

Can You Hear Me Now?

Purpose - to illustrate the importance of clear communication, and allow the group to explore their communication style and make improvements as necessary.

Materials and Preparation - 2 matching sets of children's building blocks (or Legos), with 10 blocks in each set. Using one set of blocks, build a random object using the 10 blocks. (Optional - 2 bags to contain each set of building blocks.)

Time - 45 mins

Group Size - minimum 3 people, up to about 7.

(You can have duplicate exercises running in parallel if group is larger, but will need more sets of building blocks). There are 4 roles in this communication skills game.

Assign Student Roles

Person A - director Person B - runner Person C - builder Person(s) D - observer(s)

Person A is given the built-up set of blocks, and is the only person who can see the object. It is the director's job to give clear instructions to person B, the runner, so that person C can build an exact replica of the model.

Person B listens to the director's instructions and runs to a different part of the room to where person C is sitting. The runner then passes on the building instructions, without seeing the building blocks, to Person C, the builder. The runner can make as many trips as required within the time allowed for the exercise.

Person C listens to the runner's instructions and builds the object from the set of building blocks. The builder is the only person who can see the object under construction, and building materials.

Person(s) D observe the communication game, and make notes about what works, what doesn't work, and how people behaved under pressure etc., to pass onto the group later.

Set a time limit for the exercise of 10 minutes.

When the time is up, allow the group to compare the model and the replica, and see how closely it matches. Generally, the replica will bear little resemblance to the original, which usually causes heated discussion!

Debrief

Allow the group to reflect on how the exercise went, and agree 1 thing they did well, 1 thing that didn't work, and 1 thing they would do better next time.

Run the exercise again, either switching or keeping original roles, and see if any improvements have been made. Make sure you de-construct the "original" model and create a new design!

This simple communication skills game can be run many times without losing learning potential. Teams can add layers of sophistication to their communication by making use of aids such as diagrams, codes, standard procedures and using active listening techniques.