

52 team building exercises for the office

Facilitated exercises, each under 15 minutes,
with debrief questions included. For teams that
want more than a pleasant day.

ABOUT AZIMUT

We don't sell workshop attendance. We build capability that holds under pressure.

Since 2008 we have worked with teams and managers across Romania and the wider region. We learned that a good exercise opens a conversation, but only a system changes behavior: a diagnostic, facilitated labs, practice between sessions, and reinforcement from the direct manager. The activities in this guide are the front door — the easy, useful part. The rest is architecture.

THE NUMBERS BEHIND THE WORK

20,000+

participants trained

9.27/10

average trainer score

600+

programs delivered

18

years of applied practice

DELIVERED FOR TEAMS AT

Bosch · Continental · Banca Transilvania · Endava · Deloitte · Bombardier · ZF · Mazars · Groupama · Betfair · Steelcase · Gameloft

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Six categories, 52 exercises.

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Every exercise runs in under 15 minutes including the conversation afterwards — because the debrief, not the activity, is what makes team building work. Materials are simple: most often just paper and a pen.

01

Communication – listening and influencing

COMMUNICATION

1. The negotiation of the 2 lei

Duration ~15 min **Materials** Two 1-leu banknotes per team of three

Teams of three have five minutes to decide which of them keeps 2 lei. It pushes people to find creative solutions to a simple problem, and shows that a majority vote is not always the most effective way to decide.

- 1 Divide the group into teams of 3 and give each team two 1-leu banknotes.
- 2 They have 5 minutes to decide which member keeps the money; if they cannot agree any other way, they may fall back on a majority vote.
- 3 Warn the teams when 2 minutes remain.
- 4 After 5 minutes, any team that has not decided hands the banknotes back. Teams that decided keep the money.
- 5 Note which teams missed the simplest solution: two members agree to vote one banknote to each of them.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ What strategies did you use in the negotiation, and which one worked best?
- ▶ Did you fall back on the "majority rule"? Why or why not?
- ▶ How did the time limit change the way you negotiated?
- ▶ How did you work out what had value for the other two people?
- ▶ Where does this show up in the way we make decisions at work?

COMMUNICATION

2. The triangles in the playing cards

Duration ~20 min

Materials A pack of playing cards cut into triangles, one envelope per team, small prizes (optional)

Teams trade quarters of playing cards, trying to assemble complete cards. Nobody can win without working out what the other teams need, so it trains people to look at a deal from the other side before trying to close it.

- 1 Beforehand, cut each playing card along both diagonals into four triangles, mix all the pieces, and put an equal number into each envelope.
- 2 Divide the group into teams of 3-4 (you need at least three teams) and give each team one envelope.
- 3 Teams get 3 minutes to sort their pieces and plan a trading strategy.
- 4 Open an 8-minute round of trading. Anyone may negotiate, alone or as a team. Warn them 2 minutes before the end.
- 5 Count how many complete cards (all four pieces) each team holds and announce the winner.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How willing were the other teams to trade with you?
- ▶ Which negotiation tactics worked best for you?
- ▶ How did your strategy change during the game, and why?
- ▶ What skills besides negotiating did you need - listening, empathy, creative problem-solving?
- ▶ When do we have to negotiate time, information or resources here at work?

COMMUNICATION

3. Listen!

Duration ~15
min

Materials A set of 10-15 cards per pair, each with a controversial topic written on it

One partner speaks for three minutes about a controversial topic while the other is not allowed to say a word, then has one minute to summarize what they heard. It forces people to listen precisely at the moment they most want to argue back.

- 1 Prepare the cards in advance, one topic each: euthanasia, capital punishment, animal rights, healthcare reform, nuclear weapons, school prayer, and so on.
- 2 Ask participants to pair up and hand the first speaker a single card. Do not hand out both cards at once.
- 3 The speaker talks for 3 minutes about how they see the issue. The partner says nothing at all, only listens. Warn them 30 seconds before time.
- 4 The listener then has 1 minute to recap what they heard. Summary only - no agreeing, rejecting or debating.
- 5 Give the second participant a new card, swap roles and repeat. Anyone may decline up to two topics they are not comfortable discussing.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How did the speaker's tone and body language add to the message?
- ▶ How did it feel to listen without being allowed to give your opinion?
- ▶ How did it feel to speak while your partner said nothing at all?
- ▶ How accurate was the listener's summary?
- ▶ When at work does it matter this much that we listen this carefully?

COMMUNICATION

4. Me, myself and I

Duration ~10 min **Materials** None

In pairs, one person talks non-stop for three minutes without ever using the word "I" or a first-person verb, while the other stays completely silent. It shows people how much of their everyday communication is built around themselves.

- 1 Ask participants to pair up.
- 2 One partner speaks continuously for 3 minutes, with no pauses, on any topic or several topics.
- 3 The speaker may never use the word "I" or any verb in the first person.
- 4 The listener says nothing at all - no questions, no agreement, no encouragement. Warn the pair 30 seconds before time.
- 5 Swap roles and repeat. Be ready to demonstrate 2 minutes yourself, and invite the group to catch you slipping into "I".

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ Which role was easier, speaking or listening? Why?
- ▶ How did it feel to listen without being able to ask a question or add anything?
- ▶ How did it feel to speak with no reaction at all from your listener?
- ▶ What creative ways did you find to talk about yourself without saying "I"?
- ▶ How can we phrase what we want to say so it focuses more on the other person?

COMMUNICATION

5. Origami

Duration ~10 min **Materials** One sheet of paper per participant

Participants fold and tear a sheet of paper with their eyes closed, following instructions they cannot question. Comparing the results makes the point that the same words are interpreted very differently by different people.

- 1 Give each participant a sheet of paper and tell them you will read out instructions for folding it.
- 2 Ask everyone to close their eyes and keep them closed. No questions are allowed once you start.
- 3 Read the instructions slowly and clearly, repeating them as often as needed: "Fold your paper in half. Fold it in half again. Fold it in half one last time. Now tear off the right corner. Turn the paper over and tear off the top corner."
- 4 Correct no one while they fold. The instructions are deliberately ambiguous and there is no single right answer.
- 5 Ask everyone to open their eyes, unfold their sheets and compare them with each other.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ Does everyone have the same result? Why not?
- ▶ How different would the results have been with your eyes open?
- ▶ How did you feel while I was giving the instructions?
- ▶ How could my instructions have been clearer?
- ▶ Where do we give each other instructions this ambiguous at work?

COMMUNICATION

6. Shared values

Duration ~25 min **Materials** Paper and a pen per person, one A3 sheet per team, colored markers

Individuals name the values they think matter most to the organization, then teams have to agree on three and turn them into a poster. It surfaces what the group actually holds in common and how far the stated values match daily behavior.

- 1 Give everyone 2 minutes to write down the three values they consider most important to the organization.
- 2 Divide the group into teams of 4-6 and have each member read out their three values.
- 3 From everything shared, the team must agree on the three values that matter most.
- 4 Give each team an A3 sheet and markers. They have 10 minutes to build a poster using words, symbols and images for those three values.
- 5 Each team presents its poster to the whole group.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ Which values came up in most of the teams?
- ▶ How did you settle the disagreements inside your team?
- ▶ If someone joined us tomorrow and read these posters, how would they expect us to behave? Do we behave that way?
- ▶ What makes us lose sight of these values - deadline pressure, other people's behavior, change?
- ▶ What can we do when that happens?

