

# 28

---

## Memory

### Description

This activity identifies motivating and demotivating factors in the workplace and elsewhere. The activity is powerful, but involves high risk. Participants experience the frustrations of disadvantage and possible failure in accomplishing a task well. This should be handled with great sensitivity by the trainer.

### Objectives

By the end of this activity participants will:

- have experienced or observed the effects on the individual of the poor performance of a task
- have experienced or observed the effects on the individual of performing a task well
- have experienced or observed the results of disadvantage
- have realized the importance of putting a task or instruction in context.

### Participants

Number: 10-20.

Type: Managers, supervisors, or anyone who has contact with the general public in the course of their work.

### Time

40 minutes to one hour and 30 minutes.

### Resources

- Enough space and seating for two groups, and for individuals within the groups to work independently and *out of sight of each other's work*.
- Pen/pencil for each participant.
- Two sheets of 8 ½" x 11" paper for each participant.
- Clipboard, table space, or some other means of lap-top writing, for each participant.
- One copy each of Handouts 28.1, 28.2 and 28.3 for each participant.

### Method

*Step 1:* Introduce the activity. Do not make reference to the objectives at this stage.

*Step 2:* Issue two sheets of 8 ½" x 11" paper to participants and ensure they each have a pencil or pen and something on which to lean their paper. Outline the rules of the exercise.

*Step 3:* Issue a copy of Handout 28.1 to each participant, *face down* so that the symbols cannot be seen.

*Step 4:* Ask participants to turn over their exercise sheets and to study and memorize the symbols. Detail is important as points will be deducted for inaccuracies.

*Step 5:* Tell participants to reproduce the symbols on a blank sheet of paper, as accurately as possible, as they are called out.

*Step 6:* Call out the symbols, in the order they appeared on the exercise sheet.

*Step 7:* Ask participants to look at the exercise sheet and assign points out of a possible 40 points.

### Notes

The first part of the activity will test individuals' memory/visual recall, and will be in the form of a short exercise. Participants will be given a sheet of paper on which a series of symbols are drawn (Handout 28.1). They will be given two minutes to remember the symbols, then asked to turn the sheet over, and to reproduce the symbols in accurate detail.

Ensure that each participant is sitting where s/he cannot be overlooked by a co-worker. Tell them that looking at a neighbor's work is not permitted; neither is asking a colleague for help.

Instruct participants that they should not turn the exercise sheet over until told to do so.

Allow exactly two minutes. At the end of this time tell participants to put the sheet of symbols they have just been studying *face down* on the floor beside them.

When their work is marked, points will be deducted for inaccuracies. For example, a gate drawn with five bars, instead of four will have points deducted.

Allow sufficient time for individuals to complete each symbol. Rules about conferring or looking at anyone else's work must be strictly upheld by the trainer.

This can be done by the individual or in pairs. An accurate representation of the symbol gets 2 points; a minor inaccuracy scores 1 point. Major inconsistencies do not merit a score.

For example, the size of the symbol drawn would not matter; one or more grapes missing would not matter, but a stem bending in the wrong direction could have a point deducted; the stem missing altogether might not merit a score. *Decisions about marking remain at the discretion of the trainer, and depend to some extent on the ability of the group.*

### Method (continued)

*Step 8:* Ask, by a show of hands, if anyone achieved maximum points; did anyone score between 35 and 40 or between 30 and 35?...and so on until everyone's score is established.

*Step 9:* Ask the 50 percent with the highest scores to go to one side of the room (Group A); those with the lowest scores to go to the other side of the room (Group B). Arrange seating so that, again, no participant overlooks another.

*Step 10:* Outline the second stage of the exercise. The same rules apply regarding cheating or conferring.

*Step 11:* Give out Handout 28.2 to Group A and 28.3 to Group B. It is important that both groups think they are receiving the same material. Issue the sheets *face down* so that the symbols cannot be seen. Participants may not turn over their sheets until told to do so.

