

Learning Squared

Two Practical Exercises in Collaborative Learning and Planning



NOTES FOR TEACHERS

Using Learning Squared to explore the personal skills that help you to be a good team member.

The Learning Squared toolbox includes two different activities: Broken Squares and Hollow Square. Each of these explores aspects of teamwork but the emphasis is different.

In **Broken Squares**, an exercise that does not allow verbal communication, success requires a willingness to identify the needs of other team members and make 'offers' that will allow other people to complete their part of the task. This is a key lesson in being able to identify with others and give away something that they might need. The focus is on playing a part in achieving a team goal rather than individual success.

In **Hollow Square**, the emphasis is on using effective written and verbal communication to brief another team to achieve a task. This is a planning task that highlights accuracy in giving instructions, good time management and the value of face-to-face or direct communication.

Follow the instructions and run the activity exactly as described in the accompanying notes for adult use. The notes in the manual, and the review areas, are as relevant to students and younger learners as they are to adult learners.

You need to make no changes to the activity process, although you may need to consider the length of time you ask the students to work for before intervening. Judge this upon their levels of concentration and focus and build in breaks/ progress reviews as required.

In **Broken Squares** the key learning points are:

1. The need to offer (ideas, suggestions, resources, support) rather than waiting to be asked.
2. The need to be pro-active in generating possible solutions.
3. The need to allow others to take responsibility and do things on your behalf.
4. The difficulty of agreeing a problem-solving process without communication and the amount of trust this requires.
5. The importance of agreeing a solution when there are different ways of achieving success.

These are the key learning points to draw out from the exercise. These can be used when supporting students in preparing for any form of team-based project work. A simple process of explaining what you have to offer to a team, and what support you need from them, can be very helpful in setting up high performing work teams.

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In **Hollow Square** the key learning points are:

1. If people are dependent upon your work, they need to be kept informed of your progress.
2. It is important to talk to people about how they like to receive instructions, information and help – do not make assumptions.
3. Communication involves two partners: the giver and the receiver. However good your outward communication may seem, you have not communicated well unless you have checked that your message has been received and understood.
4. In any task, you must balance the time taken planning and the time allowed for task completion. (For example, in this exercise many planning groups do not realize that their planning time must include briefing the operating team. They do not allow time for this and so there is no opportunity to check the operating team's understanding of the task and the process.)

These are the key learning points to draw out from the exercise. These can be used when supporting students in preparing for any form of team-based project work. This enables students to explore how to work together through the stages of a project, either as a big group or as delegated sub-groups. They learn the value of on-going communication, regular progress reviews and a structured planning process that is flexible enough to accommodate necessary changes.

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REVIEW

Suggested questions to use when reviewing [Broken Squares](#).

1. How did it feel to have to work in silence?
2. Who made the first offer of a piece and how did you feel about that?
3. What did you do to contribute to the exercise?
4. How easy do you find it to trust other people to do their best for you? What helps to build that trust?
5. When you work in a team, what is the most important thing that you, personally, can contribute?
6. What can other people do for you to help you to work at your best?

Suggested questions to use when reviewing [Hollow Square](#).

1. If you were involved in the planning group, what efforts did you make to keep in touch with the operating team and tell them what was going on?
2. If you were involved in the operating group, what efforts did you make to keep in touch with the planning team and establish what they were doing?
3. Was there any discussion between teams about the best way of sharing information and instructions? If not, why not? If there was, how was this initiated and what value did it bring?
4. What are the lessons from this exercise about choosing appropriate forms of communication (eg. face-to-face, oral/recorded, written)? What implications does this have for choosing the best form of communication in a world in which multi-media communication is almost always available?
5. What are the lessons in this exercise about giving and receiving instructions and briefing other people?
6. What are the lessons in this exercise about working in teams, when the whole team may not be available all of the time?

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LEARNING SUMMARY

When summarising the learning from these exercises, reinforce the following learning points.

1. People you are working with have different needs. Take time to think about what those are and see how you can help them, rather than only focusing on your own task.
2. Choose the right medium of communication for the messages you need to send and receive – don't automatically rely upon your own favoured media. Teams rely upon good, shared communication so take time to get it right.
3. Think about what the team offers you and what you offer other team members. Be willing to accept help that is offered.
4. Work together to agree the best way of doing things – if there are differences of opinion, establish a process for making decisions.
5. Don't think that it helps a team if you hold back information or ideas. Be prepared to offer your thoughts and opinions, even if they are ultimately rejected.
6. Try to make sure you have the 'big picture' of what is going on around you. This will help you to know how and where to apply your own effort.