COMMUNICATION

7. Washing machines

Duration ~20 min **Materials** None; a small prize for the winning team (optional)

Teams are handed 10,000 used washing machines for free and have to work out how to sell them, then pitch it in a 30-second ad. It trains creative problem-solving and forces people to think about what a buyer actually wants.

- 1 Divide the group into teams of 3-6.
- 2 Announce that each team has just received 10,000 used washing machines for free. Let each team decide whether theirs still work.
- 3 Give them 8 minutes to agree how to sell them and to prepare a 30-second sales pitch for the rest of the group.
- 4 Each team performs its ad. Hold them strictly to 30 seconds and time it.
- 5 The group votes for the pitch most likely to produce real sales. If a team is stuck, offer ideas: beer coolers filled with ice, paint mixers, basketball hoops, aquariums, toy storage.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How did your team settle on this strategy?
- ▶ How creative do you think you were, and why?
- ▶ What assumptions did you make - that it had to involve laundry, that the buyer was a consumer, that the machines had to stay as they were?
- ▶ How did those assumptions narrow or widen your thinking?
- ▶ How did you work out which features and benefits your buyer cares about?

COMMUNICATION

8. Who will cross the line?

Duration ~10 min **Materials** Duct tape

Two halves of the group face each other across a taped line and get 30 seconds to persuade the person opposite to cross it. Almost nobody thinks of simply offering to swap sides, which makes the point about ego getting in the way of collaboration.

- 1 Run a line of duct tape across the floor to split the room in two.
- 2 Divide the group into two equal halves and have them stand facing each other across the line.
- 3 Give them 30 seconds to get the person opposite them to cross the line - they may negotiate, bribe, beg, bluff or trick.
- 4 No one is allowed to touch anyone else.
- 5 Call time and count how many people crossed.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How many of you got the other person to cross? How did you do it?
- ▶ What did you try that did not work?
- ▶ How many of you offered to cross if the other person crossed too? Who wins in that case?
- ▶ Where does this pattern show up at work?
- ▶ What can you personally do to make collaboration easier on this team?

COMMUNICATION

9. How much will you bid?

Duration ~20 min **Materials** 7 envelopes with banknotes inside, 20 one-leu banknotes per participant (toy money works, real money hits harder)

Participants bid against each other for sealed envelopes without knowing what is inside. The group almost always spends more than it wins, which opens up when competition helps a team and when it quietly drains it.

- 1 Prepare 7 envelopes: two with 1 leu, two with 5 lei, two with 10 lei and one with 50 lei.
- 2 Give each participant 20 one-leu banknotes. They may keep the money or bid for any envelope.
- 3 Explain that each envelope holds a single banknote worth 1, 5, 10 or 50 lei, and that no envelope holds less than 1 leu.
- 4 Auction the envelopes one at a time, bids from 1 to 20 lei, opening with "Who bids for the first envelope?"
- 5 Give each envelope to the highest bidder and have them open it straight away and show everyone what they won. Repeat for all seven.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ You each started with 20 lei. How much do you have left now?
- ▶ How could you have ended up with more money?
- ▶ What would have happened if you had pooled your money and nobody had bid more than 1 leu?
- ▶ What is the difference between healthy and unhealthy competition here?
- ▶ What can you personally do to produce more win-win outcomes at work?

02

Connection – getting to know each other

CONNECTION

10. A day in your life...

Duration ~15 min **Materials** None

Participants pair up and describe, in detail, what a typical working day looks like for them. The listener may prompt but never comment, which forces real attention and shows how much of a colleague's work normally goes unseen.

- 1 Ask participants to form pairs.
- 2 One partner describes a typical day at the office in as much detail as possible.
- 3 The listener may only say "And then?" or "Tell me more about that" - nothing else.
- 4 After 5 minutes, swap roles and repeat for another 5 minutes.
- 5 Warn each pair one minute before their time is up; if a day is never "typical," ask them to describe yesterday.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How did it feel to share your day with someone this way?
- ▶ What did you learn about your partner's work that you did not know before?
- ▶ What was harder: talking for five minutes, or listening without responding?
- ▶ What surprised you about how similar or different your days are?
- ▶ What does this change about how we work with each other day to day?

CONNECTION

11. Gossip time

Duration ~20 min **Materials** Paper and pens for everyone

Everyone writes an anonymous comment about one person - the Target - who then tries to guess who wrote it. It surfaces the flattering or surprising things colleagues rarely say out loud, and it keeps the room laughing. Use it only with a group that already trusts each other.

- 1 One person volunteers, or is nominated, as the first Target.
- 2 Send the Target out of the room while everyone else writes one comment about them - something complimentary or something surprising.
- 3 Collect the slips, bring the Target back in, and read one comment aloud at random.
- 4 The Target gets a single guess per comment at who wrote it; if the guess is wrong, read the next comment.
- 5 Never let the Target read the slips - handwriting gives the author away.
- 6 When the Target names an author correctly, that author becomes the next Target and a new round begins.
- 7 Play as many rounds as time and the group's energy allow, and keep the tone friendly.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ What did you learn about each other that you had not heard before?
- ▶ How did it feel to be the Target - proud, exposed, both?
- ▶ What made it hard or easy to guess who wrote a comment?
- ▶ Why do we so rarely say these things to each other directly?

CONNECTION

12. Human panels

Duration ~15 min

Materials One A3 sheet and colored markers per person, scissors, tape and string

Each participant turns an A3 sheet into a wearable panel about themselves, using words, images and symbols. They then walk around wearing it, and may speak only to answer questions other people ask about their panel. Good for new teams and for new joiners.

- 1 Give each participant an A3 sheet and a few colored markers.
- 2 They have 6 minutes to describe themselves on the sheet in words, images or symbols.
- 3 Cut a hole or an X near the top edge so the sheet can be worn over the head, or tape a string on and hang it around the neck.
- 4 Participants put the panels on so the front of the body is covered.
- 5 For 6 minutes they mingle, asking each other about the panels; you may only speak to answer a question you were asked.
- 6 Reassure anyone hesitant that they share only what they are comfortable revealing.
- 7 Afterwards, ask them to sign the panels and hang them in the break room so people can keep reading them.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ What did you choose to put on your panel, and what did you leave off?
- ▶ How difficult or easy was it to share this much about yourself?
- ▶ What did you learn about a colleague that surprised you?
- ▶ Why does knowing each other outside strictly work topics matter?
- ▶ How can we keep finding this out about each other at work?

CONNECTION

13. My N.A.M.E.

Duration ~15 min **Materials** None

Each participant turns their first name into an acronym, with every letter standing for something true about them. The group learns names and personal details in a single pass, and those details give people something to follow up on later.

