

Exercise: Plane Wreck

The purpose of this exercise is to provide participants with an opportunity to experience cooperation based on a division of labor as well as a joint goal. The procedure is as follows:

1. The class forms groups of three. One member plays the role of observer, another member the role of A, and the third member B.
2. Each group of three needs the following materials:
 - a. A blindfold
 - b. Five or six odd-sized pieces of cardboard
 - c. A roll of cellophane tape or masking tape
 - d. A piece of rope at least three feet long
3. The situation: A and B were flying a plane, which suddenly developed engine trouble and crashed on a desert island with no water. They will be rescued in a few days, but they must have water if they are to survive. They have some materials for making a container to hold rainwater. The only problem is that B received a heavy blow on her head and is now both blind and mute. A burned both his hands badly and is not able to use them at all. But they must build the container if they are to live. A rain cloud is quickly approaching, and they must have the container finished before it reaches the island. A few drops are already beginning to fall.
4. The observer ties A's hands behind his back and blindfolds B. B is not to say a word during the entire building process.
5. The observer takes notes on how well the two persons work together. How good are the directions? How well are they carried out? How cooperative are the two persons? What communication problems exist? What could they have done differently?
6. If the container is not finished in twenty minutes, the two persons stop. The group then combines with another group of three and the two groups discuss the following questions:
 - a. How did the person playing A feel?
 - b. How did the person playing B feel?
 - c. What does the container look like? If it were made of wood and nails instead of cardboard and tape, would it hold water? (If there is a hole in the bottom, the answer is no).
 - d. What would have improved the cooperation between A and B?
 - e. What did you learn about the division of labour in a cooperative task?
7. Each group of six share its major conclusions and experiences with the rest of the class.