

Hollow Square

PURPOSE: To participate in a problem-solving situation in which you can observe leadership functions. You can see:

- The processes of group planning
- The problems of communication between a planning group and an implementing (Operating) group
- The problems with which an implementing group must cope when carrying out a plan it did not make itself.

All of these require effective leadership behavior. Thus, the specific objectives for this exercise are to provide a problem-solving task in which you can observe leadership behavior, to increase your awareness of the problems involved in using a formal hierarchy in group problem solving, and to give you practice in observing groups and in giving the group feedback on your observations.

(This exercise comes from Johnson & Johnson, Joining Together, 1998.)

GROUP MATERIALS NEEDED:

1. Hollow Squares pieces (16), one per group.
2. Planning Team Instruction Sheets (4 for each planning team).
3. Operating Team Instruction Sheets (4 for each operating team).
4. Observing Team Instruction Sheets and Tally Form (enough for all observers)

GENERAL PROCEDURE:

1. This exercise is carried out in clusters of ten (10) to twelve (12) persons. Each cluster is divided into three (3) subgroups:
 - a. Four (4) persons are planners
 - b. Four (4) persons are implementers
 - c. The remaining persons are observers
2. The exercise has four (4) phases:
 - a. The Planning Phase where the Planning Team plans how to instruct the Operating Team.
 - b. The Instruction Period where the Planning Team is instructing the Operating Team.
 - c. The assembly Period where the Operating Team is working alone to implement the plan.
 - d. The Feedback Period where the Observers provide feedback to the groups.
3. Briefly, the Planning Team has 15 minutes to decide how they will instruct the Operating Team to do a task and actually instruct the team. Then the

Operating Team carries through the task as best they can, and the Observing Team watches the process of both groups in the two phases.

PROCEDURE—EXERCISE:

1. All participants should read the objectives of the exercise.
2. The facilitator will divide the class into four-person planning teams, four-person implementing teams, and observers. Each team goes to a separate room or different parts of a large room (out of earshot) to await instructions.
3. Each team will receive and read the appropriate instruction sheets. The facilitator will brief the Observing Team first, then the Planning Team, then the Operating Team to ensure they all understand their tasks.
4. The Planning Team is given the general diagram sheet and the pieces of the puzzle and are instructed to begin Phase 1 (Planning Period). Each planner is given four (4) pieces of the puzzle. The exact distribution of the pieces is not crucial, but they should not have any labels marked on them. Phase 1 lasts fifteen (15) minutes. All the information the planners need to know is on their briefing sheet. (The Observing Team will be watching the Planning Team during this time.)
5. At the end of Phase 1, the Planning Team gives the Operating Team its instructions. (NOTE: The Instruction Period is included in the time allotted for the Planning Period.) The Planning Team is prohibited from giving any further help once the Operating Team starts assembling the pieces. They must remain silent and uninvolved as the Operating Team works. (The Observing Team will be watching both the Planning Team and the Operating Team during this time.)
6. The Operating Team is to finish the task, Phase 2, according to their instructions, taking as much time as necessary. (The Observing Team will be watching the Operating Team during this time.)

PROCEDURE: EXERCISE PROCESSING PHASE

1. A discussion will be held involving all the members of each cluster. This discussion is to include reports from the observers, planners, and the implementers, and a comparison of similarities between the exercise and other organizational and group experiences of the members. Questions for the discussion should include:
 - a. What leadership functions were present and absent during the Planning and Operating teams? What were the consequences of the functions being present or absent?
 - b. What leadership functions were needed for each type of activity?
 - c. How could the functioning of each team have been improved?

- d. Were the leadership functions distributed among all the team members?
Was participation and influence evenly distributed throughout the team?
- e. How was the communication between the Planning and Operating teams handled? How could it have been improved?
- f. What did it feel like to wait for the Planning Team's instructions? What did it feel like to watch the Operating Team carry them out?