*Step 12:* Ask participants to turn over their exercise sheets and to study and memorize the symbols. Detail is important.

### Notes (continued)

Praise high scores in an appropriate way (to establish a feeling of security, even slight superiority with the high-scoring participants). Record the scores so that the 50 per cent of the highest scoring participants can form subgroup A; those with the lowest scores form subgroup B.

One subgroup must not be able to see the work of anyone in the other subgroup and no individual should be able to see the work of a colleague.

Explain that in order to reinforce the evidence of the exercise, or to see if there will be a difference if it is conducted a second time (now that participants are familiar with it) the exercise will be repeated, but this time the symbols will be more complicated and perhaps more difficult to remember. Because of this an extra minute of time will be given to memorize the new sheet of symbols.

The symbols issued to Group A will be a combination of more complicated images but ones which form a logical progression from those already learned, or which can be easily worked out by context, plus a few new easy symbols. The sheet of symbols issued to Group B will be an entirely new set of shapes which bear little or no resemblance to what they are supposed to represent.

The success of the activity relies on keeping from the participants the knowledge that each subgroup has a different set of material. The exercise sheets (Handouts 28.2 and 28.3) should be issued carefully. The easiest way is to arrange the stack of exercises back to back and issue one group's from the top of the pile, and the other group's from the bottom.

Allow exactly three minutes. At the end of this time, tell participants to put their exercise sheets *face down* on the floor beside them, as previously.

### Method (continued)

*Step 13:* Explain that the symbols will be called out, as before, in the same order in which they appeared on the exercise sheet. The same rules about copying from a neighbor or asking for help apply.

*Step 14:* Ask participants to look at their exercise sheet and to assign points as before—2 points for an accurate reproduction, 1 point for a minor difference or omission, no points for major discrepancies.

*Step 15:* Repeat the process of establishing the scores. Out of a possible 40, did anyone get over 35? etc. Continue until the lowest score has been established.

### Notes (continued)

Ensure that participants have enough paper to complete the task.

Allow enough time for individuals to complete their copy before calling out the next symbol.

Closely observe the reactions of participants as this part of the activity progresses:

- Do members of group *A* visibly start to relax when they realize that they can cope with the task?
- Are there expressions of smugness, superiority, confidence, or just concentration?
- How are the members of Group *B* coping?
- Is there evidence of anxiety, despondency, annoyance?
- At what stage (if at all) does the first person give up?
- Does anyone abandon the task altogether?
- Is there evidence of individuals looking to colleagues for reassurance, or to see if anyone else is having difficulties?
- What does the body language tell you about various participants' state of mind during this part of the activity?

Again, participants can mark their sheets alone or in pairs providing that the partnership is from within the same subgroup. At this stage it is still important for subgroups to think that they were working from the same material.

It is quite possible that some of Group *A* improved on their scores of the previous round, but highly probable that Group *B* did far worse. In fact it is extremely unlikely that anyone in that group even equalled their previous score. Some will feel that they have done abysmally, and will have lost confidence as a result.

**Method (continued)**

*Step 16:* Lead a discussion on the issues arising from the exercise.

**Notes (continued)**

*It was stated in the Description section of this activity that the risks were high. The processing of the activity, especially from this point, should be handled with care and sensitivity by the trainer so that individuals who have experienced "failure" (in their eyes), demotivation, anxiety, frustration or just annoyance, make positive use of this experience, and that they leave the activity with morale and self-esteem intact.*

Below are some suggestions on how to open the discussion on the issues involved in the exercise. The way the discussion progresses will depend on the responses of the participants however, so although the following points should be covered, they can only be looked on as a guide. Trainer observations should be added as appropriate.

It is important that the groups discover for themselves, during the discussion, that different sets of materials were used. This information should not be offered by the trainer. It is also important that sufficient time is allowed for groups to work out their feelings about this seeming duplicity by the trainer.

