STRATEGIC TEAM BUILDING GAME: MAXIMIZE YOUR TEAM TALENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Team dynamics and diversity play critical roles in the success of a business. When forming startups, people are commonly drawn to others who are like themselves and often miss the optimizing results obtainable by building high-performing teams that are founded on diversity of talents, knowledge, skills, and abilities. Additionally, founders may lack insight on the importance of seeking training opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills of their team members, which in turn may hinder maximum growth potential. To address these issues, we developed the Strategic Team Building Game, which reveals bias in teambuilding, requires students to communicate and network, exposes students to risk and recovery from failure, and demonstrates the power of teamwork to build a high functioning organization.

Enhancing academic content with engaging classroom activities is more important than ever in a culture of students with diminishing attention spans. Games are effective learning tools; they provide a way to increase student engagement and make learning fun (Aldrich, 2005) and are useful in teaching principles of entrepreneurship through practice (Neck, Greene, & Brush, 2014). As entrepreneurship educators, we find that students lack communication skills and need more opportunities to practice networking and working together to achieve success as a team.

GAME SYNOPSIS

The game is based on key concepts from *Good to Great* (Collins, 2001), and *First, Break All the Rules* (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). At the start of the game, students learn to "get the right people on the bus" (Collins, 2001, p.63) by including four areas of talent domains identified in *StrengthsFinder 2.0* (Rath, 2017). After the student's network and build their teams with talent diversity, the goal is to attempt to increase one another's knowledge, skills, and

abilities (KSAs) to "create heroes in every role" (Buckingham, 1999 p.184) and improve overall team capacity for high performance.

In the Innovation Teaching Session, we intend to present an overview of the game with visuals and share our experiences testing it in our classes. We will have enough time to play a condensed version of the skill-building round with conference participants.

Game Goals

After playing the game, students will learn:

- Communication skills by networking and meeting new people to build a team

- Team-building skills by supporting others to succeed as a group

- Resilience by recovering from failure when the team experiences problems

Materials needed

6 colored Solo® cups of each color (red, purple, yellow, and blue)

5 white Solo® cups for Crisis Cups

Rocks and or water to use as weights for cups

Colored paper (colors to match cups) for cards, each with coded number for gameplay

Ping pong ball

Colored cards. These represent the four talent domains developed by Gallup (Rath, 2017) and have skill numbers printed on the front.

Insert Table 1 about here

The instructor creates these cards before game day and to minimize bias, skill levels 1to 5 are paired with a letter (we used A-1, B-2, C-3, D-4, and F-5). The numbers represent the amount of

knowledge, skills, and abilities the student brings to the organization, ranging from 1 (a recent college graduate) to 5 (the most valuable employee).

Colored cups. These correlate with the cards and associated talent domains.

Crisis Cups are placed in the middle of each ring of colored cups and in the center. They represent the issues plaguing businesses that lead to losing the best people: lack of recognition, disorganization, poor leadership, and unethical behavior.

Part One: Students Form Organic Teams

Without offering any commentary on how to play the game, the instructor passes out color cards to students in rows with the same colors stacked together, giving matching colors to students sitting next to one another. After passing out the cards, instruct them to "form teams of four". In our experience, students form their group with those seated nearby and therefore, have one or 2 colors represented.

After they are grouped, the instructor asks if their team has members of each of the four colors and then reveals the first unidentified factor (hidden assumption): the colors represent Gallop's four quadrants of personal talents. Ask students to recall previous class lectures on effective startup teams and discuss how successful; high functioning companies are founded with a group of individuals possessing diverse talents.

Lesson: It's easy to form a business or team with those who are closest (proximity). Teams that do, can miss an opportunity to find others who have remarkable and necessary skills to bring to the table.

Part Two: Form Diverse, Dynamic Teams

Students without four colors on their teams start over. This requires them to or get up out of their seats and meet others from across the room and network. Once they have found their

teammates, ask the class, "who has a great team? Tell us why". Perhaps the groups sought out others based only on having only varied card colors, or they looked at others' physical attributes, and/or codes on cards.

At this time, the instructor reveals the significance of the codes on the cards, then the teams are scored on the first round. Announce that the goal is to develop all the team members to level 5 in knowledge and skills. This isn't as easy as it sounds, because organizations can be complex and disorganized.

Lesson: "You can't judge a book by its cover." Dig deeper when selecting members for your team and find the hidden gems that have the KSAs necessary to lead your team to the top.

Part three: Advance Your Team by Building Teammate Skills

To improve team performance, students must identify the members that need training to advance their KSAs, and they must work together to build a stronger team. Taking turns by team, each member shoots a ping-pong ball, aiming at the colored cup associated with a teammate that is not yet a "5" in abilities, calling the color of their target. For each ball that lands in the correct (color) cup, the team earns two points for that color and moves up the scale; if they land in a cup where they already have a level 5 member, there are no points. In Round 2 and beyond, if they sink a ball in the wrong color, they lose a point.

When a ball lands in a Crisis Cup, the team experiences misfortune resulting from poor business management and practices that have a negative impact on the organization; they lose people to competitors. They lose their most skilled member on the team and trade with the team that is next in the shooting order for a person with the same colored card and a lower number. At the end of the round, record the team scores. The team that increases their skill levels the most

wins bonus points. With time permitting, repeat a second and third round of play, giving some teams an opportunity to recover losses.

Lesson: It's not that easy to keep your best people or to increase the KSA's of people on your team. Organizations that avoid problems and are well-managed can stay the course in the long run.

Scoring

Each team of four will receive points based on the diversity of color cards and KSA skill level.

- 5 points for each different color card
- 1-5 points for the KSA level on the card

DISCUSSION

We teach the importance of building strong teams in our entrepreneurship classes. This game gives students in our introductory entrepreneurship courses the opportunity to practice networking, team building, and recovery from setbacks. We tested the activity in the classroom, and the game appears to meet our goals. As we predicted, in the first round of team-building, every team had to start over and network with individuals they didn't know from across the room.

An online survey was created for anonymous student feedback, receiving 70% response rate. Ninety three percent experienced an improved understanding of dynamic team building.

Every survey respondent found the game engaging (93% found it very to extremely engaging) and all students recommended playing this game in future classes. We asked them to describe their key takeaways; one student responded, "The ability to not be afraid of failure is powerful. Teamwork is very key along with encouragement and faith. Confidence doesn't hurt." Five other students experienced teamwork as their key takeaway:

"Helping your peers/ coworkers improve will help the Team overall."

"Bringing another teammate up can be difficult."

"Being able to come up with a team plan and to regroup when those plans fail in order to reach the goal."

Fear of failure was a recurring theme throughout the game:

"There will be downfalls. You need to learn how to control them to be competitive."

"That you can bounce back from a loss."

"Not to fear risk."

"Take risks, win big."

"You have to bounce back and adapt."

One student stated that "communication is key" and another learned "strategic planning, and it really simulated the reality of the business world". Students also made suggestions on rule clarification, which we incorporated in the instructions above for future play. Overall, the objectives were met, substantiated by student feedback.

REFERENCES

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Table 1

Cup and card color significance.

Color	Talent Domain	Description
Red	Strategic Thinking	Analyze situations and cast vision
Purple	Executing	Implement and work to find solutions and accomplish goals
Yellow	Influencing	Sell ideas to outsiders
Green	Relationship Building	Build relationship bonds within teams

Adapted from *Strengthsfinder 2.0.* (Rath, 2017).