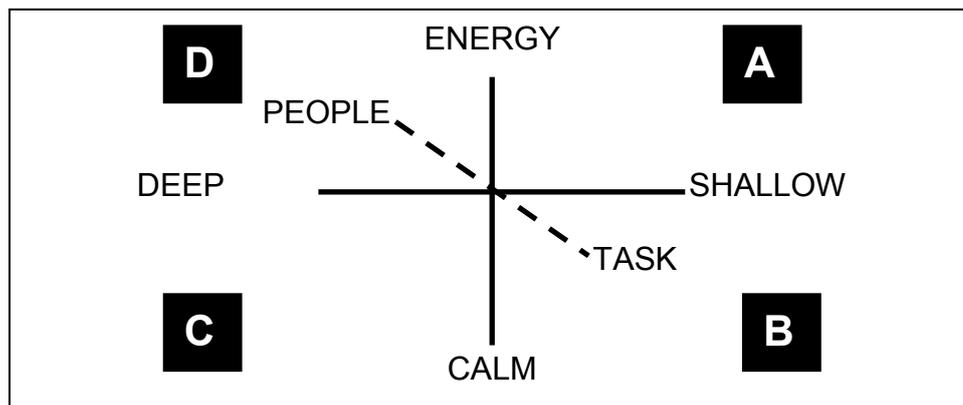


GROUP EXERCISES compiled by Brian Lennon

Although group exercises are often aimed at bonding a group by deepening the relationship between the members they can have other purposes. It is useful to think of three main dimensions: ENERGY/CALM, DEEP/SHALLOW and GROUP/TASK.



ENERGY-CALM: At times it may be important to help inject more energy into a group; at other times an exercise that helps them calm down is required. Related to this is the need for participants to move around at times. Modern research is showing that this helps the brain do its job better.

DEEP-SHALLOW: Although group-work tends to prefer the direction of deepening the level of discussion and trust among members, it is safer to start at a lighter, less threatening level. At times it may be necessary to step back to such safer lighter topics if members are having difficulty in dealing with more personal material.

PEOPLE-TASK: Most exercises have a specific learning purpose or task but sometimes it is more important to attend to the ongoing group needs. An exercise that is just plain fun would be a good example of this.

As a group progresses, the facilitator will do well to keep an eye on these three dimensions and choose or adjust exercises accordingly. It is a good idea to get familiar with a range of exercises such as these so that they can become part of your planning process and, just as important, they are available to meet new ongoing needs. You may find it especially useful to adapt an exercise or make up your own to meet specific learning situations.

The following exercises are gleaned from a variety of sources and are mostly anonymous in origin. Where possible authors are credited.

Murder

AIM: Establish eye-contact without conversation, especially good for those who are quite shy but can be used for fun with any group.

One person is selected secretly as the “murderer”. (Tell in advance or distribute a set of cards with one marked as “murderer”.)

This person murders by winking at a person.

Everybody sits in a circle.

The game is carried out in silence.

On being “murdered” a person must count to 5 and then say “I’m out” and remove themselves from the circle.

The last person left wins.

The game may be repeated with more than one murderer, with nobody as murderer and even with all as murderer.

Chair Swopping

AIM: Movement or to mingle the group randomly prior to forming sub-groups or pairs for an exercise.

Similar to the previous exercise. All must change chairs if they match the description called out. Examples are ...

All those with glasses.; People wearing runners, skirts, ties, (use one); those born in winter; anybody who spent more than €2 today; those who are in love.

Foot Tax

AIM: Build group identity through an energetic, noisy, physical exercise.

At least two groups of equal size are required for this with a minimum of three but ideally more than three in each group.

Mark off an area in the room that each group will be asked to cross, a distance they could not jump across.

Instructions to groups: A new government law applies to this area in that a tax will be levied on the number of feet that use the area. Each group must work out a way to cross all together but with the minimum number of feet touching the ground.

(If groups are of unequal sizes use a formula to decide who wins, e.g., feet touching ground as a percentage of the total number of feet in the group).

Hall of Mirrors

AIM: Movement or focus on body language.

Make two even lines on either side of the room with plenty of space between each person. One side is A one side is B. A closes their eyes. Now ask B to strike a pose which they can hold for 10 seconds (Don't forget the face). Each person makes their own pose. B holds the pose. A opens their eyes, They have 10 seconds to observe the pose opposite and replicate it as closely as they can. This exercise is generally most successful when the poses are simple to start with. Reverse and repeat.

Values Ratings

AIM: Preparation for values discussion or deeper conversations.

This exercise encourages students to think about their own opinions and how these might differ from other people's. Put ten chairs out in a row along the room. Mark each one from 1 to 10.

