

Balloon Castles/Experiential Learning

“Successful Teamwork and Experiential Learning/Balloon Castles”

How can leaders facilitate active learning in a team environment?

- Topics:** Teamwork, experiential learning, outcome-driven project planning
- Summary:** This includes an introduction to the DIGA experiential learning model and the ORP (Outcomes, Relationships, Procedure) model. It reinforces the group’s understanding of the concepts by providing a team-based activity.
- Outcomes:** Participants learn a model for outcome-driven teamwork.
Participants engage in a hands-on activity to illustrate concepts of teamwork and planning.
Participants engage in an experiential learning feedback cycle to evaluate what works and what needs work in a teamwork setting.
- Duration:** 2 hours
- Materials:** Handouts 1–3 (with Handouts 1 and 3 also in chart pack “poster” form)
Several balloons, scratch paper, and other found material/per small group
One roll of scotch tape/per small group
- Background:** This module can be conducted with a large group in a large room. However, the activity is best served by small groups of 6–10 participants grouped in spaces throughout the room.

The group(s) will first be briefed on an experiential learning model called DIGA. After that, they will engage in a group activity to be followed by an evaluative discussion. Using the DIGA model, the group(s) will also be able to recognize their overall strengths and weaknesses as a working team.
- Procedure:** *Warm-Up:*
Introduce the nature of this activity. Participants will first learn the ORP–Balancing for Success model, which provides a structure for how to put together an outcome-driven team project. The group(s) will then perform a team activity and will evaluate it using an experiential learning model.

The Activity:
1. The ORP (Outcomes-Relationships-Procedure) model is an approach to team project planning that focuses on successful final outcomes, while balancing other factors to keep the project manageable.
 2. You may wish to write out the contents of Handout 1 on chart paper. With the group, walk through the three components of the model, giving examples as often as possible.

3. Divide the large group into teams of 6–8. The teams will have 15 minutes to use the balloons, scratch paper, found items, and tape to build the tallest freestanding structure (Balloon Castle) they can. They are free to communicate while working but cannot exceed the time limit.
4. When the groups are finished, ask a representative of each to briefly describe the structure her or his team created and the process. Relate these descriptions and experiences back to the ORP model.
5. Divide the participants into small teams again and have the group leader introduce the DIGA experiential learning model. The DIGA model helps participants identify learning from a real world experience. Handouts 2 and 3 describe the model. The group leaders may want to write out the text from Handout 3 on chart paper in introducing the DIGA concepts.
6. With the group leaders facilitating the DIGA model, the small teams evaluate the balloon castle building team process.

Wrap Up:

Based on the experience shared during Balloon Castles and the insights gained during the debrief of the activity, ask group members to brainstorm and list their **strengths** when working together. Next, have them identify some potential “trouble spots” or **challenges** that the team has when working together. Finally, have them determine some **preventions** they can put in place now to ensure that the group works well together on future projects.

HANDOUT 1

Balancing for Success

OUTCOMES

Definition of Success

- ❖ Accomplishing the task
- ❖ Achieving the goal

Measures of Success

- ❖ Is the product high quality?
- ❖ Was the product created in a timely manner?
- ❖ Does the product meet internal and external expectations?

RELATIONSHIPS

Definition of Success

- ❖ The way people relate to each other
- ❖ The way people relate to the organization
- ❖ The way people feel about their involvement and contributions

Measures of Success

- ❖ Am I feeling supported?
- ❖ Do I trust others?
- ❖ Am I feeling valued?

PROCEDURE

Definition of Success

- ❖ The manner in which the work was completed
- ❖ The manner in which the work was designed and managed
- ❖ The manner in which the work was tracked and evaluated

Measures of Success

- ❖ Is the process clear and does it make sense?
- ❖ Is the process efficient?
- ❖ Is the process appropriate to the task?

HANDOUT 2

DIGA: Taking People Through the Learning Cycle

The experiential learning cycle or DIGA takes learners through five stages of learning for processing their experiences.

Stage 1: The Experience

The experience forms the basis for the rest of the cycle. The activity should produce information or understanding. Some experiences that lead to a sense of discovery include doing a structured activity, following a ropes course activity, going through a new program, or experiencing a conflict. It is important to carefully observe the group during the experience and take notes on significant interactions if necessary.

Stage 2: Describe

This stage is when participants describe or share their experience by reporting their observations and reactions to the group. It is a time to find out what events occurred and how each member of the group may have experienced the activity differently. This is a time for each person to report his or her experience. Questions are directed towards gathering data:

What happened?

What did you see?

What were your impressions of that experience?

Can you describe your experience?

How did you feel?

What is your perspective?

What surprised you?

Let's hear from someone who has a different reaction.

Stage 3: Interpret

After the participants share their ideas and reactions, it is important to help individuals see and evaluate any trends or dynamics that may be emerging in the group. The trainer's role is to help participants not only notice what happened, but also to ask "Why?" The interpret stage often happens naturally when participants are describing their experiences. It is fine to let them interpret as they describe. Questions are directed towards making sense of the data for the individual and the group:

Why did that happen?

What went on in the group?

What caused that particular event?

What kinds of patterns are you seeing here?

How was that significant?

How might it have been different?

What does that mean to you?

Stage 4: Generalize

The group determines if what went on during the experience was unique or if it happens in other situations. Participants are asked to focus on linking the experience to the real world. The goal is to identify similarities and state principles that they can apply to other situations. Generalizing helps participants transfer their personal learning from the experience to the rest of the world. Questions should be directed towards promoting generalizations and creating links with the real world:

- Where have you seen this before?
- What does this remind you of?
- What does this make you think of?
- Does this remind you of anything?
- What does that help explain?
- What does that suggest to you about _____ in general?
- What did you learn or relearn?

Stage 5: Apply

Participants begin to plan ways to use what they have learned through this experience in the future. They discover how they can use these lessons at home, school, and/or work. Giving participants the opportunity to not only reflect on the lessons they have learned, but to share with and teach others further enhances learning retention. Questions should ask participants to consider how they can apply what they have learned to their personal and professional lives:

- What do you want to remember from this experience in the future?
- How could you apply that?
- What would you do differently in a similar situation in the future?
- How could you hold on to that feeling?
- How could you make it better?

HANDOUT 3

The DIGA Model (condensed version)

- Describe** Describe what just happened. (You can even break it up to describe what happened in the planning stage or the building stage).
What was this activity like for you?
- Interpret** Use an example from what was said in Describe (e.g., the way the group divided up responsibilities):
What struck you about the way the team divided up the responsibilities?
Were specific responsibilities assigned to particular people? How were the responsibilities divided up? Why?
What does this suggest to you about yourself and the group?
- Generalize** Was one aspect of the Team Accomplishment Model (TAM) neglected over another? Why do you think this happened?
What did you learn about each other's working preferences?
Does this remind you of anything that has happened back at your site recently?
What did you learn or relearn?
- Apply** What are your options for handling a similar situation back at your site?
How can you take this experience and apply it to a situation back home?