*Questions you might ask*

(To individuals in Group B)

- How do you feel about your score this time?
- Was your score better or worse than you expected?
- Are you surprised about the quality of your powers of concentration/recall?
- How did you feel while you were participating in the exercise?
- How do you feel now?

(To individuals in Group A)

- How do you feel about your score this time?
- Are you surprised at the results?
- How did you feel while you were participating in the exercise?

**Method (continued)**

**Notes (continued)**

- How do you feel now?
- Did the need to succeed cause pressure or present itself as a challenge?
- Did the "examination" type of atmosphere and the time constraints cause stress or pressure?
- How did this affect performance?

(To the whole group)

- Why do you think there was such a disparity in the scores of individuals?
- Why do you think that one group did much better than the other?

It usually emerges at this point that different sets of information have been issued. This realization can be encouraged by questions such as:

- Why was it relatively easy for you to remember the symbol for, e.g., marriage?...hospital?...wine?
- Did anyone not remember the symbol for happiness?...envelope?...Why?

When individuals realize that they have seemingly been duped, reactions will vary from relief to anger. A few minutes should be allowed for these emotions to take their course. Groups can exchange their exercise sheets so that each group can see the other's material.

*Step 17:* Explore the feelings of group members, and how their self-perceptions affected performance.

Ask participants to identify and explore their feelings during and after the exercise. Some feelings and the effects these had on performance which might emerge from this discussion, are indicated below.

Individuals from Group A may have experienced feelings of superiority, confidence in their own skills/ability, security, companionship with their peer group etc., then after realization of Group B's disadvantage, a slight deflation of ego, annoyance with the exercise/trainer, sympathy with Group B and so on may have occurred.

**Method (continued)**

*Step 18:* Lead a discussion to elicit the learning points of the activity.

**Notes (continued)**

Individuals from Group *B* may have experienced feelings of inferiority, of being "second class citizens" once assigned to group *B*, of being less intelligent, less perceptive. This often produces the phenomenon "self-fulfilling prophecy"—if you expect to perform poorly, then you will. There will have been an element of this in their performance in Part 2 of the exercise.

After realizing that they had to memorize a different, and far more difficult set of symbols, they may feel cheated, annoyed, or possibly relieved to know that there was a reason for poor performance.

*Participants should be encouraged to feel good about their performances under the circumstances.*

**Questions you might ask**

- You have either experienced or discussed the importance of context; it was easier to remember or work out a symbol if there was logic behind it. The same principle applies to allocating tasks in the workplace, giving information to the public etc.
- How can this learning point be applied to allocating tasks in the workplace?
- Do staff for whom you are responsible always know why they have to perform a particular task?...where a piece of work originated?...why they have to perform a task in a certain way?...what will happen to their work? (For example, where will statistics go?...to what department?...for what purpose?...to what end?)
- If time is not spent explaining such things, what could be the possible effects on a member of staff's work?
- What could be the effect on that member of staff's morale?
- What could be the long-term effects for management?

**Method (continued)**

**Notes (continued)**

- Is sufficient information given to members of the public, e.g., at reception desks, for them to go away feeling confident with the service they are receiving?
- Why is context important when giving information to the public?

Group *B* had insufficient information to perform the task with any degree of confidence.

- Can you think of situations in your workplace where insufficient information makes your work difficult?
- How does this make you feel?
- Could there be areas where staff responsible to you receive insufficient information to perform their task with confidence?
- Remembering how you felt working under pressure and to a strict deadline, and recognizing that this is often a reality in the workplace, how could these pressures/stresses be lessened for the individual?
- Are unreasonable time limits set?
- How could this be avoided?

Group *B* experienced being disadvantaged; they did not have adequate information to perform the task well. Their previous performance (in part 1 of the exercise) may have lowered confidence and feelings of self-worth. Experience and knowledge that they had previously gained were of no help to them. They had been assembled together as people who may or may not have viewed themselves as a "group."