Ask the group to think for themselves about how important each of the subjects that follows is from 1 to 10 (1 is unimportant 10 is very important) and to stand by the appropriate chair. They should not consult and make a line from behind the chair as if to make a physical bar chart. You can use whatever ideas you like eg:

family, fashion, money, religion, community, home, music,
environment, football, friendship, parents, computers

Encourage the students to choose for themselves and not to follow their friends! Now ask them to think of one of their parents or another adult and repeat the exercise as if they were that person. Is the group dynamic different now? Repeat with an even older person, and perhaps a very young person. Ask the group to discuss what the factors are that make the results different.

Alternative: use this rating system to help people prepare for deeper discussions in twos. For example, ask them to rate "how you feel about talking about yourself to others right now". They can then choose partners who have placed themselves at a similar place on the scale.

Name Chain

AIM: Help group members learn one another's names.

First person gives name, second person repeats name of first person and then adds their own ... and so on around the group.

Stop and Go

AIM: raise energy levels; could lead into focus on emotions, communications. Everyone moves around the room altering pace and direction, not colliding but making eye contact with everyone in the room. When the energy and concentration are right the leader asks the group to freeze. Now the leader tells the group that "go" means "stop" and "stop" means "go". Vary the instructions. As the group gets better at reversing the instructions in their head without talking, add in further variations:

- forwards/backwards
- slow/Fast
- up/down (any others you can think of)
- sad/happy
- angry/friendly
- yes/no

Shoal of Fish

AIM: General group bonding, fun. Could be used to study peer pressure. You can do this exercise in one large group or in groups of 4 to 7 until you get used to it.

Part One: In your group, stand as close together as possible in a tight group as far from other groups or furniture. Without anyone leading see if you can all set off walking at the same time. Stop before you reach another group or a solid object. Stop together, then turn together and set off again. As the group gains confidence, you can vary the speed and the levels of your movement. As a group, see if you can find a sequence of stops and starts. Give the sequence a title.

Part Two: In your group, stand as before. This time one of you starts a movement with a definite rhythm which the others can copy. (walking, stamping, marching, hopping). Everyone must copy the movement as exactly as they can. Move together. Stop at the point where you would have to turn. Turn together and the new leader is the person at the front. Try not to pause but start a new movement immediately which the others can copy. As you get more confident, add noises to the movement. (everyone makes the noises). See if you can find a sequence of moves that you like and can repeat. Give the sequence a name.

Alternative: Plant someone secretly in each group with instructions not to follow the group. Later discuss how people felt about this, including the "plant".

Milling around

AIM: Movement and gradual deepening of group communication.

Ask group members to move around and when you say “stop” they are to pick a person nearby as partner and face this person. (Facilitator partners any odd member of group.) Each must take turns to ask a simple question and the other answers. Then the milling continues. Example questions are:

- What do you value most in a friend?
- What age would you like to be and why?
- In what way do you resemble either of your parents?
- If I could ask you only one question to get to know you what would be the best one to ask?
- What is your strongest quality, talent?

What are you doing? How are you Feeling?

AIM: Examining body language and communication of feelings.

We spend a lot of our time covering up for events, feelings and thoughts in our lives.

Part One:

Two members start. A & B

A mimes a simple but easily understood action.

B asks: "What are you doing?"

A replies with a blatant lie

e.g. A mimes digging a hole

B asks "what are you doing?"

A replies - "I'm writing a letter"

A sits down, and B mimes an action, C joins and asks the question.

Continue the exercise. Try not to repeat what has gone before. If the person being questioned doesn't reply with a different action, they stay in and start a new action for the new person.

Part Two:

As before but miming feelings instead of actions and B asks “How are you feeling?”

Group Name

AIM: Establish an initial group identity and encourage communication.

The group must choose a name for itself, one that all agree on.

Affinity Groups (from David Sawyer)

AIM: Getting like-minded groups together for further discussion.

This is a good example of a traditional icebreaker activity that can incorporate substantive issues and lead in to full reflection.

The facilitator announces a topic and instructs participants to form a group with those individuals with a similar response to the topic. This activity helps to get a visual picture of who makes up a group, and to accentuate similarities and differences within one group. Topics can begin with "low risk" issues and proceed to higher risk. For example:

Grouped according to favourite color, team, type of music.

Grouped by favourite art form: poem, song, dance, sculpture, painting (and why?)

Diversity groups (race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, age, etc.)

Values Divide

AIM: Simply movement or to prepare for discussion of individual differences or values. Can lead into a specific values divide.

Two sides of a value are called out and a side of the room is allocated to each. Those supporting each value move quickly to the corresponding side of the room. Examples are ...

