TeamBuilders

10 Adventures in Working Together

Michèle Barca and Kate Cobb

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

TeamBuilders: 10 Adventures in Working Together provides the trainer with a set of activities designed to enhance learning in five key areas:

- ❏ Decision Making
- ❏ Problem Solving
- ❏ Teamwork
- ❏ Communication
- ❏ Leadership

These are vital areas for teams to address and should form the basis of most team training initiatives.

As a trainer, you probably already know that these are also topics on which quite a bit of theory has already been written. Theory is useful but can be rather "dry" when delivered to a group — it does not necessarily engage the participants' enthusiasm or enable them to see the relevance to their own work. This is where an experiential approach can have decided benefits, as *TeamBuilders* will show.

You will find a range of exercises here, only a few of which are real-life, work-based examples. Instead, most of the "Adventures" have a definite degree of fantasy. Fantasy distances the participants from what may be the real problem at work and enables them, by challenging their imaginations, to develop solutions and constructs that they may not have explored if the exercise had stayed within the mental constraints of the familiar. In other words, they can get carried away by pretending to be on an alien planet or about to be blown up on a battleship — and often feel safer doing so!

The important factors, of course, are to ensure that the game element is not allowed to dominate your training, and that there is adequate debriefing and consolidation of learning after the exercise is completed, so that the group will see the relevance of the exercise and be able to apply their learning back in the workplace.

This may be an appropriate place to remind you of the Experiential Learning Cycle (Dr B. A. Gaw, Pfeiffer & Jones, 1975):

Experiencing

Applying

Sharing

Generalizing
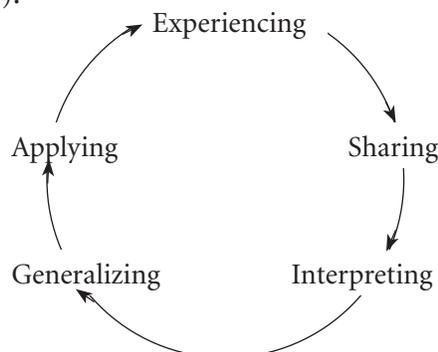
Interpreting

The objectives of each phase of the cycle are as follows:

- ❏ *Experiencing* — generating individual data from an experience
- ❏ *Sharing* — reporting the data generated from the experience
- ❏ *Interpreting* — making sense of the data generated for both individuals and the group
- ❏ *Generalizing* — developing testable hypotheses and abstractions from that data
- ❏ *Applying* — bridging the gap between present and future by understanding and/or planning how these generalizations may be tested in the workplace.

Looking at these phases, you can see that it is never enough simply to provide an enjoyable experience in training. The skilled facilitator should pay a great deal of attention to enabling the group to move through each successive phase of the learning cycle, using their processing skills to maximize their learning.

PLANNING AN EXERCISE

It is obvious (but we will say it anyway!) that you should always choose an exercise that will enable participants to learn more about the topic on which you are training and for which the experiential learning format enhances the learning. It is not a good idea, though sometimes tempting, to choose a "game" simply because it sounds fun or because you want a break from talking for an hour! This approach will always backfire on you, as at some stage participants need to understand the relevance of what they have been putting energy into, which is difficult to justify if there is no real purpose for the exercise.

Therefore, you should first write down your aims and objectives for the training and then choose a game or activity only if it fits in with them. Be clear about your objectives for the exercise, too. What shifts in understanding or perception do you want participants to make by the end of the exercise? How will you measure what has taken place?

Your role in the exercise will normally be that of an observer, which means you could simply be observing the process or taking on a role within the fantasy scenario. Before the exercise, make sure to be clear about what your role is and how it will enhance learning, and be prepared to explain clearly to the group what part you will be taking.

ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION

You may be asking a lot of some participants by encouraging them to pretend to be archeologists in the Amazon, space travellers, and so on — a certain reluctance should be anticipated. However, if you have created an atmosphere of safety from the beginning of the program and have chosen an appropriate exercise, you should be able to overcome any reluctance easily by providing participants with your support.