- 1 Explain the format and give an example built from your own name.
- 2 Give the group 5 minutes to build an acronym from their first name, one item per letter.
- 3 Each participant then introduces themselves and walks the group through their letters.
- 4 Example: "My name is Laura. L is for Led Zeppelin, one of my favorite bands. A is for Aiud, where I was born. U is for Umberto Eco, my favorite author. R is for respect, which I give and expect. And the last A is for Adriana, my best friend."
- 5 If someone gets stuck, let them bend the rule - "I" can stand for "I love chess" rather than a single word.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ Whose names do you remember now, and what made them stick?
- ▶ Which letter told you something you would never have guessed about a colleague?
- ▶ How difficult or easy was it to share personal things with the group?
- ▶ Why is it worth knowing each other outside strictly work topics?

CONNECTION

14. Penny for your thoughts

Duration ~15 min **Materials** One coin per person, ideally recent, shiny and easy to read

Each participant gets a coin, introduces themselves, and then shares something from their own life in the year stamped on that coin. It is the fastest way to get a group past name-and-job-title introductions.

- 1 Hand out one coin each, joking that this is the cash bonus for attending the meeting.
- 2 Ask each person to say their name and anything else about themselves they want the group to know.
- 3 They then read the year on their coin and share something significant or interesting from their life that year.
- 4 Go first with an example you prepared in advance.
- 5 If someone cannot recall the year, ask them to describe where they lived, what job they had, or what they were into at the time.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ What did you hear today that you would never have learned in a normal meeting?
- ▶ How difficult or easy was it to share something personal with the group?
- ▶ Whose story do you want to ask more about later?
- ▶ Why is it worth knowing each other outside strictly work topics?

CONNECTION

15. I like

Duration ~10 min **Materials** None

Sitting in a circle, each participant repeats what the person before them said and then swaps in something they themselves enjoy doing. Everyone ends up knowing one genuine personal preference of every other person in the room.

- 1 Seat the group in a circle so everyone can see everyone else.
- 2 Start by naming something personal you enjoy: "I like collecting porcelain dolls."
- 3 The next person repeats it and swaps in their own: "Instead of collecting porcelain dolls, I like eating ice cream."
- 4 The one after that continues: "Instead of eating ice cream, I like sunbathing on the beach."
- 5 Go around the whole circle, each person replacing the preference named just before them.
- 6 Let the group react briefly to what they hear, but never criticize a choice, however unusual.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ Why is it worth knowing each other outside strictly work topics?
- ▶ How difficult or easy was it to share something personal with the group?
- ▶ Which preference surprised you most, and why?
- ▶ How can we keep learning things like this about each other at work?

CONNECTION

16. Ready, steady, recognize!

Duration ~10 min **Materials** None

Two teams race to sort themselves into order by whatever category you call out - first name, street name, years in the company. Sorting fast forces people to ask each other questions they would otherwise never think to ask.

- 1 Split the group in two and line the teams up facing each other.
- 2 Call out a category, for example first name; both teams race to reorder themselves alphabetically.
- 3 Announce the finish, then call the next category, for example the street they live on.
- 4 Repeat with as many categories as the energy holds: date of birth, time in the organization, place of birth, number of countries visited, favorite food.
- 5 Prepare more categories than you think you will need, and stop while it is still fun.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ What did you find out about someone while you were sorting yourselves?
- ▶ What surprised you as the lines reordered?
- ▶ How difficult or easy was it to share this about yourself?
- ▶ How can we keep learning this kind of thing about each other at work?

CONNECTION

17. Similarities and differences

Duration ~15 min **Materials** A sheet of paper and a pen per person

Participants circulate and, for every colleague they talk to, note one thing they have in common and one thing that sets them apart. It maps the group's shared ground and its real diversity at the same time.

- 1 Give everyone a sheet of paper and a pen.
- 2 Ask them to rule three columns: Name, Similarity, Difference.
- 3 They then move around the room, talking to as many colleagues as they can and filling in one row per person.
- 4 Each row needs a genuine similarity and a genuine difference - for example: "Mihai / we both like to travel / he listens to country music."
- 5 No copying answers, and the similarity and difference must be about unrelated things - not "we both like music" and "he likes rap, I like rock."

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How difficult or easy was it to share this about yourself?
- ▶ What surprised you among the similarities and differences you found?
- ▶ Which difference in this room is actually useful to the team?
- ▶ How can we keep learning this kind of thing about each other at work?

CONNECTION

18. Sweet stories

Duration ~20 min **Materials** A large bag of colored candy (M&M's, Skittles or similar)

Each participant takes one candy, and its color decides which story they tell - a proud moment, an embarrassing one, a failure, a fright. The color does the choosing, so nobody has to volunteer for the harder topics.

- 1 Ask each participant to take one candy, and not to eat it yet.
- 2 Read out the color code, adapting it to the colors you actually have.
- 3 Blue: a moment you felt genuinely proud at work. Green: a manager you respected, and why. Yellow: a reason you are proud to be part of this organization.
- 4 Brown: an embarrassing moment at work. Orange: a time you failed at work. Purple: something funny that happened to you at work. Red: a time you were scared at work.
- 5 Go round the group one by one, each person telling the story their color calls for.
- 6 Say clearly that the story does not have to be the proudest or the most embarrassing - just one they are comfortable telling. Then let them eat the candy.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ What surprised you in someone else's story?
- ▶ How difficult or easy was it to tell yours?
- ▶ What made it feel safe, or not safe, to tell that story here?
- ▶ Why is it worth knowing each other outside strictly work topics?
- ▶ How can we keep learning this about each other at work?

CONNECTION

19. Human Bingo

Duration ~15 min **Materials** A bingo sheet and a pen per person, small prize (optional)

Participants work a bingo grid whose squares describe people rather than numbers: someone with an unusual hobby, someone who can whistle the national anthem, someone with a pet. To fill a square you have to find that person and get them to sign it.

- 1 Prepare a bingo sheet whose squares each describe a person, and give one copy to each participant.
- 2 Decide what counts as a win: any line of five squares in a small group, the whole sheet in a large one.
- 3 Tell participants the point of the game is to get to know each other better.
- 4 They circulate and find someone who matches each statement; that person signs the square themselves.
- 5 Nobody may sign a square on their own sheet.
- 6 Allow 10-20 minutes depending on group size and win condition; the first to finish shouts "BINGO!"

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ What did you learn about each other?
- ▶ Were there any surprises during the game?
- ▶ How does knowing this help us work together?
- ▶ How does the diversity in this room affect the team?
- ▶ How can we use our similarities and differences to make the team stronger?

03

Cooperation – working as one team

COOPERATION

20. Catch!

Duration ~20 min **Materials** one light, soft ball; a stopwatch

A fast circle game in which the group passes a ball along a fixed order and then keeps trying to beat its own time. It shows that any process can still be improved, and that the improvement has to come from the whole team rather than from an instruction handed down.

- 1 Stand the group in a circle and give the ball to one person.
- 2 That person throws it to anyone in the circle; each catcher throws to someone who has not held the ball yet, until the last person throws it back to the starter. This order is now the team's fixed pattern.
- 3 Ask them to repeat exactly the same pattern, to the same people in the same order, and time the run.
- 4 If anyone drops the ball, the ball goes back to the first person and the run starts over. The clock keeps running.
- 5 Announce the time, ask how fast they think they could be, then time a second run.
- 6 Give them 3 minutes to plan a strategy, then time one final run of the same pattern.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How did you feel the first time I timed you, and how did that change on the later runs?
- ▶ What did you do to get faster, and how well did each idea work?
- ▶ What limits did you assume you had to work within?
- ▶ How did you react when someone dropped the ball?
- ▶ Where at work are we accepting a process time we could actually improve?

