

Card Sort – Teambuilding Activity

This simple team exercise requires two decks of cards with different distinctive coloured backs for each team. Remove one card from each of the decks and store them in an envelope ahead of the exercise. Shuffle the two decks for each team in advance of the activity and place them face up on a different table for each team. (Ensure the teams do not see that the backs are different styles.) Split the group into two teams of between three and six people in each team (for larger group sizes you can increase the number of card decks and therefore, run the exercise with a corresponding number of teams). Do not allow teams to go near the tables at this point. Ask one member from each team to step out of the room. The facilitator then explains to these individuals that their responsibility is to pass on the instructions for the exercise to their teams. Do not specify that they are a leader or mention the word leadership at all.

Instructions: The purpose of the task is as follows. Your team has two separate decks of cards which I want you to sort into suits and display 'ace-high', i.e., aces facing up on the top of the piles followed by king, queen, etc., down to the two, which should be at the bottom of each pile. You should have eight piles at the end of the activity. You need to tell me that the task is correct and complete when you are finished. Are there any questions? Return to the room and wait until I say start before briefing your team.

Allow the individuals to re-join their teams. Look at your watch, pause and say 'start now'. Wander between the groups and keep looking at the watch which should be in your hand rather than on the wrist.

Observations guide for facilitator - points to review after the activity:

- Use of physical resources - Were the teams able to gather around the table and if not did they reposition it?
- Human resources - How well were team members involved in the task? Did each have a role to play, and if not why not?
- Time - There was no time limit given. Did they feel there was one? Was this due to body language? Did anyone ask about time?
- Competition - Did the teams feel it was a competition between teams and if so why? What about collaboration? If the teams did not know that the exercise was a competition then why did the first team to finish not help the remaining teams to complete the activity? Were the missing cards identified? Was the information shared with all members of the team? Did teams inform you at the end of the exercise?
- Cards - Were the decks separated first by turning them over so the backs were visible or were the decks mixed up? If so why?

- Passing on of information and seeking clarification - Did the initially selected representatives assume the role of leaders? Did an expert leader emerge because for example they play cards or did leadership rotate?
- Type of leadership - What type of leadership was exhibited? Laissez-faire, autocratic, democratic, etc.
- How do the issues raised during this exercise relate to the issues we face back in the workplace when working in teams? What can you/we do to improve teamworking?

While this team exercise is quick to play, the discussion and review can take longer. There are very many aspects of team-working, collaboration, assumptions, communications, leadership, etc., to explore. Most importantly, the final question focuses the group on transferring lessons from the exercise to improve teamworking upon their return to work.