If someone still does not want to join in, then that is his or her choice and he or she should not be forced to participate. Though it is natural in these circumstances to feel a little angry with someone who does not wish to join in with your carefully planned exercises, be sure not to take out your negative feelings on him or her. Instead, find another role for the reluctant participant, perhaps as observer or timekeeper, so that he or she is still involved in the activity.

Remember, if you are confident in your choice of exercise, then this will communicate itself to your group and should encourage a positive attitude from the start.

CREATING ATMOSPHERE

Since these adventures are based on fantasy (some more than others), you will need to "set the scene" appropriately. In fact, the more preparatory work you do, the easier it will be for participants to enter into the spirit of the exercise and subsequently benefit from it.

Each adventure gives you a written scenario and briefing sheets for the relevant team members — and you will need to be completely familiar with all of this information before you begin. From this information you will no doubt develop your own method for creating the right atmosphere for a particular game, a method which may vary from group to group. If you need help creating a mental picture for participants, try reading the example paragraph below, making sure to pause at the ellipses to allow participants time to get into the mood.

> *"I want you to close your eyes for a minute or two and relax. Take a deep breath, and as you breathe out, let me take you on a journey into … (for example, see **Escape from Acrab**) outer space…. You are a member of a space exploration crew…. Unfortunately, you have just crash landed on an alien planet…. You are frightened/nervous/wary…. You need to start taking steps to get out of this position…. As you open your eyes, you and your other crew members start to consider what you need to do…."*

You would then distribute any handouts or other materials and begin the game.

If you are really inventive and have the time (perhaps if you use one of the games for a large-scale program), you can gather together appropriate props and costumes to add to the fantasy element of the exercise. Be careful, however, as asking people to dress up may increase their anxiety and also requires more de-roling (see page 7) time after an activity.

USING OBSERVERS

As we have already said, the trainer's usual role in these games is that of observer. It is not a good idea to set up the exercise, get the group started, and then walk away and begin setting up your next session! You must show that you are still completely involved in the process and are giving your attention to the group even though you are no longer the focus of the training. If you show you are committed, then participants will be encouraged to be committed to the outcome of the exercise and will still feel supported by you.

You may wish to use other group members to assist in the observation for a variety of reasons:

❏ They do not wish to participate (see "Encouraging Participation" above).

❏ They have experienced the exercise previously (perhaps in another training program) and therefore already "know the answer."

❏ They will add to what you observe — however good you are at observation, other people may well pick up on some things you miss and certainly will have their own unique perspective on what has occurred.

❏ Your group is too large for the chosen exercise and too small to split into two, so the "extras" can usefully act as observers.

These reasons may seem either rather negative or simply pragmatic, but there is one very important, positive reason for using group members:

❏ It enables them to see the process from a completely different perspective — that is, as an impartial observer, which is a vital skill for team members to develop and can be an important learning point to discuss when you are debriefing.

If you choose to use group members as observers, there are some important rules to follow:

1. Make sure your observers know what their roles are — give them Observation Forms (these are provided for each exercise) or ask them to observe something specific.

2. Check that they understand the principles of positive feedback. Have them read the Feedback Guidelines Handout (page 15 — also included with each Adventure).

3. Allow time during your debriefing for your observers to give their comments. There is nothing more frustrating than being asked to observe and then not being given the opportunity to share what you have seen. Unfortunately, this is all too common an occurrence.

Observing an exercise is not just a way of "getting out of doing something." The whole process should be handled carefully, especially since the "performing" members of the group may view it as receiving criticism from their peers. Handled properly, observation can and does add another invaluable dimension to the exercise.

You may choose to use video recording or closed-circuit television as your method of observation. This means you have an accurate and objective record of what happened that you and your group can replay and analyze in order to extract the maximum learning. But it takes a great deal of time in your debriefing session and therefore the advantages and disadvantages need to be weighed carefully before you decide to opt for this medium. Also, being on camera can make some people very nervous and can therefore defeat your purpose. With some encouragement from you (and after some nervous laughter!) participants usually get used to it, but always give them the option not to be recorded and make sure they know the recording is purely for training purposes and will be erased after the training ends. In fact, it is a good idea to erase the tape in front of the group once you have finished with it, to put to rest any doubts or worries the group may have.