COOPERATION

21. Pass the card on

Duration ~15 min **Materials** one pack of playing cards and a row of chairs per team

A fast, competitive relay in which each team moves a whole deck of cards down a row of chairs, one card at a time, hand to hand. It lifts the energy in the room and forces a team to synchronise instead of each person working at their own pace.

- 1 Divide the group into teams of 4-8 and seat each team in a row of chairs side by side.
- 2 Place a pack of cards on the floor beside the chair at the right-hand end of each row.
- 3 Explain the rules, then give the teams 5 minutes to plan their strategy.
- 4 On your signal, the participant next to the deck takes a card and passes it from their left hand into the right hand of the person on their left.
- 5 Every participant after that moves the card from their right hand to their left hand before placing it in the right hand of the next person.
- 6 No one may hold more than one card at a time, and the starter can pick up the next card as soon as the previous one has moved on.
- 7 The run ends when the last participant lays the final card, with their left hand, on the pile at their feet. The first team with the whole deck down the row wins.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How did you feel when someone dropped a card?
- ▶ Which parts of your strategy worked, and which slowed you down?
- ▶ What did you learn in the first few cards that your planning had missed?
- ▶ Where at work do we have to be this tightly synchronised?
- ▶ What does this say about how we hand work over to each other?

COOPERATION

22. Popcorn

Duration ~10 min **Materials** a blindfold, a tablespoon and a small bag of popcorn per person

In pairs, with both partners blindfolded, one person feeds the other ten pieces of popcorn from a spoon. It is loud and funny, and it makes the point that cooperation runs on constant, explicit feedback rather than on good intentions.

- 1 Ask participants to pair up. Hand out a blindfold, a tablespoon and a bag of popcorn to each person.
- 2 Both partners put on their blindfolds and keep them on for the whole round.
- 3 One partner feeds the other ten pieces of popcorn, one piece at a time, using only the spoon.
- 4 Put more than ten pieces in each bag, because some will end up on the floor.
- 5 When the ten pieces are eaten, swap roles and repeat.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How did it feel to be blindfolded, and why?
- ▶ What went wrong when you first tried to feed each other?
- ▶ What ways of communicating and cooperating did you invent?
- ▶ Which of them actually worked, and how did you find out?
- ▶ How does that compare with the feedback we give each other at work?

COOPERATION

23. Confused?

Duration ~15 min **Materials** one 20-50 piece children's puzzle per team, each in its own bag

Each team gets a bagged jigsaw to finish in five minutes, but two or three pieces of every puzzle are sitting in another team's bag. Teams only finish once they stop assuming they are in a competition and start trading across team lines.

- 1 Before the session, bag each puzzle separately, then take 2-3 pieces out of every bag and put each of them into a different bag. Use puzzles that are clearly different from one another.
- 2 Divide the group into teams of 3-6, one team per bag.
- 3 Give each team a bag without saying anything about the swapped pieces.
- 4 Tell them their goal is to complete their puzzle in under 5 minutes, and start them.
- 5 When a team realises pieces are missing and asks you for an explanation, calmly repeat the goal and tell them every piece needed has already been handed out.
- 6 If they ask permission to work with other teams, stay neutral: "You know what your goal is. Do whatever you think it takes."
- 7 Avoid any comment that sounds like encouragement in a race.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ What did you assume at the start of this activity?
- ▶ What made you believe this was a competition?
- ▶ How did you react when you realised you did not have all your pieces?
- ▶ How did it feel when another team offered you a piece, or asked for one of yours?
- ▶ Where do we hold on to pieces other teams here are waiting for?

COOPERATION

24. Silence is golden

Duration ~15 min

Materials one A3 sheet and coloured markers per team; tape to display the drawings

Small teams draw their picture of an ideal work environment without saying a word to each other. It shows how much of what we mean actually travels through something other than the words we pick, and how well a group can align without speaking.

- 1 Divide the group into teams of 4-6 and give each team an A3 sheet and a few coloured markers.
- 2 Decide before you start whether written notes are allowed, and tell them.
- 3 Ask each team to draw a plan or a picture of the ideal work environment for the group. Money is no object, so they can be ambitious and enjoy it.
- 4 No one may speak to anyone while planning or drawing.
- 5 Warn them 1 minute before time runs out. After 10 minutes, each team presents its drawing and tapes it up.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ What did the drawings have in common?
- ▶ How did you get your ideas across without speaking?
- ▶ How accurately did you understand each other, given you could not use words?
- ▶ What surprised you about how well the team worked in silence?
- ▶ Where at work do tone and body language carry more of our message than we notice?

COOPERATION

25. The power of the stars

Duration ~15 min **Materials** one 12-15 m rope; blindfolds (optional)

The whole group holds a single long rope and has to shape it into a five-pointed star. It is a short, physical test of whether a group can listen to each other, agree on a plan and organise itself against a deadline.

- 1 Ask everyone to pick up the rope, spread out so each person has 60-100 cm of it and nobody is crowded.
- 2 They may slide their hands along the rope, but they may not swap places with each other.
- 3 In 10 minutes they must form a five-pointed star with no loose rope left at either end. Either a plain outline or the overlapping single-stroke kind of star counts.
- 4 For a larger group, split into two teams with a rope each, or use a longer rope.
- 5 To raise the difficulty, blindfold everyone, or appoint one leader and blindfold only that person so they have to direct the team by voice.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ What did this task demand of you as a team?
- ▶ What did you do to make sure everyone's ideas about how to proceed were heard?
- ▶ Did a leader emerge, and how did they organise the group?
- ▶ How did you handle disagreement while the clock was running?
- ▶ Where at work do we need this same kind of coordination?

COOPERATION

26. Tied up

Duration ~10 min **Materials** rope or tape for a start line and a finish line

The group walks from a start line and has to cross the finish line at exactly the same instant. It looks trivial and normally takes five to ten attempts, which is the whole point: a simple task stops being simple the moment it depends on coordinating other people.

- 1 Mark a start line and a finish line a few metres apart with rope or tape, or use a visible stripe on the floor.
- 2 Line the whole group up behind the start line.
- 3 On your signal they move forward, and every person must cross the finish line at exactly the same moment.
- 4 Once the attempt has started, nobody is allowed to stop moving. This rules out halting just short of the line and stepping over together.
- 5 If they do not all cross at once, they go back to the start line and try again, until they succeed.
- 6 To make it harder, tell them they may only look straight ahead, or only at the ceiling.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How easy did this look before you started?
- ▶ How easy was it once you tried it?
- ▶ What finally made it work? (A count-down, a marching step, holding hands, something else?)
- ▶ When has a task at work looked easy until you had to coordinate other people around it?
- ▶ What should that change about how we plan work that crosses several people?

COOPERATION

27. United hearts

Duration ~30 min **Materials** one pack of playing cards per 15 participants

Three teams play thirteen fast rounds of a card game for points, each convinced it has to beat the other two. There are enough points on the table for every team to hit its target, so the real lesson is how quickly we assume competition where none exists.

