A LESSON IN HIDE-AND-GO-SEEK: A TEAM BUILDING GAME

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ABSTRACT

This paper emanates from an on-going study into the use of outdoor sports and games to build interpersonal and teamwork skills within a formal academic curriculum in higher education. Working in teams of five students had to locate their tutor and escort him to a designated location (base camp) via several landmarks (rendezvous points) – without being intercepted by an opposing team. Winning was largely a matter of chance, but favoured highly cohesive teams with a strong leader/coordinator function. Participants reported a high level of enjoyment. The game gave freshers an opportunity to bond with their peers and to explore the university's hometown. While winning was important to all players, they were largely driven by the intrinsic reward derived from playing the game.

INTRODUCTION

In a largely service sector economy, Britain's employers require potential employees to be good team players and possess a good set of interpersonal skills to be effective in the workplace. This is evident in the person specifications highlighted in job adverts and recent employment surveys (Coleman, Seeds, & Edwards, 2007). While university education has been largely successful at imparting specific skills, they still have some way to go in their ability to teach more generic skills ("Are university degrees too academic?," 2006). The skills that universities are seen to be teaching seems to be at disparity with the skills (teamwork included) that graduates need to succeed in the workplace and to compete in a global economy (Vance, 2007).

Teamwork (unlike technical skills or substantive knowledge) is a 'compendium of the most useful generic skills' (Watson, 2002). Successful integration of teamwork in to the skills repertoire of a formal curriculum requires careful planning and innovative thinking. Unlike teaching of substantive content which tends to be didactic and instructive, generic skills require implementation of experiential and active learning strategies. A cooperative learning environment that immerses a student in the ethos of team work with hands-on activities are perceived to provide greater learning and application of theory than listening to lectures (Roebuck, 1998). For these innovative learning environments to function effectively, tutors need to devolve control to students whom they should trust and empower to manage their own learning. Essentially, the role of the tutor should change from one of "teacher/teller/transmitter" to that of "teacher/facilitator/coordinator" (Pitt, 2000). It is crucial for tutors to demonstrate strong leadership, deep commitment and a clear vision (Watson, 2002). Tutors must themselves set the example of teamwork (Ramirez, Velez-Arocho, Zayas-Castro, & Torres, 1998). Also critical to success is the comprehensive integration of a cooperative learning culture that is not merely an add-on to the traditionally individualistic philosophy.

A more controversial innovation concerns the assessment process. Traditionally, assessment has been biased towards the individual's performance over collaborative group-work. Cooperative learning procedures however require marks to be allocated to the cooperative learning activities, the extensive use of peer and self-assessment and collective performance measures (Gupta, 2004). This is especially true of courses that predominantly promote technical proficiency and content-knowledge. Tutors therefore need to carefully plan and integrate interpersonal assessment tools into their teaching (Ramirez et al., 1998). Weak-form-integration, such as one where students are encouraged to work in groups but grades are allocated for individual performance (with a minority allocation for collaborative group-work) tend to prove disastrous (Pitt, 2000). In such environments, students tend not to take group-work seriously and therefore do not make a genuine effort at it. Tutors do not see the need to actively support group work, and therefore do not create cooperative learning cultures to foster teamwork. The danger in such poorly designed learning environments is that they create disaffected learners who shy away from group-work in future situations. Where cooperative learning environments have been carefully planned and actively implemented they yield observably beneficial results. Students become more accountable for their actions and teams tend to manage team members through peer pressure. The teamwork culture leads to greater inclusion especially of international students. An inoffensive environment created by the teamwork ethic can encourage more timid and reserved students into leadership roles (Gupta, 2004). Introducing freshers into a teamwork culture can 'cement social structures and support networks, [reduce] drop out rates, and informally [function] as a mentoring and monitoring scheme'. It can also dismiss students conceptions of staff/student roles – mainly the "we pay you teach us" attitude (Watson, 2002). Fostering a teamwork culture within a cooperative learning environment also has a significant positive impact on academic performance and class attendance.

