

Straw Tower Exercise

Purpose

In order for teams to succeed, they must learn to work together productively. This exercise will provide teams with an opportunity to work together to accomplish a goal. In so doing, teams will learn more about how individual behaviors can benefit or hinder the overall group performance.

Materials

- 25 straws (preferably bendy straws)

Process

- Assemble students into their teams
- Assign a member of each team to be the team observer
- Explain the objective of the exercise to the teams
 - Build the tallest self-supporting structure you can with 25 straws

Rules:

- You have 20 minutes to plan your structure
- There is NO assembling of parts during the planning time
 - EXCEPTION: you can use 2 practice straws
- You can LAYOUT pieces during planning but NO trial assembly
- Construction period lasts for 90 seconds

Debriefing

- Bring the teams together and measure their structures
- Announce the winner and give them a round of applause
- Ask the Team Observers to give their reports
- Ask the each team to provide some feedback on what they could have done differently to improve their performance
- Ask the Team Observers and teams to discuss what the differences were between the team with the best tower and the other teams

Observer Instructions:

- Observe your group and answer the following questions. Be prepared to give a report to the entire class at the end of the activity.
 - What are group members doing that seems to benefit group performance?
 - What are group members doing that seems to hinder group performance?
 - What is the general group climate? What examples of behaviors support this?
 - What kinds of roles emerged during this exercise?
 - Was there a leader?
 - Did one person take control?
 - Did individuals have specific tasks?