- 1 Divide the group into three teams of 2-5 players. The teams do not have to be the same size, and extra people can sit in as observers.
- 2 Keep the hearts as the dealer's cards and give each team one of the other suits. Teams may look at their own cards; the dealer plays for no points.
- 3 Each team chooses a leader. Explain the rules below, then give them 3 minutes to plan a strategy.
- 4 Every team's goal is 30 points. The game runs 13 rounds, one for each card in a suit.
- 5 Each round the dealer turns one heart face up, then every leader places one of their team's cards face down.
- 6 Turn the leaders' cards over. The highest card played wins the value of the dealer's heart for that team.
- 7 Number cards score their face value; a jack is 11, a queen 12, a king 13 and an ace 1.
- 8 If two leaders tie for the highest card, that round's points are lost for good.
- 9 Played cards stay out of the game, and once play starts nobody is allowed to speak.
- 10 After round 5, and again after round 9, give the teams 2 minutes to regroup and rethink their strategy.
- 11 At the end, add up the scores and see which teams reached 30 points.

COOPERATION

27. United hearts (continue)

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ What just happened?
- ▶ How did you pick your leader, and what strategy did you settle on?
- ▶ How many points were on the table in total? (91, which is enough for all three teams to reach 30.)
- ▶ So why did you compete with each other?
- ▶ Where do we compete internally for resources or support when we do not need to?

NEXT STEP

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04

Adaptation – dealing with change

ADAPTATION

28. Changes over time

Duration ~25 min **Materials** A sheet of paper and a pen per person

Each person plots five major changes from their own life on a timeline, then works through one of them with a partner. It shows that changes which looked like disasters at the time were survived, and often turned out well. It also gets people to know each other properly.

- 1 Give everyone a sheet of paper and a pen.
- 2 Ask each person to recall five major changes they have lived through.
- 3 Have them draw a timeline of their life and mark each change on it with an X.
- 4 Put people in pairs. Each partner picks one change to talk about.
- 5 Post the sharing prompts where everyone can see them: What made the change difficult? What was the key to getting through it? How did you feel before, during and after? How did the other changes happening around the same time affect your ability to cope?
- 6 Give the pairs enough time for both people to share, then bring the group back together.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How did it feel to share these experiences with each other?
- ▶ What did you learn from the way your partner handled their change?
- ▶ What did you notice about how changes that land one after another affect each other?
- ▶ What does that mean for the way we handle change here?

ADAPTATION

29. Guess and change

Duration ~20 min **Materials** None

Two teams play a yes/no guessing game, and after every round the guessers switch to whichever team won. People get used to changing teams and allegiances quickly, and they find out how little a closed question actually tells you.

- 1 Split the group in two and send each team to an opposite corner of the room.
- 2 One person from each team steps outside. Together the two of them quickly pick any object in the world.
- 3 Each returns to the opposing team, not the team they came from.
- 4 Teams question their visitor to work out the object. Only yes/no questions count, and answers are given quietly so the other team cannot listen in.
- 5 The first team to guess claps to win the round. Both people who left the room now join the winning team.
- 6 Each team picks a new person to step out, and a new round starts.
- 7 Play until one team holds everyone, or until time runs out. Keep it fast, and don't let teams deliberate over who goes out.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How did it feel when your team started shrinking?
- ▶ How did it feel when your team started growing?
- ▶ How did it feel to have to join the other side?
- ▶ Did you find a pattern of questioning that worked better than the rest?
- ▶ What does this say about the questions we ask each other at work?

ADAPTATION

30. Building towers

Duration ~20 min **Materials** 25 sticky notes and a roll of tape per team, a tape measure or ruler

Teams build the tallest free-standing tower they can from sticky notes and tape, and then the tape is confiscated and they have to do it again. It pushes people to find creative solutions when a rule changes mid-task, with a competitive edge to keep it lively.

- 1 Divide the group into teams of 3-5. Give each team 25 sticky notes and a roll of tape.
- 2 Teams have 5 minutes to build the tallest free-standing structure they can, using only those materials.
- 3 The tower has to stand long enough to be measured. Measure every tower, then ask the teams to take them down.
- 4 Announce that the tape has been found to breach health rules and collect it back in.
- 5 Give each team 25 fresh sticky notes and another 5 minutes to build the tallest free-standing structure, paper only.
- 6 Measure again and name the winner. Approach the towers slowly: an air current will flatten the work.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How did you decide what kind of structure to build each time?
- ▶ How did you feel when I took the tape away?
- ▶ What did you find in the second round that made it work?
- ▶ What does this say about how we react when the rules change on us at work?

ADAPTATION

31. Human machine

Duration ~20 min **Materials** None

Teams build a working machine out of their own bodies, then have to redesign it after one part is declared obsolete. The point is that a forced change is often the opening to a better version of the product or process.

- 1 Divide the group into teams of 6-10. Everyone has to be a moving part of the machine.
- 2 Give each team 6 minutes to plan its human machine, and encourage sound effects.
- 3 Warn the teams 1 minute before planning time runs out.
- 4 Watch each team demonstrate its machine.
- 5 Pick one person from each machine and declare that part obsolete. Choose whoever has the most important role, so the team really has to rethink the design.
- 6 Teams get 3 more minutes to adapt or reinvent the machine, using that person in a new way.
- 7 Watch the second round of demonstrations.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How did you settle on the design of your machine?
- ▶ How did you handle disagreements inside the team?
- ▶ How did you feel when I rejected your original design?
- ▶ How do we usually react when something is taken away from us here?
- ▶ What does that imply for the way we work together?

05

Creativity – solving problems together

CREATIVITY

32. Redesign

Duration ~20 min **Materials** Magazines, scissors and glue per person, one A3 sheet each

Everyone cuts a magazine picture into small pieces and glues those pieces into a completely new image. It is a direct demonstration that taking something apart can produce something new and good, not only loss.

- 1 Let each person choose a picture from the magazines. The bigger the pictures, the better.
- 2 Ask them to cut it into pieces small enough that the original image is no longer recognizable.
- 3 Each person uses only their own pieces to build a new image, glued as a collage onto an A3 sheet.
- 4 Give 10 minutes, with a warning 1 minute before the end.
- 5 Offer no suggestions about what to make. Their own ideas will fit them better than yours.
- 6 Ask each person to present their collage and say what the original picture was.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How did you decide what collage to make?
- ▶ How did you feel when I told you the task was to make a collage?
- ▶ How do those feelings compare with how we feel about changes at work?
- ▶ What was the key to getting it done?
- ▶ What does that suggest about how we approach problems here?

CREATIVITY

33. Numbers

Duration ~15 min **Materials** None

A fast, noisy calling game in which every slip sends a person to the end of the line and renumbers everyone behind them. It trains people to keep up when things change at speed, and to treat small mistakes as small.

