

Broken Squares

Objectives: Students will be able to

1. Analyze certain aspects of cooperation in solving a group problem.
2. Become sensitive to some of their own behavior which may contribute toward or obstruct the solving of a group problem.
3. Identify the role of trust building in cooperation situations.

Group size: any number of groups, 5-6 people per group.

Time required: 45 to 90 minutes.

Materials needed: one set of broken squares for every six participants and observer's instructions for one member of each group.

Instructions: Divide the participants into groups of six. Five members of each group should form a small circle so they can work with the squares. The sixth person is the observer and should be given the observer's instructions. Give each group an envelope containing one set of squares. The set of squares is broken down into five sets of pieces, each set being all the pieces labelled by one of the letters A, B, C, D, E. These sets are given to the group, one set per member, in individual envelopes within the larger envelope. Do not let the group open the envelope until the instructions are read. Read the following instructions aloud:

"In each envelope there are five sets of pieces of paper for forming squares. When I give the signal to begin, the task of your group is to form five squares of equal size. The task will not be completed until each individual has before him or her a perfect square of the same size as that held by others. Specific limitations are imposed upon your group during this exercise. They are:

- No member may speak.
- No member may ask another member for a piece or in any way signal that another person is to give him or her a piece.
- No member may take a piece from another member.
- Members may, however, give their pieces to other members.

"Are the instructions clear?" (Questions are answered at this time.) "The observer in each group will enforce the rules. Begin working."

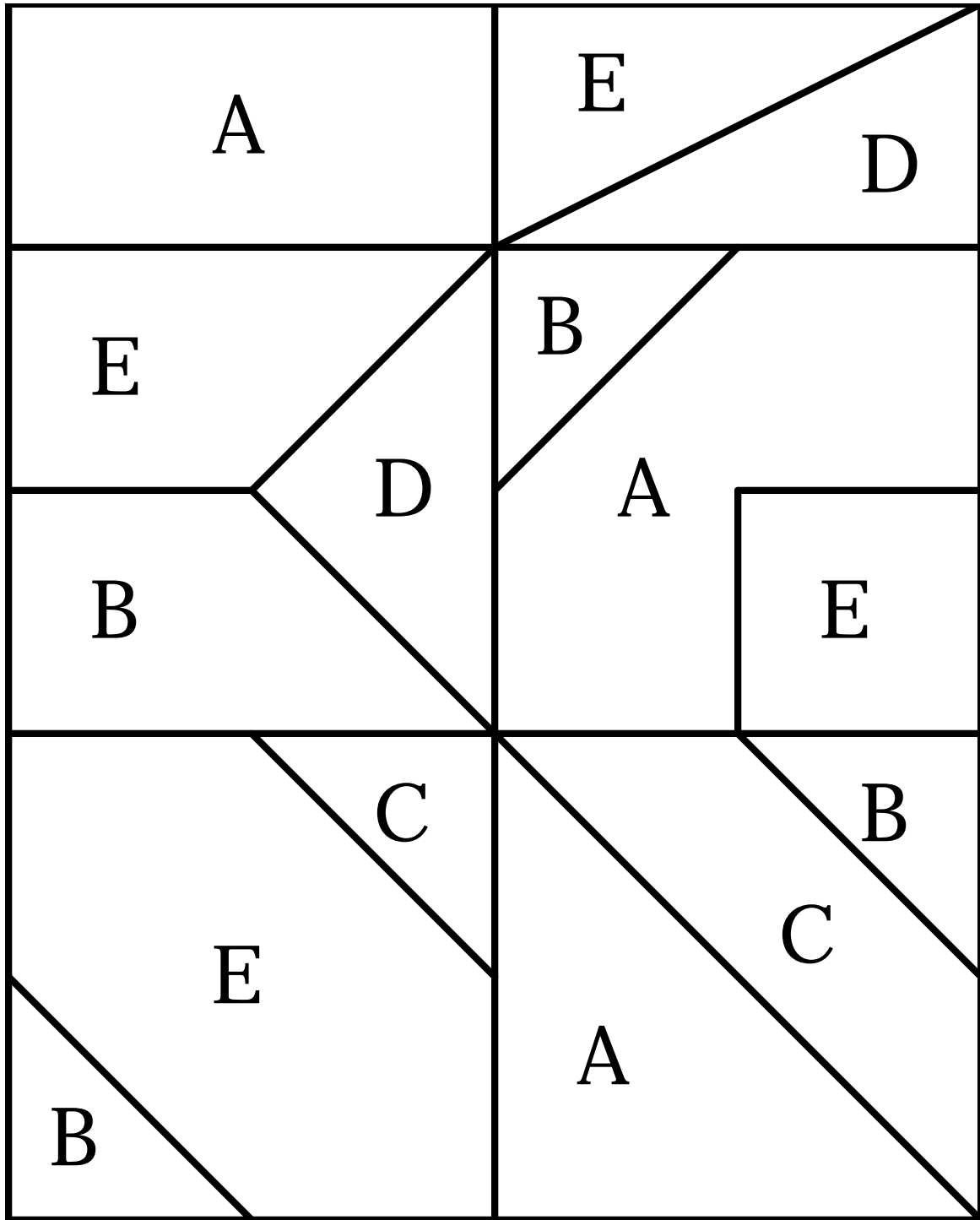
Debriefing Questions

1. How did you feel during the exercise? Why?
2. How many were frustrated? Why? (The usual answer to this question is, "I couldn't communicate." Suggest this is not true, but rather their normal patterns of communication were disrupted. They could communicate by giving away appropriate pieces.)
3. Ask the observers if anyone mentally dropped out when they had completed their square? Why? (For westerners with an individualistic orientation, we hear the instructions as individuals. Not everyone hears them this way.)
4. Was there any critical point at which the group started to cooperate? What was the cause?
5. What are some principles for successful group cooperation?
 - Each individual must understand the total problem
 - Each individual should understand how he or she can contribute toward solving the problem.
 - Each individual should be aware of the potential contributions of other people.

- There is a need to recognize the problems of other individuals, in order to aid them in making their maximum contribution.
6. How was trust developed or broken down within the whole group?
 7. What was necessary to build trust within the group context?

Broken Squares

Format for creating squares for use with Broken Squares exercise. All pieces labeled with the same letter should be put together in one envelope. This will give you 5 envelopes per group of 6 persons working with the exercise. (The extra person serves as an observer.)



Broken Squares Exercise

Instructions for the Observers

Observer: Your job is part observer and part judge. Make sure each participant observes the following rules while playing the game.

1. No talking, pointing, or any other kind of communicating among the five people in your group.
2. Participants may give pieces to other participants but may not take pieces from other members.
3. Participants may not simply throw their pieces into the center for others to take; they have to give the pieces directly to one individual at a time.
4. It is permissible for a member to give away all the pieces to his square, even if he has already formed a square.

Observations: As an observer, please record the following observations on this paper. You may record the names of individuals in your group who identify with a particular question. The participants are not to see these questions.

1. Who is willing to give away pieces of the puzzle?
2. Did anyone finish their puzzle and then somewhat divorce himself/herself from the struggles of the rest of the group?
3. Is there anyone who continually struggles with their pieces but yet is unwilling to give any or all of them away?
4. How many people are actively engaged in mentally putting the pieces together?
5. Periodically check the level of frustration or anxiety--who's pulling their hair out?
6. Was there any crucial turning point at which time the group began to cooperate?
7. Did anyone try to violate the rules by talking or pointing as a means of helping fellow members solve their puzzle?