



Games for team building

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Games to explore team working

There are many useful games and exercises which create experiences on which students can reflect about team working. They usually have a common structure - a task which students undertake in teams (often with an element of competition between teams) and then a reflection and analysis stage through which they can draw out relevant principles which can then be supported by readings, relevant theory etc. It is often helpful to have some players involved as observers, able to replay to the teams how they have behaved during the exercise.

The primary task is usually one which involves solving an open-ended problem, often against the clock and using limited material resources. But the real learning lies not in the outcome of the task (which is often fun and energizing) but rather in exploring the *process* which teams went through. Key insights about team roles, leadership, project management, creativity, etc. can be drawn out of this.

One extended example is the New Product Development game – see elsewhere in the website for details.

Another robust family of games can be quickly constructed using eggs as the core resource. The basic structure here is to break the students into teams and give them a bag containing some construction resources – for example flexible drinking straws, cards of various shapes and sizes, rubber bands, balloons, sticky tape, paper clips, etc. They are then given a problem involving an egg - for example, how to move it from a position on a chair to a safe position on the floor. The instructions for this are below:¹

¹ The idea for this and many other games comes from David Francis, CENTRIM, University of Brighton

Egg Down

- Your team is asked to find and implement a creative solution to an unusual problem.
- Two eggs will be placed on a chair and two cups 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.



The value of using eggs is that they are fragile and so teams have to be careful – but at the same time they have to take risks with them. There are many variants on this idea but 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.

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.
- 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.

In each case the key lessons come in the reflection phase after the game – which can be structured as follows:

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1. First ask the team members about how it was for them, their reflections, their feelings (especially if their solution was unsuccessful), and particularly focus on their observations about the *process* they went through – how did they achieve what they did?
 2. Then ask any observers to reflect back to the teams what they saw and observed. Since they were not involved in the activity they had an opportunity to observe more objectively and in detail and often contribute useful insights. (A variation in the use of observers is to video the game and then get the team members to watch and identify key points).
 3. Finally there is the opportunity to bring in relevant theory about team roles, project management, creativity, etc.

For more examples of team games like this which offer experiential insights into core issues see the following external links:

<http://www.teachthought.com/teaching/10-team-building-games-that-promote-critical-thinking/>