- 1 Arrange the group in a U shape and count off from one end, so everyone holds a number.
- 2 The first participant shouts out any other participant's number. Rule out numbers next to their own, so the calls cannot run in order.
- 3 That person immediately shouts someone else's number, and so on.
- 4 Play continues until someone hesitates, calls their own number, or calls a number nobody holds.
- 5 That person bows, the group applauds them, and they move to the end of the line.
- 6 Everyone who was behind them now has a new number. Restart the game.
- 7 Keep the pace high, with the group clapping a steady rhythm, so mistakes and renumbering happen often.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How did you feel when you made a mistake?
- ▶ How did you feel watching someone else make one?
- ▶ What is our usual reaction to small mistakes at work?
- ▶ How did you feel as your own number kept changing?
- ▶ Did anyone try to catch out the people at the start of the line, and why?

CREATIVITY

34. Confused fingers

Duration ~30 min **Materials** One children's puzzle per team, a stopwatch

Teams race to assemble a children's puzzle three times, then do it three more times with no thumbs. It shows how much easier a change is to accept when you know the reason behind it, and that a dip in performance afterwards is normal.

- 1 Divide the group into teams of 2-4 and give each team a puzzle. Puzzles with a solid edge and 15-25 pieces inside it work best.
- 2 Before each round, teams spread all the pieces face up with no piece touching another.
- 3 Time each team assembling the puzzle, and call out finishing times as they come in.
- 4 Run the round twice more. Teams try to beat their own time.
- 5 Announce that thumbs may no longer be used: every time a thumb touches a piece, one minute is added to that round's time.
- 6 Time three more rounds under the new rule, teams again trying to improve.
- 7 Compare all six times. Note the complaints made right after the new rule, they are useful material for the debrief.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How did the first three rounds feel compared with the last three?
- ▶ How did you react when I banned thumbs?
- ▶ Would it have landed differently if I had told you a bacterium on the pieces only transfers through thumbs?
- ▶ How does knowing the reason for a change help you cope with it at work?
- ▶ What could you have done to make the last three rounds more productive?

CREATIVITY

35. Reversed image

Duration ~15 min **Materials** A sheet of paper and a pen per person

Everyone draws an object from their workplace with their non-writing hand, then swaps drawings to be identified. The awkwardness is the point: it mirrors how people react to change, and shows those reactions are ordinary and short-lived.

- 1 Give each person a sheet of paper and a pen.
- 2 Give them 6 minutes to draw an object from their office or workplace, using the hand they do not normally write with.
- 3 Say nothing about artistic quality, so nobody is embarrassed to draw. Warn the group 1 minute before time is up.
- 4 Anyone who flatly refuses to draw writes a sentence or two about an object with their other hand instead. It teaches the same lesson.
- 5 Have participants swap drawings with someone else in the group.
- 6 Each person labels the drawing they received with what they think it shows, then returns it to the artist.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How many objects were identified correctly?
- ▶ How did it feel to use your other hand?
- ▶ How did that feeling show up in the drawing itself?
- ▶ How did you get past it?
- ▶ How do those feelings compare with how we feel about changes at work?

CREATIVITY

36. Seven hands

Duration ~30 min **Materials** Washable markers or pens, three sheets of paper per team

Teams solve a classic stacking puzzle using their own numbered hands instead of discs. The shortest solution takes 127 legal moves, so it exposes exactly how a team handles process disputes, an emerging leader, and work that looks like backtracking.

- 1 Divide the group into teams of 4-7, mixing people who do not normally work together.
- 2 In each team, everyone writes a number from 1 to 7 on the back of a hand. In smaller teams some people number both hands.
- 3 Place three sheets of paper in front of each team.
- 4 Stack the hands in order on the first sheet: hand 7 flat on the paper, hand 1 on top. This is the Start position.
- 5 The task is to rebuild that exact stack, 7 at the bottom and 1 on top, on a different sheet of paper.
- 6 Rules: move one hand at a time, only the top hand of a stack, onto another hand or onto an empty sheet, and never onto a hand with a lower number.
- 7 For example, 3 can never go on 1 or 2, but it can go on 4, 5, 6, 7 or an empty sheet.
- 8 Let the teams work, and note the comments made along the way for the debrief.

CREATIVITY

36. Seven hands (continuare)

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ What strategy finally got you there?
- ▶ How did you resolve differences of opinion about which hand to move?
- ▶ Did you have a leader, and how did that person emerge?
- ▶ When someone thought they had the next move, how did they behave, and how did the rest of you respond?
- ▶ Where do we repeat moves just to get back to where we started in this organization?

CREATIVITY

37. Balloons sculpture

Duration ~15 min **Materials** One long balloon per person plus spares, a balloon pump

The whole team builds a single sculpture out of long balloons to represent its commitment to itself. It is light, physical and quick, and it gets people to state that commitment out loud instead of assuming it.

- 1 Inflate the balloons before the session if you can, leaving 2-3 cm uninflated so they can still be bent and twisted.
- 2 Give each person a balloon, and keep spares to hand for the ones that burst.
- 3 Ask the whole team to create one balloon structure that reflects their commitment to the team.
- 4 Let the meaning come from them: balloons tied together can stand for interdependence, touching balloons for connection, balloons at the base for the support people give others.
- 5 Watch how the team behaves while it builds, then ask them to explain the finished sculpture.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ What did this exercise have to do with teamwork?
- ▶ How did you handle each other's ideas about what the structure should be?
- ▶ How did you deal with the disagreements?
- ▶ What does each part of the finished sculpture stand for?
- ▶ What does that imply for how we work together day to day?

06

Teamwork – appreciation and mutual support

TEAMWORK

38. The stack of playing cards

Duration ~20 min **Materials** 16 playing cards per team

Teams lay out 16 cards in a grid and try to collapse them into as few piles as possible under strict movement rules. It looks like a solo puzzle, but the teams that agree on a method and listen to each other get much further than the ones that argue over every move.

- 1 Divide the group into teams of 3-5 and give each team a set of 16 playing cards.
- 2 Ask each team to lay the cards face up in a four-by-four grid.
- 3 State the goal: reduce the 16 cards to a single pile, or to the fewest piles possible.
- 4 Rule: a card or a pile can be moved any distance horizontally or vertically, never diagonally.
- 5 Rule: a card can only be moved onto a card or pile whose top card matches it in rank or suit, and never onto an empty space.
- 6 Rule: once cards are stacked, the pile moves as one unit according to its visible top card. The cards underneath no longer count.
- 7 Give the teams 10 minutes, then compare results.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How close did you get to a single pile, and what affected your result?
- ▶ Every team was dealt a different set of 16 cards. How much did your resources shape the outcome? Does that happen here?
- ▶ How did you handle everyone's ideas about how to play?
- ▶ Did a leader emerge? What did that person actually do?
- ▶ How did you settle disagreements, and what does that tell us about how we settle them at work?

TEAMWORK

39. Consultants

Duration ~15 min **Materials** Paper and a pen for each person

Everyone writes down a real problem they are facing at work, then the pages circulate and each person adds one piece of advice. It shows people how much usable help is already sitting in the room, and how rarely we ask for it.

