



CommuniCards



CommuniCards is ideal for exploring how to communicate when there is no clear way to give and receive information. Finding the right words is easier with teamwork and active listening.

How does it work?

Everyone is blindfolded and sits in a small circle. The trainer removes two plastic cards from the deck of 30, then distributes the remaining 28 cards to the participants. Their job is to determine the shape and color of the missing two cards. Being blindfolded, this is a real challenge! The trainer will tell everyone the color of their cards, but give no other hints. The group learns they need a 'common language' to communicate with each other. Will they find the right words?

What do you need?

People (min / optimal / max): 6 / 14 / 28

Time for Activity: 20-45 minutes

Materials: 30 plastic cards, 16 blindfolds, 1 set of instructions

Workspace: Enough space for all participants to form a circle

Instructions

1. Before you use CommuniCards, make sure you have a complete set of plastic cards. Sort the cards by shape. You should have six different shapes in five different colors each for a total of 30 cards.
2. Prepare for the activity. Ask your group to arrange their chairs in a circle. Give everyone a blindfold and ask them to put it on. Then distribute the plastic cards. For groups of 14 or fewer, give each person two cards. For groups with more than 14 people, give each person one card.
3. Explain the goal of the activity. You can say something like, *"You each have one plastic card that is part of a set. I have removed two cards from the set, and your task is to work as a team to identify the missing two cards."*
4. Outline the rules:
 - Together, all the cards form one logical system of shapes and sizes.
 - The number of shapes multiplied by the number of colors equals 30 (or less if you choose to perform the activity with fewer cards).
 - Two cards are missing. It is your job to identify these two cards by shape and color.
 - You may not touch each other's cards - only your own.
 - You may only communicate with each other verbally about the shapes you are holding.
 - You can ask me about the color of your card. Simply hold your card up in the air and I will tell you what color it is.
5. Observe the activity. Typically, after an initial period of confusion, one or two people in the group will take the lead. With the help of these leaders, a strategy emerges that helps the group find the missing pieces.

The real challenge for the group is how to explicitly describe the shapes of the cards, and the only way to make visible progress and keep everyone motivated is with effective meta communication. If even a single piece of information is missing, it may be enough to affect the end result.

6. If the group reaches an impasse, try not to intervene. Give them a chance to find a solution by themselves. If they are truly stuck, you can give them a clue (for example, maybe they have settled on the wrong number of shapes or colors).
7. Lead the debrief, basing the conversation on your original intent for the activity and your observations. Here are some examples.

Feedback / I vs. You Messages: You can refer to a specific interaction from the activity, and ask the group how it affected them personally. You can say something like, *"I want to draw*

your attention to an interesting interaction that happened during the activity. When Person X said '...', Person Y reacted in an emotional way. Person Y, how did your colleague's comments make you feel? This will allow you to illustrate the concept of I and You messages.

Strategy, Planning and Management: To focus on this topic, ask the group to note on a flipchart the various steps they took to complete the activity. Then invite the participants to reflect on how these steps apply to their work environment. Doing this can help you raise awareness of how varying degrees of information can impact a group's success.

Appreciative Communication within Teams: During the activity, look for examples of appreciative, resource-oriented communication. Then on a flipchart, compare these examples to less appreciative, problem-oriented interactions that also occurred. Ask the group to find more examples.

Here are some general questions to ask:

- What was the key to this exercise?
- How did you deal with the complex nature of the task?
- What were some of the more helpful steps you took to complete the task?
- What was your problem-solving strategy?
- What roles emerged during the exercise?
- What role did communication play?
- Where do you see parallels to your current situation?
- How can you apply the insights from this activity to your current situation?

Variations

- For groups with 10 or fewer people, you can make the activity less difficult by not using all the cards. Simply remove a particular color or shape. Some cards have shapes that are similar to each other, so if you eliminate the shapes that are easily mistaken for each other (such as those with holes), you can reduce the difficulty level. No matter how many cards you choose to remove, make sure to inform your group of the correct number of cards you are using.

Common Sense Caution

This activity requires participants to wear blindfolds. Some participants may experience dizziness, nausea, vertigo or headaches, and may fall or stumble as a result. If a participant suffers from balance problems, vertigo, dizziness, lightheadedness or orthopedic problems, he or she should refrain from participating in this activity.