

Psychology 272, Class Project #1: Team Building Exercises

In our first class project, we will engage in a series of three team-building exercises not unlike those that are frequently conducted by corporations that are attempting to increase morale, cohesiveness, and productivity among their employees. Often, these exercises take the form of wilderness hikes where coworkers have to work together to navigate their way through obstacle courses or engage in physically challenging activities. It is believed that getting employees out of their comfort zones and interacting with their colleagues under completely different conditions can have long-term beneficial effects. We cannot do something quite as exotic as a wilderness field trip, but we will do our best to capture the spirit of corporate team building. Hopefully, these events will be fun. Some people will win money; some will not. Some people will get wet; some will not. In addition to giving you a first hand experience with team building, these exercises will also serve as an icebreaker at the beginning of this new class and get you to interact with other members of the class in an interesting situation. Hopefully, we will all get to know each other a bit better. These exercises will take place in a classroom in the Knox Memorial Gym and also at the college swimming pool.

Preparations:

In order to more closely simulate the corporate workplace and also to simulate the unexpected nature of some the situations you will face in these exercises, all class members will dress as they would for managerial work. Appropriate dress for males is defined as a long-sleeve shirt and tie and pants that are *not* jeans. Appropriate dress for females is defined as a dress or skirt with pantyhose OR a long-sleeve blouse and slacks that are not jeans. Anyone failing to show up for class that day dressed appropriately will have two points deducted from their grade on the assignment.

I should also tell you that at least some of the people in the class are going to end up getting wet with their clothes on, so be sure to bring a complete change of clothes with you unless you are feeling lucky. Your ability to swim will not matter, as no one should ever be in water that is over his or her head. These exercises are intended to be fun as well as educational, and I do not want them to be unnecessarily stressful for anyone. IF YOU HAVE A SEVERE FEAR OF WATER OR A HEALTH OR RELIGIOUS ISSUE THAT COULD CAUSE PROBLEMS FOR YOU, OR EVEN IF YOU JUST DO NOT WANT TO BE INVOLVED, PLEASE E-MAIL ME OR CONTACT ME BEFORE CLASS THAT DAY AND WE WILL WORK OUT SOME DISCRETE (i.e., no one else has to know) WAY OF INSURING THAT YOU ARE NOT PUT IN AN EMBARRASSING SITUATION.

Team Building Exercise #1: The Sinking Ship: Persuade as if Your Life Depended On It

(This project was adapted from an exercise developed by Mary Shapiro, who is an adjunct professor in the Simmons Graduate School of Management in Boston)

Introduction

In work organizations, it is necessary for groups to divide labor and assign tasks to people in a way that takes advantage of what each person has to offer the organization. Being a successful employee in such an organization requires that you find a niche in which the contributions that you make work to everyone's advantage. Sometimes, merely working hard will not be enough if your efforts are invisible or if the value of the work that you are doing is not immediately apparent. As you rise in the organization's hierarchy, your persuasive skills will become increasingly important as you may now be called upon to contribute to the plans that the organization is making for its own future. Thus, being able to thrive in an organizational setting in the long run requires that you become a good persuader. You will need to be able to persuade others about the value of your own contributions as well as persuading them about courses of action that the group as a whole should pursue. Unfortunately, it is an unavoidable feature of organizational life that sometimes some employees must be sacrificed for the good of the whole group. One of the most difficult decisions faced by managers is deciding which employees must be let go when lay-offs due to "downsizing" become necessary. Our first exercise this term is designed to help you examine the values that you would bring to bear in situations such as this, as well putting you in a "life and death" situation in which your "survival" depends upon your persuasive skills.

Learning Goals

The goals of the "sinking ship" exercise are as follows:

1. To help you clarify for yourself the values that you consider to be most important when evaluating the contribution and worth of others to the life of your group.
2. To test your ability to analyze a situation and identify the needs of other members of the group.
3. To give you an opportunity to discover how quickly and effectively you can communicate to others how you can help them satisfy their needs.
4. To put you "on the spot" and create a persuasion strategy under duress; that is, when something real is on the line, time is limited, and your adrenalin is pumping.
5. To free you of the limitations that come from acting in familiar situations by placing you in an entirely new dilemma.

**Team Building Exercise #2:
The Student's Dilemma: The tension between being a good team player
and competing with your coworkers.**

The "Prisoner's Dilemma" is a game that was developed by social psychologists to study human decision making in situations where cooperative and competitive strategies each seem appropriate, causing conflict within the individual making the decisions as well as between members of the group in which such decisions must be made. The name "prisoner's dilemma" comes from the original story that was developed to describe the context in which the game was played. According to the story, two people were arrested on suspicion of committing a crime and were taken to separate rooms for interrogation. Separately, they were asked to confess to the crime. If neither of them confesses, the authorities can only convict them of a minor charge that carries a very short prison term. If both of them confess, they will immediately be sentenced to a relatively long term. If only one of them confesses, the one who confessed is set free and the other person is given a life sentence as an example for others who may refuse to cooperate with the authorities. Hence, the conflict between cooperating with your partner by not confessing (and trusting that he or she does the same) and risking a more competitive approach.

This type of dilemma is particularly common in work organizations in which individual workers frequently must make decisions about their behavior in an atmosphere that simultaneously encourages cooperation and competition with co-workers. With a few modifications, the Prisoner's Dilemma Game will provide an extremely vivid, first-hand experience of the decision-making pressure and group dynamics experienced by people in real-world situations. I will discuss several of the important group phenomena affecting your behavior in this situation in class after we have conducted the exercise itself. Specific instructions for this activity will be provided on the day of the activity.

**Team Building Exercise #3:
Who's Who in 272: Remembering names is the first step to effective
networking.**

The details of this activity will be provided on the day of the event.