properties of the egg. Only when the 'action phase' begins do they receive the egg – so their theory may often come crashing down when it confronts reality!

### **Reflection and debriefing**

The key to the game is, of course, not the creative energy and wonderful contraptions which teams come up with, nor is it the fun element (though the exercise works well as an energiser). Its power lies on providing a live laboratory experience from which to reflect.

The underlying task is a simple version of the general innovation challenge – how to get value (in this case a successful outcome) from ideas – the many suggestions which teams come up with to solve the problem.

Reflection can be wide-ranging but a good starting point is to ask teams how they performed as a team, what were the key elements in their group creative process – and how might they improve on their performance next time around. It is important to guide this reflection away from focusing on the solutions the teams come up with and keep the discussion around the group processes which were involved.

One helpful variant (depending on the number of people available) is to appoint observers whose role is simply to watch the team and make notes on their process which they can then share during the reflection session.

### Variations

One of the valuable things about this exercise is that it can be deployed in many different ways. The core elements remain the same but the challenge can be different – instead of getting the egg into the cup there are many other challenges which can be set up, all retaining the same elements of risk and uncertainty.

Variations on the 'egg in a cup' include:

- 1 Suspend the eggs from the ceiling by string – they have to place their inventions on the floor and at the agreed time you cut the string. Eggs mustn't break!
- 2 Eggs can be dropped out of a first floor window – can be placed in their inventions or their inventions can be on the ground to meet them, or combinations of the two! Eggs mustn't break is the main criterion here.

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- 3 Egg scrambler – tell them you want a device which will rotate an egg as many times as possible within 30 seconds. (This should produce ready scrambled eggs when you break them!) Since this often produces inventions which use rubber bands and rotate the egg very fast tell them they also have to provide some way of measuring the number of revolutions achieved. The winner has the most revolutions without breaking the egg.