Group *A* experienced being advantaged. They knew that they had performed the first part of the task well and better than their colleagues in Group *B*. They had been assembled as a dominant group of people. Their past experience and knowledge helped them perform Part 2 of the exercise. They may or may not have developed a view of themselves as group



## Method (continued)

*Step 19:* Conclude the activity by referring back to the objectives.

## Notes (continued)

*A* members and/or of the membership of group *B*.

- Group *B* had a symbol to remember representing "marriage" which comprised a combination of the international symbols for "man" and "woman." This was logical, but meant that the group had to unlearn the symbols remembered at Step 1 of the exercise.
- What groups of people are disadvantaged in this way—having to discard information already assimilated, then relearn a new set of concepts?
- With people for whom English is a second language, are there areas where concepts have to be "unlearned" in the context of their working/living in a new country?
- If someone is appointed to your place of work who is experienced in the skills required for the job, but not familiar with the systems of your organization, what are the initial difficulties s/he might face?
- As a manager, what are your responsibilities in this matter?
- How should you ensure that the feelings of disadvantage, anxiety, lack of confidence etc., which can lead to demotivation, despondency, work errors, even abandonment of task or job, are not experienced by individuals at your place of work?






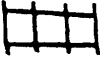










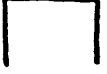



To ensure that each participant leaves the activity with positive feelings about the experience and the learning points, refer to the objectives of the activity, then ask individuals what they found most powerful/enlightening and in what way the learning can be applied in their place of work.





## Exercise

You have two minutes to memorize the symbols below. Detail is important and points will be deducted for inaccuracies.

1		MAN	11		BOAT
2		WOMAN	12		SMILE
3		FLOWER	13		FENCE
4		STAMP	14		HAND
5		BUILDING	15		TELEPHONE
6		GRASS	16		GLASS
7		FISH	17		GRAPES
8		CHAIR	18		PLUS
9		TABLE	19		UMBRELLA
10		ELECTRICITY	20		ANIMAL

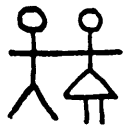
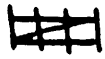


















Reproduced from *50 Activities for Interpersonal Skills Training*,  
Sue Bishop and David Taylor, Gower, Aldershot, 1991.





## Exercise

You have three minutes to memorize the symbols below. Detail is important and points will be deducted for inaccuracies.

- |    |   |             |    |  |                 |
|----|---|-------------|----|--|-----------------|
| 1  |    | MARRIAGE    | 11 |    | GATE            |
| 2  |    | CHILD       | 12 |    | GLOVE           |
| 3  |    | GARDEN      | 13 |    | TELEPHONE BOOTH |
| 4  |    | HOSPITAL    | 14 |    | WINE            |
| 5  |  | ENVELOPE    | 15 |   | CARROT          |
| 6  |  | DESK        | 16 |  | HAMMOCK         |
| 7  |  | ELECTRICIAN | 17 |  | RAIN            |
| 8  |  | WATER       | 18 |  | FLOWER SHOP     |
| 9  |  | SAILING     | 19 |  | ZOO             |
| 10 |  | HAPPINESS   | 20 |  | SWIMMING        |




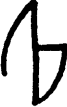
















Reproduced from *50 Activities for Interpersonal Skills Training*,  
Sue Bishop and David Taylor, Gower, Aldershot, 1991.





## Exercise

You have three minutes to memorize the symbols below. Detail is important and points will be deducted for inaccuracies.

1		MARRIAGE	11		GATE
2		CHILD	12		GLOVE
3		GARDEN	13		TELEPHONE BOOTH
4		HOSPITAL	14		WINE
5		ENVELOPE	15		CARROT
6		DESK	16		HAMMOCK
7		ELECTRICIAN	17		RAIN
8		WATER	18		FLOWER SHOP
9		SAILING	19		ZOO
10		HAPPINESS	20		SWIMMING

Reproduced from *50 Activities for Interpersonal Skills Training*,  
Sue Bishop and David Taylor, Gower, Aldershot, 1991.