FEEDBACK

Positive feedback is vital in any situation in which someone is invited to undertake a task. It is the only way we can learn whether or not our performance meets the required standard. If feedback is not given, then learning cannot take place, change cannot occur, and, more often than not, confusion and resentment set in.

This is as true for a training exercise as it is for any aspect of performance at work. Therefore, learning how to give positive feedback is a necessary skill for any manager to develop. It is also useful for you to use in your training program. Again, the training process can (and should) be used to mirror what is experienced back in the workplace.

Positive feedback does not mean glossing over poor performance, nor does it mean destroying someone's confidence in him- or herself by hammering home all of his or her "bad" qualities. When a group has invested time and energy into participating in your training exercise, they have a right to receive constructive and positive feedback, both from you and from other observers. So make sure everyone in the group understands the principles outlined on the Feedback Guidelines Handout (page 15 — also included with each Adventure) and that both you and they adhere to those principles.

DEBRIEFING

If we look back at the Experiential Learning Cycle, we see that in order for participants to benefit from a game or activity, each experience must be analyzed and processed to enable learning to take place and for group members to understand how they may apply their learning to their work situations.

The debrief is therefore the most important part of any exercise and perhaps the most difficult. How should we approach it?

An effective debriefing should include at least some of the following:

❑ An opportunity for participants to relate their own experiences of the exercise

❑ An opportunity for the trainer and others to relate their experiences as observers

❑ An opportunity for the trainer to elicit and establish the main learning points from the exercise

❑ An opportunity for the trainer to establish the relevance of those lessons to the working environment of the participants

❑ An opportunity for group members to consider practical ideas about incorporating this learning into their working environment.

At the end of the debriefing session each participant should be able to answer these questions:

❑ How did I feel in the role?

❑ What did I learn from the exercise?

❑ How can I apply this learning to what I do at work?

Debriefing Model

Stage 1 Trainer clarifies the objective of the exercise, gives the solution to the problem if appropriate, adds any missing information, and introduces the process for debriefing.

Stage 2 In a structured format, participants relate their perceptions of the exercise, how they felt they "performed," and so on; and the trainer may ask questions designed to draw out the learning points.

Stage 3 Trainer gives opportunity for participants to "de-role" (see "De-Roling" below).

Stage 4 Trainer gives a summary of the exercise and presents the major learning points, which may incorporate additional theory relevant to the training and may be presented on handouts, OHTs, or other supplemental materials.

Stage 5 Trainer leads a discussion to explore the relevance of the learning to the participants' working environment.

Stage 6 Debrief concludes with an opportunity for participants to identify how they intend to apply the perceptions gained through the exercise to their jobs.

Effective debriefing takes time but should always be considered an integral part of the exercise, not just something that you do if you have any time left over at the end! Plan your time to include adequate debriefing — this is your chance to reinforce the learning points of the exercise.

DE-ROLING

It may seem like fun for participants to spend some of their work time pretending to be astronauts or entering into any other fantasy scenario the trainer might suggest, but participants in training programs usually invest a large part of themselves in such exercises, often without being aware of doing so. They may take on the personality characteristics of the roles they are asked to play, or unintentionally allow their own personalities to come through while they are acting.

If you allow no time to de-role — that is, to remove the assigned role in some way — then group members can be left feeling frustrated, confused, angry, and resentful, especially if an individual feels he or she has "failed" in some way. It may be particularly acute if you have two teams undergoing the same exercise in which one "succeeds" and the other does not.

We would highly recommend that you spend some time de-roling your participants during your debriefing so that they lay aside the feelings associated with their roles before moving on to consider what learning they can apply to their jobs.

There are many ways of achieving de-roling. Here are some examples:

1. Ask each participant to imagine that he or she is wearing a hat that symbolizes the role he or she has just played in the exercise.

    Go around the group and ask each person in turn to take off that hat and throw it away. Make sure he or she actually performs the physical action of doing so.

    Then ask each participant to find a hat that symbolizes his or her real self in everyday life. Let him or her choose something that will feel safe. Tell participants to put their hats on and keep them on. Check how they are feeling. If they still aren't feeling okay, then do another de-roling exercise.