The aim of this learning project was to create an active learning environment that encouraged teamwork, by placing students in an experiential learning environment. Its research objective was to determine whether this particular game model encouraged desirable team behaviours. To measure team behaviours the scoring system adapted allowed inter-team collaboration and point sharing.

THE GAME

Loosely modelled on a special operations training exercise, the game involved participants operating in teams of five with the objective of finding and escorting a VIP (played by their tutor) to base-camp via designated rendezvous points (RV). The play area was defined on a map that participants could collect from the faculty office at noon. Teams would plan their approach for half-an-hour and set out on the search – which could last up to another three hours. A week earlier participants registered their teams and were briefed on the game rules and objectives. Participation was voluntary and winning did not result in any extrinsic reward such as a prize or extra course credits. Some simple rules of play were:

1. When an individual team-member finds the target, the entire team must assemble at that location before the VIP will move;
2. If another team intercepts the VIP on route, all the members of that team must be present (in the proximity of the VIP) for a capture to be successful;
3. The target cannot be rushed and will move only at a modest pace.

(Also see appendix)

TEXT MESSAGING

At registration, each team also registered a team member's cell phone number to receive text messages. The tutor sent text messages to teams at key stages in the game. The first was to signal that he was in place and the 'seeking' could begin. This happened exactly at noon. Two precautions were taken by the tutor to ensure he was not followed on the way to the hiding place. The first was to limit the time-window for collecting the maps to between 12:00 p.m. and 12:10 p.m. The second was to necessitate the compulsory presence of all team members before the maps are handed out to that team.

MAPS

The maps that participants collected from the faculty office defined the play area and comprised of street names an identified the landmarks that acted as RVs during play. The tutor had in his person four maps each with only one designated rendezvous point that the students had to escort him to. The team that first located him was giving a map showing the position of rendezvous point 1 with the main landmark clearly identified. Then, on reaching this point they were given another map designating rendezvous point 2 with the relevant landmark identified. On reaching each RV the tutor sent text messages to the other teams designating the landmark he was at.

PLAY AREA

The play area in appendix 3 was guided by three primary concerns: accessibility and safety; making play challenging yet possible for a total of twenty-five participants playing at any one time, and; locating movement around the university campus – with the campus in the centre. Tutors with more than twenty-five participants may wish to consider expanding the play area and increasing the team member quota. The size of the play area should be challenging but not impossible bearing in mind that the average play time is three hours.

LOCATING TARGET STRATEGICALLY

When it comes to giving clues there should be more than one option. For example in one game the target was located close to one of two underground train stations. After waiting for one-hour without being found a text message was sent saying "VIP near a train station" this gave teams two targeting options great distances apart.

MOBILITY-IMPAIRED PARTICIPANTS

Game organisers should give careful consideration to participants with disabilities before deploying the game. It would be advisable to speak with such participants individually to assure them of their value to the team and to assess their readiness for the event. The only disability encountered in this study was mobility-impairment (wheel-chair users). The game enabled mobility-impaired participants to be successfully included in the play. Teams were more than happy to accommodate fellow participants with mobility-impairment. Sometimes the participant was partnered-up with a team-mate, in other instances the participant chose to function autonomously (as other team mates did). Despite its apparent sensitivity, mobility-impairment did not prove an impediment. The game itself did not require great physical capabilities. The terrain was paved and suitable for wheel chairs. There was no running, jumping or crawling – movement was at a normal modest pace. The skill lay in reading maps, finding the shortest route, effective communication, co-ordinating the human resources and thinking strategically.

ALTERNATE VARIANTS

Martin (2006) conducted a similar game with the primary aim of inducting new students to their university environment. Play was group-based and required participants to verify specific questions. This method allows tutors to direct students strategically and efficiently around the university campus such that they gain familiarity with their new surroundings. The group work element also helps build camaraderie among peers and introduce new students to the ethic of teamwork and cooperation. As (Martin, 2006) mentions the game can also be extended to introduce new staff into the campus.

Another variant would be to change the object of the game to locate a list of landmarks and business organisations in the local area on a map comprising only street names. The winning team would be the one that identifies most number of targets in the quickest time. This version has proved useful as a bonding exercise in a two week summer term business workshop course.

