Game of Collaboration

**Time and Purpose Adaptations**

This exercise can take anywhere from twenty minutes to an hour depending on the time devoted to group discussions, on the group size, and the purpose.

As a short, introductory activity, this can take fifteen to twenty minutes and end after the third round.

To generate a brief discussion about how a group can best collaborate, the exercise takes thirty to forty-five minutes.

In one hour, the exercise can help a group discuss new strategies for improving their communication and collaboration.

**Space Needs**

Ample room for participants to form a circle with enough space for them to stretch their arms out works best.

**Supplies**

1. Three soft balls about the size of tennis balls.
2. A book that is small enough to hand off easily. Select a title that has some meaning to the group.
3. A set of keys.
4. Flip chart to capture participant ideas for improving their collaboration, if the purpose is to capture the group’s thoughts.

**Facilitator’s Tone**

A warm inviting tone works best; many adults have forgotten how to play.

**Thoughtful Adaptations**

Anyone using wheelchairs who can catch and toss balls can join the circle. Interpreters can teach the group appropriate sign language or specific words to use.

Those who cannot or choose not to participate in the circle can assume the role of observer.

**General Purpose**

This light-hearted, activity generates group discussions that can lead to improved communication and collaboration. It is useful for both established and newly formed groups of between five to thirty participants. These instructions are for the longest version of this exercise.

**Explain Exercise to the Group**

This exercise will help us get to know each other better. Standing or sitting in a circle, we will learn each other’s names and a little more about each other. If standing or participating is not an option for you, your job will be to serve as an observer; everyone’s perspectives are valuable. (Facilitator should not give the entire game away in the explanation.)

**First Round**

1. Form a circle about arm’s length distance away from each other.
2. This game involves tossing and catching a ball in an established pattern so that everyone has an opportunity to catch the ball once and throw the ball once.
3. When you throw the ball, you will get the catcher’s attention, state their name, and say, “Here you go!”
4. When you catch the ball, you will thank the thrower and state their name.
5. Keep your hands in front of you, palms up, to signal that you haven’t yet caught the ball.
6. Once you have caught the ball and tossed it to someone else, put your hands down.
7. The game will begin and end with me, the facilitator. I will be the first to toss the ball and the last to catch the ball.
8. Notice what you are thinking and feeling.

**FACILITATOR’S NOTE:**

Model how to toss and catch the ball for the group and get the first round going. Do not encourage the group to go faster or slower. Notice how they are reacting to the exercise. Once the group has the pattern established, pause and lead a short discussion between each round and state what you noticed as you facilitated.

**First Round Group Discussion**

1. What was that like for you?
2. Did anybody get anxious?
3. Observers, what did you notice?

**Second Round**

Introduce a second ball and ask participants to toss and catch the ball in the same sequence.

**Second Round Group Discussion Questions**

1. What was that like?
2. What did you notice?
3. What were you thinking or feeling?
4. Is this starting to feel like your day-to-day work?
5. Observers, what did you notice?

**Third Round**

Introduce a third ball following the same sequence. Notice if the group is working faster, getting anxious, etc.

**Third Round Group Discussion**

1. What was different?
2. Did anyone start to panic or feel like you had to rush?
3. Observers, what did you notice?
4. Did you notice how the pace changed?
5. Where did you get the message that you had to go faster?
6. Did anyone get impatient with your partners?

**Fourth Round**

Introduce a book that participants will hand to each other in a counter clockwise rotation while the balls are tossed. Ask participants to state, “Knowledge is power” when they pass the book to their right.

**Fourth Round Discussion Group Dyad and Sharing Exchange**

1. Ask participants to join someone for a listening pair.
2. Each person will have one minute to think aloud and process the exercise without interruption.
3. Ask them to consider what they may need from their tossing and catching partners.
4. Ask the pairs to decide who will be the first speaker.
5. Set a timer for the one minute, and ask the partners to finish their thought and switch roles.
6. Set a timer for the last minute, and call the group back together.
7. Give the group three to four minutes so everyone may communicate their needs to their tossing and catching partners.
8. Observers can pair up with each other to share their observations and state what their needs would be if they were participating.

**Final Round**

Introduce a set of keys that is passed person to person clockwise as the balls and the book are being tossed and passed. Ask the participants to say, “Connection is key,” when they pass the keys to the next person.

**Final Group Dyad and Discussion**

1. Pair participants off with a listening partner to think aloud without interruption.
2. They will have two to three minutes each.
3. Offer the following prompts:
   1. What did you learn about yourself?
   2. What did you learn or notice about the group?
   3. What worked to make things go better?
   4. What communication or collaboration challenges became evident for the group’s day-to-day work?
   5. What ideas do you have for addressing those challenges?
4. Ask the pairs to decide who will be the first speaker and give each speaker at least two minutes each to speak and think aloud.

**Final Large Group Discussion**

Bring the large group back together and have the group discuss what they learned about themselves and about the group.

End the large group discussion by scribing strategies that could improve their collaborations with each other. It is helpful to have a second facilitator present to scribe.

Review the strategies the group identified and facilitate a process to reach consensus on any strategies they would like to use in the future.

Finish the exercise by checking in with the group about any observations or lessons they learned.



This Ball Toss Game was adapted from various sources by the Center on Domestic Violence, University of Colorado, Denver. Contact the Center at 303-315-0241 if you have any questions regarding the facilitation of this exercise.

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