2. Go around the group and ask each person in turn to get up from his or her seat and peel off his or her outer skin as if it were an article of clothing. This outer skin symbolizes the role each participant has just played.

    Then ask the participant to say "I am not Charles Frasier, General Manager of… (i.e., the name of his or her role in the exercise). I am Jeff Riker, I am single, I live in Philadelphia, and I have a dog named Ripley" (or whatever is true of him or her).

3. Ask each person to move to the seat next to him or her in the group saying, "I am not a meteorologist on a flight to Bidjou Bidjou. I am Joyce Parsons, I enjoy walking, and I am a confident person."

ANTICIPATING POSSIBLE DIFFICULTIES

Since it is, of course, impossible to anticipate exactly what will happen in a training session, we need to be open and flexible in our approach whenever we deal with groups of people. When you use an exercise with a group you must be alert to what is happening in terms of group dynamics. Do not forget that within any exercise you will still see the processes of group development, as described by Tuckman (1965), taking place as follows:

- ❏ Forming
- ❏ Storming
- ❏ Norming
- ❏ Performing
- ❏ Ending.

For example, in a decision-making exercise in which no team leader is assigned, the group will go through the process (consciously or unconsciously) of allowing a leader to emerge. That leader may in turn be challenged by others and storming may occur before the group can accomplish (or perform) the task.

You will also find that group members will take on specific roles: for example, the "expert" who knows (or purports to know) everything; the "argumentative one" who argues every point; the "silent one" who appears to have withdrawn both physically and psychologically; and the "joker" who makes people laugh and breaks the tension when things are getting too difficult.

Observing what is happening with the group dynamics can be useful information for the group, especially if they are a team of managers who work together from time to time. It would be helpful to feed back what you have seen and try to determine whether this is an accurate reflection of what happens in the working environment. In fact, this could form an entire session in itself!

Be aware that if you set up an exercise so that there is an element of competition between the teams, you could be opening yourself up to receive a lot of hostility from the group who comes in second and usually a degree of smugness from the team who finishes first!

As with everything you do as a trainer, you must be sensitive to your group as a whole and to the individuals in that group, which means being aware of how your exercises may affect people on the basis of their race, class, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, size, and so on. This may seem obvious, but it is important when planning exercises that you don't choose (or invent) something that could exclude a member of your group because of his or her status as a member in another group — for example, if you give examples of names in an activity, avoid using exclusively "white" sounding names by mixing in some African-American, Asian-American, or Latino names. This is as true when working with a mixed race group as it is when working with an all white group because it shows a wider perspective to everyone.

Be sensitive to any members of your group who have disabilities and adapt exercises to suit them whenever possible. If you cannot adapt a particular exercise, then do not leave disabled participants out — choose another exercise instead. Also, do not assume that you can judge another person's capabilities. Ask the participant what he or she can and cannot do.

SKILLS MATRIX

Although each game has a designated purpose, it is possible to use them in other training contexts (see below). You may need to change or add to the scenario a little and will certainly need to amend the Observation Forms if you do this. Be creative!

● = primary purpose

○ = secondary purpose

PURPOSE	The Sky's the Limit	Save the Planet	The Treasure of the Sierra Madres	The Paint Spray Game	Greeting the World	Escape from Acrab	Flight 101	Weather Satellite	The Play's the Thing	Missile Crisis
Decision Making	●	●		○	○		○			
Problem Solving			●	●		○	○	○		
Teamwork			○		●	●		○	○	○
Communication	○			○		○	●	●		○
Leadership	○	○	○	○		○	○	○	●	●
Attitudes and Values		○								
Managing Diversity		○			○					
Trust									○	○
Assertiveness	○	○					○			
Influencing Skills	○	○								○
Managing Conflict	○			○				○		
Sharing a Vision		○			○	○		○		○
Negotiating	○	○					○		○	
Delegating					○	○		○		○
Creativity					○				○	

CONTENTS

HOW THE BINDER IS SET UP

The five key learning areas covered in this binder are Decision Making, Problem Solving, Teamwork, Communication, and Leadership. Each learning area has its own tab. Behind each tab are two activities. Each activity has its own Facilitator Instructions, Observation Forms, Feedback Guidelines, and Participant Handouts. The activities, by learning area, are as follows:

Decision Making

The Sky's the Limit
Save the Planet

Problem Solving

The Treasure of the Sierra Madres
The Paint Spray Game

Teamwork

Greeting the World
Escape from Acrab

Communication

Flight 101
Weather Satellite

Leadership

The Play's the Thing
Missile Crisis

All materials shown in the binder are reproducible.

