

# TEAM PUZZLE SQUARES

## Description

This is a handy exercise for reinforcing the importance of teamwork. The exercise is simple, but reliable and effective. The activity creates a situation in which participants can achieve personal success easily an early on. However, they can only succeed on behalf of the whole team by destroying part of what they have already done. It's easy to accept that teamwork is essential. It's another matter entirely to come to terms with the personal sacrifices that must be made in the interests of the team. To obtain a team result, team members have to look up, observe how others are proceeding, share resources and start to cooperate effectively.

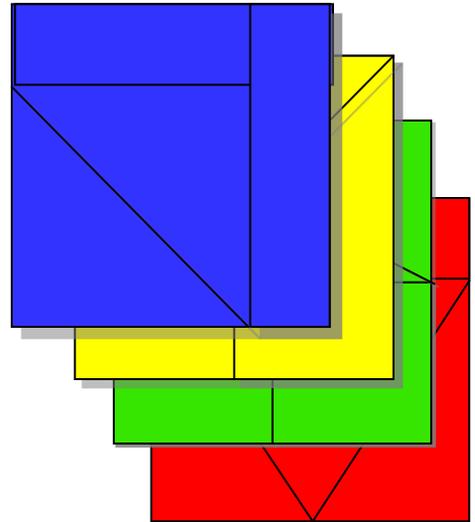
Thus, there are three phases in this exercise:

- 1) Working individually.
- 2) Negotiating and trading.
- 3) Sharing and cooperating.

## Learning Messages

We have become accustomed to working with desktop devices and mobile devices which contain many years of 'customerization' to suit an individual's requirements. And yet we all tend to use these tools in different ways, with our own personal styles and preferences. This is as true for e-mail, word processing, spreadsheets as it is for video games and smart phones. Furthermore, we organise our agendas in different ways, we summarise information in our own fashion and we work at our own rhythm and according to our own moods. Not surprisingly, when we are invited to use organisational tools that are designed to work collectively we don't find the kind of optimum customised features which we are accustomed to use on personal devices. Often, we have to first go backwards in order to go forwards later on. In learning, we have to fall before we can walk. It gets worse before it gets better. In teamwork the effort is deliberate, we have to re-trace our tracks in order to pick up at the point where the team can go forward together. The essence of this exercise therefore is to provide a message that putting the team first means putting ourselves second.

However, the exercise develops this message in a soft and fun way, that should allow a little perspective when thinking of the challenges ahead.



## Situation

You need an exercise that takes about fifteen or twenty minutes, that is relaxed, certainly not stressful (as a rule) and yet communicates a strong message in a way that is palatable and not hurtful. With this exercise you have the possibility to reduce tension or to prepare for a session that could be challenging.

## Aims

- To prepare for a teamwork session
- To develop the principle that in order to progress together, ego and self-centeredness must be put aside
- To recognize that to develop as a team, individuals often have to take a step backward
- To build the notions of empathy and cooperation
- To emphasise the importance of sharing knowledge and resources

## Materials

Print out the cards, enlarge if necessary. Cut the cards along the dotted lines. Mix up the pieces and distribute four pieces to each participant as per the guidance.

## Trainer Guidance

The participants should be in groups of four. If there are five or six people, you can propose observers. If there are seven, then one person could be in two groups. With eleven people, then you could have three observers, one for each team and one for both teams. Prior to the exercise, you will have cut out the squares along the dotted lines and sorted the shapes into different envelopes or packets. Here you have a choice. You can mix them up at random; or you can make sure that no participant already has pieces that make a square; or you could arrange the pieces so that only one or two participants are able to make squares all on their own. You tell the participants that their task is to make a square and give each individual in each group of four one of the packets. The exercise works best if everyone knows that it serves as an icebreaker, a warm exercise, or an energizer.

