

Performance Puzzle



WHIRLING CHIEF



Introduction

Through our work over the years in the area of leadership development, we have come to witness many organizations struggle with how to best develop a team to its fullest potential, (taking into consideration different styles, personalities, as well as culture).

The design and development of teams require not only aligning them to business objectives and strategy, but also determining what individuals within these teams need to reach their highest potential.

Below is a detailed description of an especially fun team development and team building exercise designed to further improve and gain an in-depth understanding of:

- personality types
- communication styles
- potential areas of conflict and/or misunderstandings
- what makes a team successful
- importance of team ground rules
- ways of trusting each other
- why only together will the team succeed
- how each team member is important

What you need

- A team with a minimum of 6-8 members, maximum of approx. 30
- The puzzle itself – divide your team into smaller groups of approx. 3-6 people. Each group will then get one puzzle and a white card that will show a drawing of the puzzle when completed. That is important – each table group gets one. Each puzzle has a different color.
- A timer
- A flip chart and markers that correspond with the color of each puzzle
- A table for each sub team
- Approx. 3-4 hours in total

How you start (this is a warm-up prior to playing the game):

Set up the team in different groups. If you have, say, a team of 20 people, maybe split them up into groups of 5 people at four separate tables.

Ask two table groups to discuss what they think are the key indicators for high performing teams. Give them 10 minutes, then have them identify one member to present their insights to the entire room.

Ask the other two groups to discuss what they think are key indicators for a low performing team or, in other words, what might be missing. Again, allow 10 minutes to discuss with their table group, and one person to present their outcome.



Have the high performing teams present first. Typically you see statements like: Clear strategy and objectives, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, good communication, conflict resolution, trust in one another, clear leadership, shared accountability for success, fun, etc.

The team with low performing results typically shares the opposite.

As a facilitator, you want to make sure to point out some of the highlights of their presentations.

Now it's game time:

Ask each table group to clear up the entire table – no papers, pens, or drinking glasses are allowed. They need the free space to work on the puzzle. Give each group the puzzle package. They are not yet allowed to open the package. In each package is a white card with the visual description of the puzzle

Play rules (write them down on a flipchart, visible to all for the entire game):

- Assemble the puzzle as fast as possible and correctly
- For each wrong junction there will be a time penalty of +20 seconds
- We will conduct several rounds of assembling and disassembling the puzzle. For each new round the puzzle pieces need to be in one pile.

Facilitator:

You need to be very strict with the timings – if time is up, every team has to stop. Teams will play several times, assembling the puzzle together and then disassembling it. Of course, for each round there will be specific tasks given to the team.

Round 1: 20 minutes

- All team members start at the same time
- Identify the task and develop strategies for success
- After the time is up, all pieces need to be put back in one pile

Before they continue to round 2:

Now is a good time to ask each team to identify one person to play the role of the Consultant. This is an important role as she/he will step away from being actively engaged, and is there to observe the team – how well they play together. That person will later have “consulting time” to advise her/his team, providing feedback.

Observation points are needed, and the “consultant” will want to focus on the following:

- How does the group function?
- Behavior & contribution of each team member, do they listen to each other – identified roles & responsibilities
- How did they develop their strategy (if any), solve tasks & implement their agreed actions?



- How do team members communicate with each other?
- Listening, asking, contributing

Round 2: max 10 minutes

All teams start at the same time, now competing with each other. The moment a team completes the puzzle, they need to shout out their color so that you, as facilitator, can write down their time. You'll want to double check that the puzzle is assembled correctly; if not they receive a time penalty. After the allotted 10 minutes, the puzzle needs to again be put in one pile. (Refer to the picture below to see how a facilitator can capture the times, visible for all team members on a flip chart.)

Round 3: 5 minutes

The consultant steps in and provides observations and feedback. Be honest with them. Typically you see in the first round that every team has room for improvement (ie. no alignment to be seen, no listening to each other). Usually they did not take the time to define a strategy and follow through. Also important is how many "potential" leaders emerge – are there some signs of competition? Teams often forget they also need a strategy to disassemble the puzzle in order to know exactly how to start again.

Round 4: 10 minutes

Develop or readjust your strategy, roles & responsibilities.

Round 5: max 8 minutes

- Second competition between the teams. The moment they complete the puzzle, the teams need to clearly shout out their color so facilitator can write down the time.
- Again – facilitator checks for wrong junctions.

Round 6: max 6 minutes

Third competition. Teams now announce how long they think it will take them to complete the puzzle. This needs to be an ambitious goal, otherwise you as a facilitator needs to challenge them.

Round 7: max 10 min

- Each team needs to let go of one of their team members – that person joins another team.
- This is usually a tough decision as teams have started to gel by now and members know each other.
- Introduce the new team member, allowing time for him/her to learn that team's strategy. This usually proves to be an interesting exercise as teams may ignore that person...or take special interest if that person comes from a more successful team.

Round 8:

- Last round of competition assembling the puzzle.
- If the group is especially engaged in the puzzle, and you have time left, you could play another round.



The Winner:

Everyone's attention now turns to the flip chart; discuss together who might be the winner. Usually one group is deemed a bit stronger than the others. We typically celebrate the victors' success with chocolate – make sure to buy enough, in case the winners want to share with the other teams.

You may also want to take some time to discuss with the groups what made them successful...or hindered success. They get some real good insights into business reality.

If you find even more time, ask each group to jot down some notes on what they now think – based on their puzzle experience – is important in day-to-day life to be successful as a team.

It's a real fun activity, and you learn a lot about team dynamics.

I have seen groups that never once managed to put the puzzle together due to: strong disagreements among team members, members wanting to leave their team, and some completely disengaged.

I have also seen the exact opposite: teams that solved the puzzle in as little as 25 seconds! They had a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities, they trusted one another to deliver, everybody understood strategy, and their only objective was to become even faster. There was no talking whatsoever.

And there was a clearly defined leader who encouraged them enthusiastically.

As facilitator of the game, you carefully guide the discussion and focus on the key learnings of each group. In the end, it's not about losing or winning. It's actually about learnings, and the importance of taking time to develop as a team. This ensures that we are all aware of personalities, different communication styles, clarity of task, strategy, and roles & responsibilities. Trust is not given; it needs to be earned.

If you live in Switzerland, I can easily provide you with the puzzle as I've got a set to play with 5 teams.

Enjoy and, of course, should you have any questions, don't hesitate to drop me a note!



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