TEAM BEHAVIOURS

The game favours the team that finds the VIP first. Other teams may get a share of the points if they can intercept early on in the game. Therefore, the rapid location and safe escort of the VIP is vital to win. The

runner-up is usually the team that intercepts the VIP early in the game (usually towards the second RV). While there is a strong element of chance – the game favoured a particular type of team above others. Two broad types of team behaviours were observed based on their point accumulation patterns. Type I teams accumulated the most points early on in the game. The cumulative point total was then eroded by interceptions towards the later stages of the game. Type II teams were dormant during the earlier stages but rapidly accumulated points towards the later stages.

In practice Type I teams are observably better at locating the VIP and proficient at safely escorting him through the first few rendezvous points. Also, if the VIP had been located by another team, they are more efficient at intercepting the VIP early on in the game. Type II teams are observably less efficient at locating the VIP and lack the co-ordination to carry out successful intercepts. Where they do locate the VIP initially, they are often unable to avoid intercepts from opposing teams early on in the game. As often is the case, Type I teams gather game points early on and Type II teams wrestle for runner-up position depending on their efficiency (or *luck*) at intercepting. Figure 2 below illustrates the score accumulation pattern between two Type II teams. The team on the left stands a better chance of gaining runner-up position.

FIGURE 1

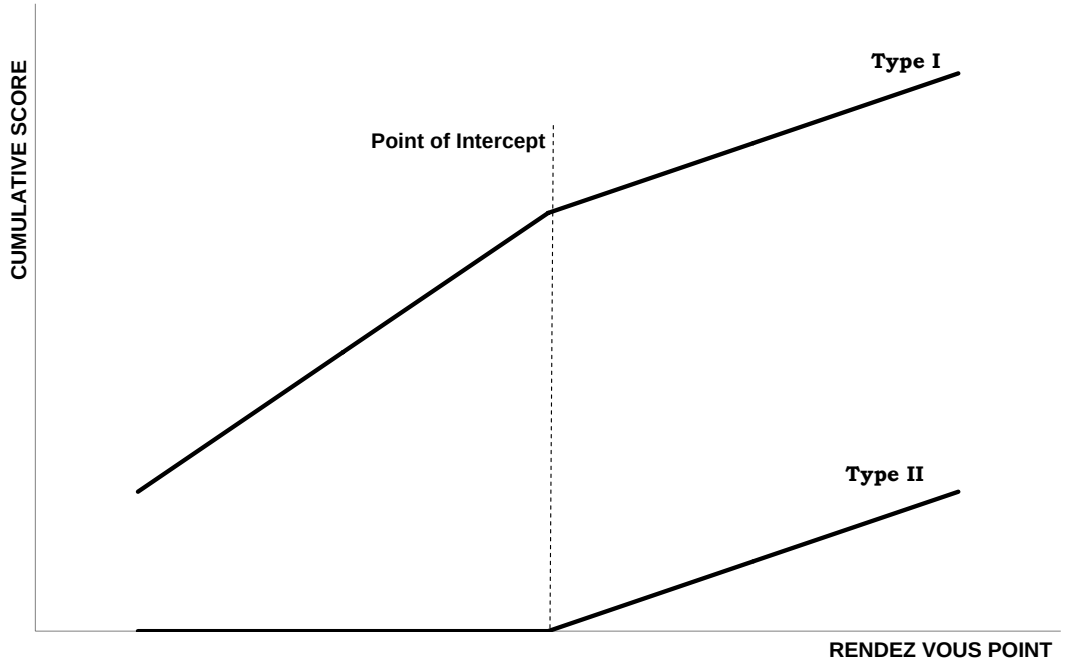
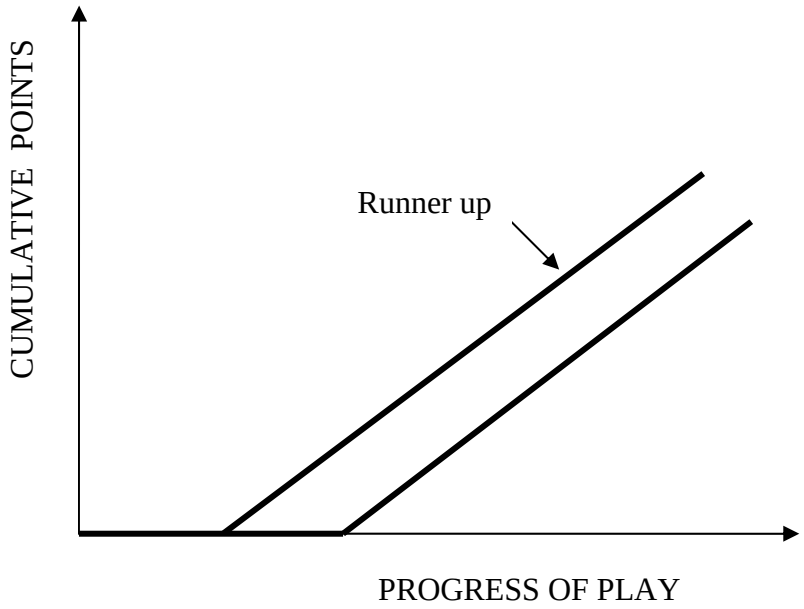