- 1 Give each person paper and a pen. Everyone writes one current problem or worry at the top of the page. Allow 2 minutes.
- 2 Everyone passes their page to the person on their left.
- 3 Each person has 1 minute to read the problem they received and write one piece of advice underneath.
- 4 Pass to the left again and repeat for as many rounds as time allows.
- 5 Return every page to its original owner to read.
- 6 Accept partial advice. Anyone stuck can write a few words of encouragement or point to someone who would know.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How many of you got at least one idea that will genuinely help?
- ▶ How did it feel to be the one giving advice?
- ▶ Why don't we ask each other for help more often?
- ▶ Whose advice surprised you, and why did you not expect it from them?
- ▶ What implications does this have for how we work together day to day?

TEAMWORK

40. Improve this

Duration ~10 min **Materials** None, just the chairs in the room

The group gets 60 seconds to improve the way their chairs are arranged, with no definition of what improved means. It is a fast, uncomfortable demonstration of how readily we act on a vague instruction instead of asking what it actually means.

- 1 Tell the group they have exactly 60 seconds to improve the way the chairs they are sitting on are arranged. Give no other instruction.
- 2 If anyone asks for detail, simply repeat the original sentence word for word.
- 3 Look at your watch to discourage further questions, then tell them to start.
- 4 Let them move furniture if they want to. Do not correct or coach anyone.
- 5 While they work, note what they say out loud, such as "I don't know what he wants, but let's try this."
- 6 Stop them after exactly 60 seconds and go straight into the debrief.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ Did you achieve the goal? How do you know?
- ▶ What was your goal, and was it clear? Define "improve" for me.
- ▶ Did you try to get clarification? If not, what stopped you? If you did, what happened?
- ▶ Where does this same pattern show up here, where we start before we know what good looks like?
- ▶ What can we do to stop it happening again?

TEAMWORK

41. One-word stories

Duration ~10 min **Materials** None

The group builds a story out loud, one word per person, going around the circle. It is a quick lesson in giving up control: your contribution only works if it fits what came before it and leaves room for whoever speaks next.

- 1 Explain that the group will build one story together, each person adding a single word in turn.
- 2 Each word should follow on sensibly from the word before it, and should be as interesting as the person can make it.
- 3 Demonstrate with a familiar opening so the rhythm is clear: "Once" ... "upon" ... "a" ... "time" ...
- 4 Go around the circle. Keep the pace up, and ask people to speak clearly.
- 5 End the story once the action has clearly landed, then start a second one. The group will be noticeably better at it.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ Who felt the person after them said the wrong word, because it was not the word you were setting up? How did that feel?
- ▶ Who did not like where the story ended up? Why not?
- ▶ If this had been a conversation at work, what could you have done at that moment?
- ▶ Which story worked better, and what made the difference?
- ▶ What does this tell us about how we react when someone misreads what we meant?

TEAMWORK

42. Shuffle the pages

Duration ~15 min **Materials** One shuffled newspaper per team

Teams race to put a completely shuffled newspaper back into page order. There is nothing clever to work out and no individual skill involved, so everything worth discussing afterwards is about how the team organised itself.

- 1 Before the session, prepare one newspaper per team with the pages thoroughly shuffled and out of order.
- 2 Divide the group into teams of 4-6 and give each team a shuffled newspaper.
- 3 Ask them to sort the pages and restore the newspaper to its original order.
- 4 Give no hints or advice before or during the task. Let each team find its own method.
- 5 Stop when the first team finishes, then compare how the teams worked.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ What did this activity have to do with teamwork?
- ▶ How did you handle everyone's ideas about how to approach it?
- ▶ Did a leader emerge? What did that person do?
- ▶ How did you deal with disagreements inside the team?
- ▶ What implications does this have for how we organise ourselves at work?

TEAMWORK

43. Blame someone

Duration ~15 min **Materials** None

Standing in a circle, everyone secretly copies one other person's every move while trying to stay completely still. Movement always breaks out and nobody can say who started it, which shows the group how much energy it wastes hunting for someone to blame.

- 1 Stand the whole group in a circle.
- 2 Point at someone and hold it. That person points at someone else, and so on, until everyone is pointing at one other person and the last person points back at you.
- 3 The person you are pointing at is your Idol. Everyone lowers their hands but keeps their eyes fixed on their Idol.
- 4 Explain the goal: follow your Idol and copy every move exactly.
- 5 Ask the group to stand perfectly still. No one may move unless their Idol moves. If your Idol blinks, coughs or shifts, copy it exactly, then freeze again.
- 6 Play for a few minutes. Small movements will spread around the circle and grow. If it gets out of control, stop, refocus everyone and start again.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ You were all supposed to stay still. What happened?
- ▶ Does anyone know who started the movement? (Let a few accusations run; it is almost never possible to establish.)
- ▶ Once a movement is going, how much does it matter who started it?
- ▶ How much energy do we spend here looking for someone to blame?
- ▶ Which behaviours have we all copied from each other until they became team norms?

TEAMWORK

44. No but! (feedback)

Duration ~10 min **Materials** None

In pairs, people give each other one piece of feedback about their clothes, joined by the word "but", then repeat the identical sentence with "and". Hearing both versions back to back shows how "but" quietly deletes whatever came before it.

- 1 Ask participants to get into pairs.
- 2 Give each person 30 seconds to think of something they like about their partner's outfit and something that could be improved.
- 3 The first person says what they like, joins it with "but", and finishes with the improvement. Then the partner does the same.
- 4 Wait until every pair has finished the "but" version before moving on.
- 5 Now ask everyone to repeat their sentence with "and" instead of "but": "I like your tie, but it would bring out your blue eyes more if it were red" becomes "I like your tie, and it would bring out your blue eyes more if it were red."

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How did you feel when you heard "but"?
- ▶ How did you feel when you heard "and"?
- ▶ What does "but" usually signal to the person listening?
- ▶ Why do we reach for "but" so often when we offer suggestions or feedback?
- ▶ Where would swapping "but" for "and" change a conversation you are having right now?

TEAMWORK

45. No but! (ideas)

Duration ~15 min **Materials** None

Pairs plan a holiday together, first answering each other with "Yes, but ..." and then with "Yes, and ...". Same two people, same topic: one version stalls and the other builds, which makes it obvious how fast a well-meant "yes, but" closes an idea down.

- 1 Ask participants to get into pairs. Each pair is planning a holiday together, and money is no object.
- 2 One partner suggests something. The other replies starting with "Yes, but ..." and adds their own idea.
- 3 Keep it going back and forth that way for 2 minutes: "I want to go somewhere warm." / "Yes, but let's make sure it isn't Florida."
- 4 Now run the conversation again for 2 minutes, with every sentence starting "Yes, and ...". It does not have to repeat the first version word for word.
- 5 Keep the exchanges quick. They are not planning a real trip, so nothing has to be realistic or accurate.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How did you feel when you heard "but"?
- ▶ How did you feel when you heard "and"?
- ▶ Did the plan actually move forward once you switched to "and"? Why?
- ▶ Why do we say "yes, but ..." so often?
- ▶ When is "yes, but ..." genuinely useful and appropriate?

TEAMWORK

46. First impressions

Duration ~15 min **Materials** Envelope of 4-5 magazine photos per team

Teams look at photographs of strangers cut from magazines and say out loud what they assume about each person. It shows how fast and how confidently we judge people on appearance alone, and how differently two people read the same face.