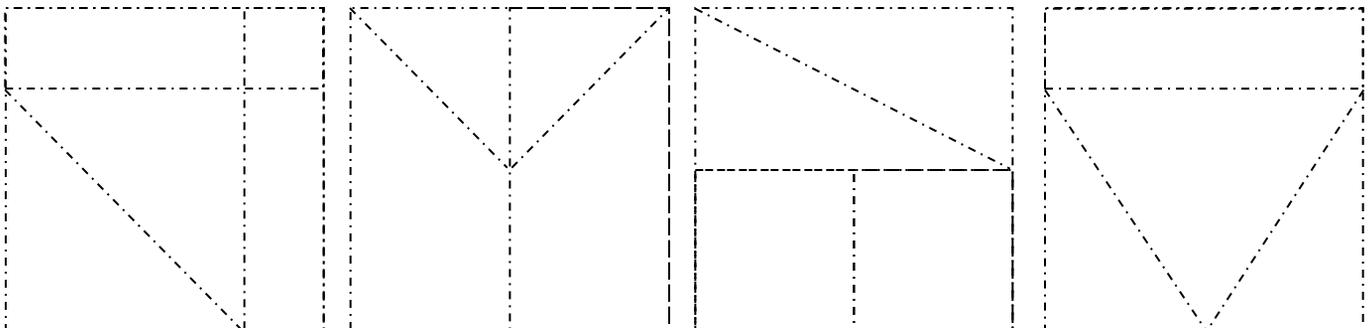
## Method

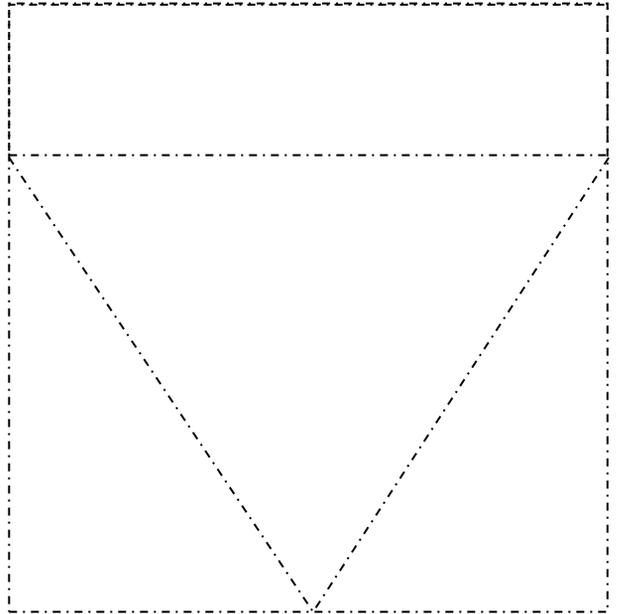
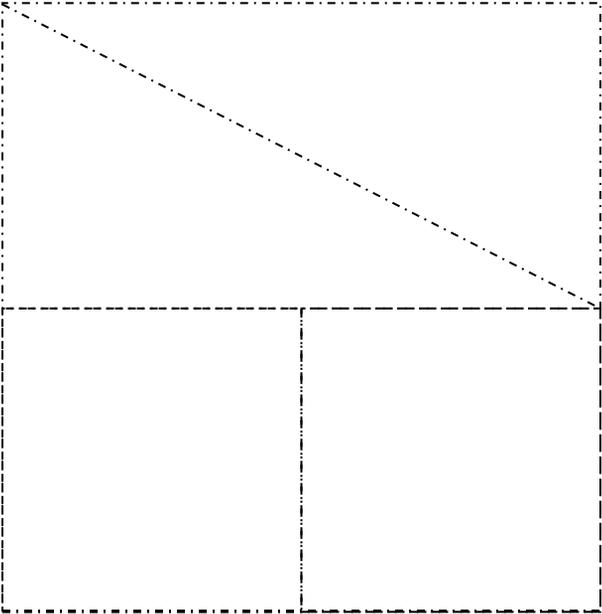
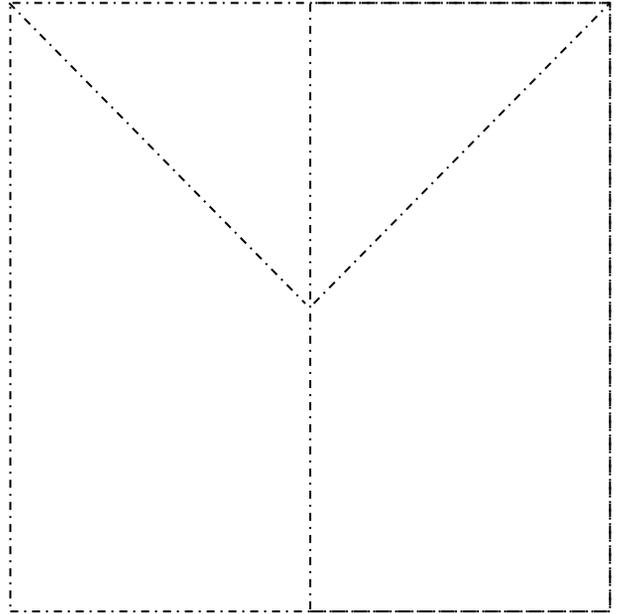
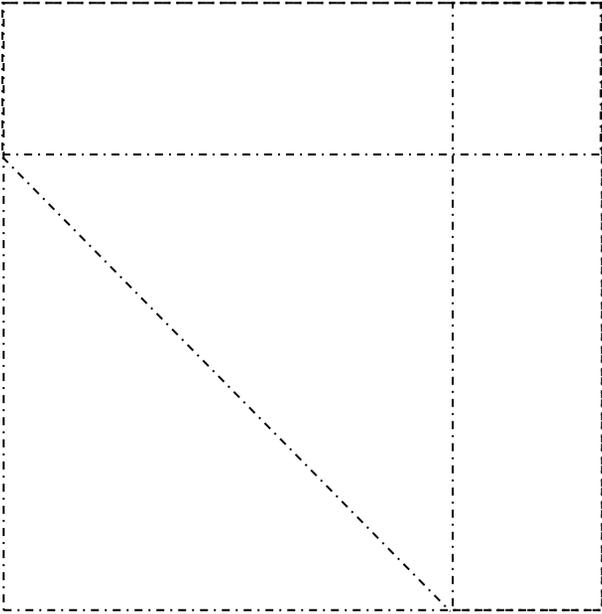
- 1) Print out the squares on coloured paper, or scan and enlarge them if necessary, or reproduce them yourself.
- 2) Cut the squares along the dotted lines.
- 3) Each colour makes a set. Place four pieces of each colour in an envelope, or packet.
- 4) The individual participants in their colour groups each receive one envelope, or packet
- 5) Their instructions are for each of them to make a square..
- 6) This some people will be able to do quite quickly, but it is likely that only one, two or three participants in each team will be able to make a square until they share the pieces and work cooperatively to achieve four squares in the team.
- 7) When the four squares have been produced by each team, initiate a discussion about what the exercise demonstrates for team working.
- 8) If the exercise was extremely easy, fairly difficult, or somewhere in between, there will be lessons to take back to the workplace. If it was fairly easy; how can cooperation in the workplace be facilitated – for example, meeting and agreeing on shared work methods. If it was difficult; going back to the start and working things out in a different way with new roles.

## Timing

*Total time: Fifteen to thirty minutes*

- 5 minutes to introduce the exercise and start the group work.
- 5 to 15 minutes to explore options and to design the paper ring
- 5 to 10 minutes for the discussion.





## Learning Messages

Unless the team feels whole, there is every reason to put personal interests and individual priorities before those of the team.

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