FIGURE 2



In their organisation and behaviour Type I teams are characterised by a high degree of team cohesion and the significant presence of a team leader, whose primary function seems to be to ensure effective communication and co-ordination. While team-members do problem-solve autonomously depending on the circumstances, all individual decisions were relayed to the team leader. In these teams participants are united under a common team goal, the social role of the team takes precedence over individual personalities and attitudes. There are no disagreements among team mates – both successes and failures are shared. In a Type I team, efficiency is defined by three critical factors: First, the timely and effective communication of relevant information; second, a high degree of co-operation among team mates; and the role of a team leader who strategically co-ordinates resources.

Where Type I teams falter is in their ability to cooperate with other teams. Teams of this nature are highly goal-oriented and competitive - collaboration with other teams is virtually a taboo. However, towards the end of the game it is almost inevitable that the VIP will be intercepted by another team. When this happens it would be best practice to cooperate with the other team to avoid any further intercepts and erosion of game points. Type I teams are notoriously inept at this. They constantly try to outmanoeuvre the team that they ought to be cooperating with. In the process they needlessly waste valuable time and make themselves vulnerable to further intercepts.

Type II teams by contrast are more likely to collaborate with other teams during the early stages of the game. Their decision is strategic – more eyes are better than few. However, Type II teams have consistently been poorer at locating the VIP at first instance. Type II teams tend to be larger in number, more de-centralised and mainly democratic. However, they are characterised by an inefficient co-ordination function, which inhibits their initial chances of a dispersed search effort to locate the VIP. They tend to search in pairs or small groups (of friends), and have complex communication patterns that are not pragmatic in rapid operations. One team member may pass on an important piece of information to another who has no clear function and so the rest of the team are not informed of it in time. Individual differences dominate the teamwork effort and often interfere with it. This type lacks cohesion and are characterised by smaller informal groups operating within the main group. The lack of co-ordination leads them to gravitate towards proximity-search-patterns (with the entire group more or less moving together and searching the same area) and an underutilisation of mobile communication technology.

A game may have more than one Type I team. This study has encountered two Type I teams in the same play event. When this occurs, the VIP would most probably be located by one of the Type I teams – which, is a matter of chance. However, during escort the other Type I team is most likely to intercept the target well ahead of the other teams and therefore more likely to gain runner-up position. There is no evidence to suggest that the characteristics of the individuals making up the team differ greatly between the two types of teams. However, Type I teams are clearly identifiable by the significant presence of a leader/coordinator.