HOW TO GIVE POSITIVE FEEDBACK

When someone has invested time and energy in a game or activity, he or she will naturally expect some feedback on his or her performance.

Feedback should not be thought of as just another word for criticism, as feedback should focus on both positive and negative aspects of a person's performance. Positive feedback is especially useful in that it gives the recipient of the feedback important information about how to improve his or her behavior.

Here are some simple guidelines for giving positive feedback effectively:

1. Give your feedback in a straightforward and adult way; do not be patronizing or overly critical.

2. Be supportive and positive.

3. Always start with what the person has done well (there will always be something!) and ask him or her to analyze how he or she thinks he or she achieved it. This allows learning to take place through success, not just through perceived "failure."

4. Move on to talk about what you think, based on your observation, could be improved next time.

5. Be prepared to accept that the person may not agree with you! Feedback should always be a two-way process and we can learn a lot from giving as well as receiving feedback.

6. Remember! Feedback is helpful in the learning process.

The Sky's the Limit
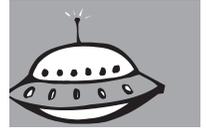
FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS

You are a group of astronauts meeting to discuss a new procedure. Will you be able to make a decision and agree on the outcome together before your time runs out?

BACKGROUND

This fantasy-based role-play game challenges a team to reach a consensus decision.

MATERIALS

- ❑ Observation Form — one copy for each observer
- ❑ Feedback Guidelines — one copy for each observer
- ❑ One business-size envelope with the "Mission to Saturn" logo on the front (print the logo directly from the *TeamBuilders* CD-ROM — see page 12 for details) for each role player. Each envelope contains:
  - ▪ Background Information
  - ▪ relevant Team Member Role
  - ▪ identity badge sticker
- ❑ Trainer's Debrief
- ❑ Decision Making Handout

TIME

Pre-reading	5 minutes
Exercise	20 minutes
Debrief	30 minutes
Total Time	**60 minutes**

NUMBERS

Groups of 8 or more

METHOD

1. Ask for volunteers or choose participants to play characters from the scenario.

2. Distribute an envelope to each role player.

3. Allow a few minutes for the role players to absorb the information and encourage them to enter into the fantasy.

4. Distribute the Observation Forms and Feedback Guidelines.

5. Start the exercise.

6. After 20 minutes, stop the exercise and use the Trainer's Debrief.

TRAINER'S DEBRIEF

Stop the exercise at the end of the allotted time — whether a decision has been reached or not.

1. Ask the group what point in the decision-making process they reached during the exercise (if they did not make a definite decision).

2. Emphasize that there is no right or wrong answer for this exercise.

3. Ask participants to give their feedback on how they thought the exercise went and how they worked as a group to reach a decision.

4. Ask observers to give their feedback according to the principles outlined on the Feedback Guidelines Handout.

5. Give your own feedback on what you observed, focusing on the decision-making process. You may find the following questions useful:

   ❑ What process did you use to come to a decision?
   ❑ What helped or hindered the process?
   ❑ How were opinions shared?
   ❑ How easy or difficult was it for you to go along with the decisions made as a group?
   ❑ How did the leadership in the group help or hinder the decision-making process?

6. Distribute the Decision Making Handout to each participant.

NOTE TO TRAINERS

Expectations

You can generally expect people to enter into this type of game whole-heartedly, for although there is a fantasy scenario it is a familiar format that allows participants to feel comfortable.

Troubleshooting

You may wish to select someone with leadership skills to take the lead in this exercise, rather than make a random choice. This generally ensures that the meeting is run reasonably efficiently.

NOTES