



TOP TRAINING ACTIVITIES

THE HIDDEN CODE

Key Learning Points: Thinking outside the box, assumptions, first impressions, risk assessments, problem solving, different learning styles

Participants: 4 – 25

Duration: 15 minutes

Resources: 5 different colored pencils, felt tip pens or popsicle sticks, area large enough for participants to stand around facilitator

Description: A group activity where individuals try to find out a “pattern”, which is found by “looking outside the box”

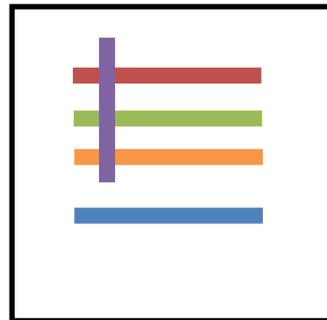
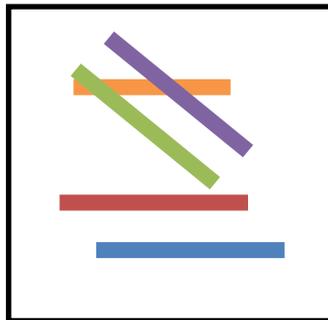
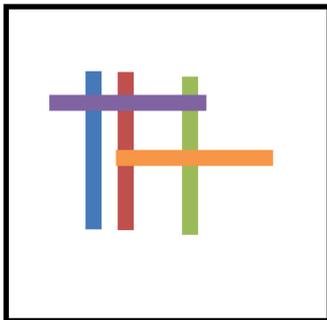
Notes: *I have done this activity many times. It is one of my favourites because it has so many learning links. As frustrating as it is, the participants also love it with many telling me they go home or back to work and try it out on family members and colleagues. Be ready to know when to stop this activity when some frustration levels are reaching their peak. I usually let participants know I have done this with high level engineers, police officers, investigators and military personnel, with many of them over thinking or getting stuck on the assumption that the code is in the pens. This makes those that get it feel smart and those that don't, feel that they must be high level thinkers (win-win).*

Watch the video [here](#).

Instructions:

This is best done on the floor, with the group gathered in a semi circle around you.

1. Lay the pens / Popsicle sticks on the floor in any pattern, making sure the participants watch you create an arrangement.



2. Rest one hand on your knee with your fingers becoming the 'code' e.g. two fingers means the number is 2.



3. Without mentioning the pens, or your hand, instruct the participants that when they can identify a number, to call it out.



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4. People will all have suggestions, usually based on how many intersections there are, how many different positions, etc. I usually change positions of the pens often, because it is the key to having the participants assume the answer lies with the pens rather than my fingers.
5. If anyone says the right number, tell them they are correct, but tell them we can't assume they understand the process because they got it right once. Accurate assessment usually consists of 2-3 pieces of evidence so you would like them to have a couple more turns. If they answer correctly remind them not to share how they got the answer with the rest of the group.
6. Once the correct number has been said, rearrange the pens in a different pattern and ask for the remaining participants to identify the new number.
7. Repeat this process often while giving hints such as, "Think outside of the square". I have even drawn an imaginary square around the pens for those who need visual direction.
8. When the majority of the group have figured out the "code", I often start making my fingers more obvious by tapping them on my knee, wriggling them, or looking at them.

Discussion:

- Who assumed the pattern was something to do with the pens? Why?
- What are some similar work experiences you may have had?
- Why is it important to look outside the box? *See things from different points of view and different angles, become more creative in our thinking, become more open minded...*
- What was frustrating about this exercise?
- In order for all participants to complete this task successfully, what needed to happen? *Thorough instructions, questions and answers, knowledge sharing, let go of assumptions ...*
- In order for tasks at work to be completed successfully what should we do? *Thorough instructions, questions and answers, knowledge sharing, let go of assumptions...*
- Why is it important to test someone for competence more than once? *First time may have been a fluke, someone else may have told the answer, they may have done the task a long time ago (outdated knowledge and experience)...*