CONCLUSION

The scoring system enabled tutors to form clear picture of team behaviours during the game, and to assure them of the game's credibility as a team-building exercise. Groups that did not function effectively as teams were at a disadvantage. Participants were debriefed after the game in small groups. Students cited winning as the main objective of playing the game but not necessary to its enjoyment. Students derived an intrinsic reward from participating in the game. Four skills were identified as having (or would have) helped them in playing the game: map reading; (effective) communication; (better) co-ordination; (better) team organisation and planning. In addition to exercising their interpersonal and teamwork skills, students felt valued as learners. They were encouraged by the 'time and trouble' taken by tutors to plan and implement the event. The game experience acted as a means to impart the university's values especially with regard to teamwork. Students got 'a strong hint that they were encouraged to be effective team players'. Being first year undergraduates, this is an important lesson to have learnt and one which would bear fruit in future years when they engage in group projects.

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APPENDIX

BASICS
Total Play Time: 4.0 hours
Planning: 0.5 hours
Play time: 3.0 hours
Debriefing: 0.5 hours
Team size: 5 members (max).

KEY TERMS

Base: The open space outside the student union café at St Mary's Road campus.

Target: The person whom you have to locate (find) and escort safely to base. This will be your tutor.

RV: (Rendezvous) A location where you have to escort your target to. You will earn a point for each rendezvous point you escort your target to,

Recce: To carry out reconnaissance – search the area.

OBJECTIVES
1. Find the target;
2. Escort target without being detected to three designated rendezvous points;
3. Then escort target to base.

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED
Walking shoes and outdoor gear – e.g. warm jacket, umbrella, raincoat etc.
Operational mobile phones
Map of play area – can be obtained from the faculty office at 12 noon.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES
Disabled participants can and should take part in the game.
If you have a physical disability let your tutor / game administrator know, and provisions will be made to accommodate you in the game.

EARNING POINTS
Your team will be awarded points for the following:

Finding the target …	1 team point
Escorting target to RV 1	1 team point
Escorting target to RV 2	1 team point
Escorting target to RV 3	1 team point
Escorting target to Base	1 team point
Total Attainable	5 team points

FINDING THE TARGET
The game is similar to a treasure hunt – with a few modifications.
Working as a team locate your target (i.e. find your tutor).
On finding the target, alert your team mates and summon them to where you and the target are.
Once the team is assembled together, your target will give you the location of your first RV.
Escort the target without being detected by an opposing team to the first RV.
On reaching the first RV, you target will give the location of the second RV, and so on.
After reaching the third and final RV, escort your target to base.

INTERCEPTING THE TARGET
Once a team has located the target and is escorting him back to base, an opposing team may capture the target on route.
To capture the target:
1. Make visual contact with the target while he is being escorted;
2. Approach the target; and
3. Inform him that he has been intercepted by [team name].

Once intercepted you have to *share* the mission with the team that already has the target. That means you will also *share* the points for each RV.
If you are unfortunate enough to have your target intercepted you will have to share points for reaching each RV with the other team.
If more than one team intercepts the target, the points will be shared out equally among all teams escorting the target.

"ENEMY INTELLIGENCE"
When a team locates the target, and each time a team escorts the target to a RV, other teams will be alerted as to the target's location (via SMS).
Therefore, if you are the first to locate the target, get your team assembled and get your target moving fast! The moment your team escorts the target to a RV, get him out of there and to the next RV soon.

LOCATION OF TARGET AND RV
To begin with the target will be in a certain location within the area of the map given to you on the day of play.
All RVs will also be within the area of the map given to on the day of play.
The target or any of the RVs will not be inside a building.
The target or any of the RVs will not be within a private area.
He will only be in a public (unrestricted) area.

HEALTH AND SAFETY
Players are not allowed to use any form of mechanised transport.
Each participant must be equipped with proper shoes for walking and weatherproof clothing if necessary.
When crossing a road: stop look both ways then cross when safe.
Do not cross at intersections.
Do not cross the street while on your mobile phone.
When crossing a busy dual carriageway do so at designated pelican crossings and/or signal lights.
During play do not ask strangers if they've seen your target. Do not accept help or rides from strangers.
If an emergency arises seek help from a police officer or member of the public or dial 999 – use your discretion.
Do not enter private property or alleyways – your target will only be in an open public area.
Avoid jumping over walls and fences.

Good Luck & Have Fun ☺