- Those who like the countryside v those who prefer the beach
- Coffee drinkers v tea drinkers
- Soccer supporters v Gaelic supporters
- Those who shower v those who prefer a bath

Who Am I? (from Wilmes, Scott & Rice)

AIM: Self-discovery and self-disclosure.

Tell participants you would like them to respond in writing to 10 questions. Then ask them 10 consecutive times to respond to the question "Who am I?" At the end of the "quiz", ask them to cross off 3 of the items, then 3 more. Process what types of responses they wrote for their identity (acknowledging that some may have hidden identities that they may not wish to share). How did it feel to cross items off? What types of responses were crossed off first/last (e.g. most negative, less important, etc.)? What did you learn about how you see yourself?

Stereotype Simulation (from Wilmes, Scott & Rice)

AIM: Discussion of prejudice and stereotyping.

Participants are asked to close their eyes as they are read a scenario which brings them to a party where they do not know anyone. Party guests have been given a set of rules requiring them to talk with everyone at least once. Guests all must wear headbands, that they have not first seen, that have an identity written on them (e.g. "Male, Black, 4.0 g.p.a., divestment leader"). Guests relate to one another based on the identity on the headband, but may not ask one another what their own identity is. At the end of the "party," initial processing occurs before personal identities are revealed: How did they feel about others' reactions to them? After participants discover their personal identities, process how the group felt about responding to stereotypes. How did individuals choose to respond? A simple version of the exercise can be found in "Headbands: Group role expectations." A handbook of Structured Experiences for Human Relations Training, Vol. VI (304), University Associates, 1977, p.25.

The Ball Game (from Wilmes, Scott & Rice)

AIM: Team building and discussion of teamwork.

Participants are asked to form a circle. The facilitator has a ball and a stop watch. Participants are told the rules to this game: the game begins and ends with the facilitator; each person must touch the ball only once; you must remember the order of who has the ball before you and who you give the ball to; these are the only rules of the game. The facilitator throws the ball to someone in the group who then throws it to someone else, etc., until the last person throws it back to you, the facilitator. The facilitator or timer tells the group how long the process took. (Participants were not previously informed it would be timed.)

Instruct the group to cut their time in half. Repeat the process until the group cuts their time down to 3 seconds. Typically it will take the group several tries to refine their strategies (e.g., standing next to people who pass them the ball, asking the facilitator to play an active role in moving the ball). The facilitator should not answer questions except to say there are only the four rules that s/he gave at the beginning of the game. Process how the group could complete the task in 3 seconds when it took ____ minutes the first time. What helped you reach the goal? What hindered you? How did you look at the problem in new ways? What does this tell us about human nature? Did anyone suggest you do it in less time than the facilitator suggested? Who or why not? This activity takes approximately 20 minutes for group of about 25 people.

Describe, Interpret, Evaluate (from Wilmes, Scott & Rice)

AIM: Focus on clarity of communication. Similar to "Chinese Whispers". Select pictures from magazines (helpful to select on that may draw stereotypes with captions that would counteract stereotypes) to hand around the room. Captions should be removed or concealed. Ask participants to individually examine the pictures and "describe what they see." As a group, ask participants to describe what they saw. The facilitator should tabulate responses in three columns at the front (as a description, interpretation, or evaluation) without explanation to the participants. Process the exercise by describing what the facilitator was recording, distinguishing between description, interpretation and evaluation. Discuss the role of assumptions and stereotyping in the exercise. How did the group description exaggerate or modify individual perceptions? End by sharing the caption from the picture. Variation: ask several participants to be blindfolded and paired with partners who describe the pictures to them. Ask for descriptions from the blindfolded participants first in the processing. Did getting the information second hand contribute to distortion? Why or why not?

Force Field Analysis (from STACS)

AIM: Analysis of influences on change, preparation for action planning. In every organization, work environment, family, or community, there exists a natural tendency (a force field) which acts to keep the situation from changing. A force field represent posers that are proposing change and those that are working towards change. In essence, those forces want to keep the issue at an equilibrium.

A simple Force Field Analysis lists positive and negative forces on a chart. For example, forces that are keeping children in poverty may be: lack of education, inadequate health care, poor nutrition, violence in homes. On the other side of the Force Field are forces that are helping to get people out of poverty: social workers, loving fathers, school nutrition programs, etc. Chart both on the wall and discuss what issues the group is capable of changing. How can the group break the forces that are working towards equilibrium?

A Force Field Analysis chart can be used for any problem. Examples included: What forces are keeping you interested in this training? What forces are keeping our organisation from expanding? What forces are preventing women from being leaders in our program? Once the opposing forces are charted, the dynamics and tension in groups often begin to dissipate. This is an excellent tool for getting groups to think about strategies for making small and large commitments to change.