- 1 Divide the group into teams of 4-6 and give each team an envelope of photos.
- 2 Give the teams 6 minutes to discuss their first impressions of each person, based only on what they can see.
- 3 Give a 1-minute warning before the discussion time is up.
- 4 Ask each team to present the photo that produced their strongest first impression, and what they read into it.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How easy was it to agree on your first impressions of these people?
- ▶ Where did you disagree, and why? (We were raised differently; we have different experiences with a certain look.)
- ▶ What do people assume about us, based on how we present ourselves?
- ▶ What does this change about how we show up in front of clients and colleagues?

TEAMWORK

47. From trash to treasure

Duration ~15 min **Materials** Everyday office objects: clips, pens, staplers, sticky notes

Each person picks an ordinary office object that represents what they bring to the team, explains the choice, then the team builds one sculpture out of all of them. It makes individual contributions concrete, and shows that the parts only add up to something once they are assembled.

- 1 Spread the objects on a table: paper clips, pens, erasers, pocket calculators, mugs, staplers, sticky notes, rubber bands.
- 2 Ask everyone to choose the object that best represents what they contribute to the team's success.
- 3 Go around the group; each person explains why they chose that object.
- 4 Give the team 5 minutes to build a single sculpture using all the chosen objects.
- 5 The sculpture has to show how the separate parts combine to make the team stronger.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ Why did the same object mean different things to different people?
- ▶ What went through your mind as you tried to fit everything into one sculpture? (I couldn't see where the stapler belonged; I wanted my pen more central.)
- ▶ Whose contribution did you only understand properly after they explained their object?
- ▶ What does this tell us about how we credit each other's work day to day?

TEAMWORK

48. Congratulations

Duration ~15 min **Materials** One or two boxes of Merci chocolates

People thank each other with a chocolate, and every chocolate has to come with a specific reason. Recognition from a peer lands differently from recognition from a manager, and this makes that difference obvious.

- 1 Show the group the box and explain that anyone may give anyone a chocolate, and more than one if they want.
- 2 State the only rule: every chocolate comes with a short, specific reason for giving it.
- 3 Go first yourself. Give a chocolate to someone and say exactly what they did to earn it.
- 4 Lead a short round of applause for each recipient.
- 5 Let the group continue in no fixed order and with nobody put on the spot, until the energy fades or the chocolates run out.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ How hard or easy was it to name out loud what a colleague did well? Why?
- ▶ How is recognition from a colleague different from recognition from a manager?
- ▶ Whose contribution nearly went unmentioned, and why do you think that was?
- ▶ What would change if we gave this kind of feedback to suppliers, clients and partners as well?

TEAMWORK

49. Labels

Duration ~20 min **Materials** 6 large forehead labels per team, tape

Everyone wears a label on their forehead telling the others how to treat them, without knowing what their own says, and then the teams have to plan something together. It shows how quickly a label takes over a conversation, and what that costs the actual work.

- 1 Prepare 6 labels per team, big enough to read across the room: "ignore me", "treat me like a leader", "argue with me", "respect my opinions", "interrupt me", "agree with me".
- 2 Split the group into teams of 6 and hand each team its set of labels face down.
- 3 Each person sticks a label on the forehead of the person next to them, without letting them see it.
- 4 Give every team a planning task (a department picnic, a charity event) and 7 minutes to complete it.
- 5 While they work, everyone must react to the labels they can see and treat each person accordingly.
- 6 Stop the teams after 7 minutes, whether or not the task is finished.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ What happened? Did you complete the task, and why or why not?
- ▶ How satisfied are you with the result? Why?
- ▶ How did it feel to treat someone a certain way purely because of their label? (It wasn't me; I felt forced; it was funny at first.)
- ▶ Did it get easier as the 7 minutes went on? What made it easier? (The others reinforced the label; I got used to treating them that way.)
- ▶ Where do labels like these already shape how we treat colleagues, clients and partners?

TEAMWORK

50. The rainbow of diversity

Duration ~15 min **Materials** One colored pencil per person, all different colors

Colored pencils stand in for the people holding them: participants pair up first by similar color, then by opposite color, and end up seated in a circle shaded like a rainbow. It gives the group a physical picture of how similarity and difference sit side by side in the same team.

- 1 Give each participant a pencil, making sure no two colors are the same.
- 2 Ask everyone to pair up with someone whose color is close to their own, and give them 2 minutes to find everything they have in common.
- 3 Ask them to pair up again, this time with someone whose color is completely different, and give them 2 minutes to find everything that makes them different.
- 4 Ask the group to sit in a circle, each person next to the color closest to their own, so the circle forms a round rainbow.
- 5 Run the debrief while they are still sitting in that circle.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ What did you find out about the person whose color was close to yours?
- ▶ What did you find out about the person whose color was nothing like yours?
- ▶ What does this circle say about our team? (Even sitting next to someone like me, I am still connected to the very different person across the circle; we make up one whole.)
- ▶ What does that mean for the way we work together day to day?

TEAMWORK

51. What I like about myself

Duration ~10 min **Materials** None

In pairs, each person talks for three minutes about what they have done well at work recently. The moment they undercut themselves, the listener objects and they have to take it back. It shows people how routinely they discount their own work.

- 1 Ask participants to work in pairs and decide who speaks first.
- 2 The speaker talks for 3 minutes without stopping about the things they have done well at work lately.
- 3 Whenever the speaker minimizes an achievement, the listener says "I object!" and the speaker has to withdraw the comment and say it again straight.
- 4 Apart from objecting, the listener says nothing at all.
- 5 After 3 minutes, swap roles and repeat.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ Which role was easier, speaking or listening? Why?
- ▶ How did it feel to listen without being able to contribute? (Shut out of the conversation; unsure I had understood; bored.)
- ▶ How did it feel to speak with no reaction at all from your partner? (Selfish; unsure they were even listening.)
- ▶ What did you notice about the way you talk about yourself? (I hedge; I need someone else to confirm it; I'm not comfortable claiming a win.)
- ▶ Where does that habit cost you at work?

TEAMWORK

52. ZYX

Duration ~20 min **Materials** None (paper optional)

The group has to learn to recite the alphabet backwards as fast as they say it forwards. It is a genuinely hard learning task, so it exposes how differently people go about learning, and it ends with the group doing something they were certain was impossible.

- 1 Ask the group to recite the alphabet together at a normal, steady pace.
- 2 Set the goal: recite the alphabet backwards from memory, at that same speed. Reading it off a page is not allowed.
- 3 Give them 12 minutes to prepare, using anything in the room, including each other.
- 4 Bring the group back together and have them recite it: Z, Y, X, W, V, U, T, S, R, Q, P, O, N, M, L, K, J, I, H, G, F, E, D, C, B, A.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- ▶ What went through your head when you first heard the goal? (This is impossible; I can't do that.)
- ▶ Which preparation method helped you most: writing it down, saying or singing it, or moving while you repeated it?
- ▶ Did you break the task into smaller pieces? What did that do for you?
- ▶ Did you offer help to others, or ask for it? Why, or why not?
- ▶ Next time you face a hard learning task at work, what will you do differently?



NEXT STEP

Team building that changes something after the day ends.

These exercises are a start. When you want structured debriefs, follow-up, and behaviour that sticks, we work together.

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