

Title

Toxic Waste Dump

Source

Method presented during the International Trainers Laboratory, October 2001; original by Pam Lindberg (and Keith Merron), Ann Arbor, MI. For further information on the International Trainers Laboratory, please contact IJAB e.V., Kerstin Giebel, Heussallee 30, D-53113 Bonn, Tel.: 0228/9506223, Fax: 0228/9506199, E-Mail: giebel@ijab.de.

Field/Content

Exercise on teamwork

Duration

1 hour

Participants

Divisible into groups of 6 to 8 people

Aims

To provide an opportunity for planning and experiencing teamwork and a live forum for analysing its prerequisites, processes and consequences.

Materials / Resources

2 coffee cans, enough popcorn kernels to fill one can about halfway, 6 – 8 pieces of 7.5-foot-long rope and one bicycle tire tube per group

Suggestion: Select a green can for the safe one and a red can for the toxic one.

There should be enough rooms for each group to work undisturbed by the others.

Preparation

Mark off a 10-foot diameter circle for each group and put the coffee cans in. Have the instruction sheets prepared for each person.

Toxic Waste Dump: Instructions**Background**

A can of highly toxic popcorn has contaminated a circle approximately 10 feet in diameter. The toxic area extends to the ceiling. If the poisonous popcorn is not transferred to a safe container for decontamination, the toxic popcorn will contaminate and destroy the population of the entire city. The popcorn is estimated to have a safe life of exactly 30 minutes before it explodes. Obviously, there is insufficient time to contact authorities and evacuate the city. Therefore, the lives of thousands of people are in your hands.

Inside the circle you will find two cans. One (unsafe) container is about half full of the toxic popcorn. The other (safe) container is available for decontamination.

Objective

You must find a way to safely transfer the toxic popcorn from the unsafe container to the safe container, using only the materials provided to you. For your group, this includes a piece of rope (each approximately 7.5 feet long) for each person, and a bicycle tire tube.

Rules

1. **No** participant may cross the plane of the circle with any part of the body. If this occurs, the person must be taken to the hospital immediately (removed from play) and may not participate in any form from then on. The group is responsible for the safety of all its members.
2. **No** participant may sacrifice himself or herself to aid in the transfer of the popcorn.
3. **No** spills are allowed, or the popcorn will explode.
4. Participants may **only** use the materials provided. However, they can be used in any way desired.
5. The popcorn will not spread its toxicity to the safe can, the ropes, the tube or the instruction giver. The participants have **no** protection inside the imaginary cylinder created by the 10-foot diameter rope.
6. The safe container may move anywhere in or outside of the circle. The unsafe container must stay **inside** the circle, and not be moved more than one foot from its centre.
7. Remember, the popcorn **must** be transferred within 30 minutes, or there will be a tremendous disaster.

Methodology

Briefly explain to the group how important teams and teamwork are in contemporary organizations. Ask them to identify the characteristics of highly effective teams.

Explain that effective teams pay close attention to both their tasks and their processes (e.g., how they work together to accomplish their objectives). Form participants into groups of 6 – 8 people. Establish an open space for each group, with a 10-foot diameter circle marked off with string. Distribute the Toxic Waste Dump instruction sheet to each person, and start the clock running.

Administer the rules very closely.

Evaluation / Debriefing

- Was your team successful? By what measures?
- What did your team do that helped it succeed?
- What did your team members do that caused it to have difficulties?
- What did you learn from this exercise that you can apply in your work?

Variants