Readings and Quotes

Providing participants with readings about the issues they will be addressing can stimulate thinking and discussion, much like Quotes. Readings can include a mixture of viewpoints, including some that may be controversial or challenge participants to consider alternative ideas. Participants should be encouraged to connect the content of the readings to their service experiences, and to bring in other reading that they believe to be relevant. Such material includes relevant literature (philosophy, fiction, policies), newspaper articles, service provider pamphlets, poems, and student reflection essays. Samples of some of these can be obtained from the Georgetown University Volunteer and Public Service Center.

Bomb and Shield

Aim: importance of information (Cf The Table Exercise)

FIRST ROUND

Pick two persons from your group but do not say who they are.

Pick one of them to be the bomb and the other to be the shield but do not tell them who is who.

When I say "begin" your job is to do what you can to make sure that the shield is always between you and the bomb but you are not allowed to speak.

BEGIN

SECOND ROUND

Now you tell the group who your own bomb and shield were.

When I say "begin" your job is to do what you can to make sure that the shield is always between you and the bomb but you are not allowed to speak.

BEGIN

DISCUSSION

What have you learned from this exercise? ... about teams?

Knees Circle

AIM: Build group identity through an energetic, noisy, physical exercise. Can also help illustrate group problem-solving and decision-making processes.

The group is given the job of finding a way for everyone to sit on someone else's knees, all at the same time.

Moving the Table (BL)

AIM: Examine need for communication between team members. Each of four volunteers are asked to move a table to “the best location”. Prior to the exercise each has been handed a separate instruction card and asked not to talk during the exercise.

- The best location is right where it is now.
- The best location is near the door.
- The best location is under a light.
- The best location is beside the window.

Follow up the activity by discussing what happened, why it happened, how the confusion could be resolved, what the table is a metaphor for (group communication, teamwork ... otherwise the project/table/institution gets torn apart).

Frierian Fish Bowl (from STACS)

AIM: Good for discussion of sensitive issues. Often, for many reasons, certain individuals will feel uncomfortable voicing their opinion in a group environment. One mechanism for gaining full-group participation is to have all participants write their respective responses to issues on a piece of paper (do not include names). The issues, or pieces of paper, are then placed in a hat in the middle of a circle. For example, the facilitator asks that everyone explain (on paper) "why are there so many homeless people in this city?" Answers may range from, "people do not want work because they are lazy" to "there exists a government conspiracy and homeless funding is often misused." These are typical statements that are controversial but tend to not be voiced openly. Thus, the Frierian method gets all opinions down on paper.

Once opinions have been recorded on paper and placed in a hat, pass the hat among the group. Everyone must respond with their interpretation of the written response and then voice their personal reaction to the paper.

Class Treasure Hunt

Give each student the following list of questions and tell them the task is to find out which students in their class match the questions below. They will need to move around to get the information from others. They may only use any one name once.

1. Who plays basketball?
2. Who likes the same musical group as you?
3. Who supports the same football team as you?
4. Who likes swimming?
5. Whose birthday is closest to yours?
6. Name one boy and one girl who are exactly the same height as you.
7. Who would be the best person to talk to if you had a problem?
8. Who is best at Mathematics?
9. Who is best at English?
10. Who has travelled the furthest?
11. Who is best at telling jokes?
12. Who was camping this summer?
13. Who was in hospital recently?
14. Name somebody with green eyes.
15. Who has the nicest watch?
16. Who has the friendliest smile?
17. Name a student who is an uncle or auntie.
18. Who would you most like to sit beside on a long journey?
19. Who would be the best leader of the class in an emergency?
20. Who has been most helpful to you?

Person Bingo

Find people in the group who match the descriptions in the spaces below and then write their names in the corresponding space. If you get a row across, down or diagonal completed shout "BINGO"

A person who has a bicycle	Somebody who has been in Dublin recently	Supports the same football team as you	Someone who is wearing glasses	Someone who likes camping
Has the same number of sisters as you	Is a fairly quiet person	Somebody with a similar hobby or interest as you.	Someone who knows how to play chess	A person who likes horses
Has hands the same size as you.	Someone who likes the same music as you	Someone who likes the same TV program as you	Somebody born in the same month as you	Is roughly the same height as you
Someone who loves computers	Someone who has a pet at home (brother/sister s don't count!)	Somebody who has the same favourite school subject as you	Has the same favourite food as you	Has the same colour of eyes as you
Anybody who will sign their name in this space ...	Someone who is wearing black shoes	Someone who watches the same TV series as you	Somebody who lives less than a mile from you	Somebody who has the same first name or surname as you.

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