

What Shape Are You In?

Activity Summary

This learning experience is a form of visual “check-in,” which is good to use at the beginning of any group session. It is a way of allowing participants to nonverbally get in touch with their current moods. By bringing their attention to their bodies, it enables participants to be more present and in the moment. This exercise also allows participants to learn more about each other, by discovering shared moods and common themes among members of the group.

Goals

- To allow participants to understand their own moods and how they are reflected in their bodies.
- To allow participants to learn about the moods of their fellow team members.
- To allow participants to discuss the impact of moods on the group.

Group Size

A group of ten to thirty managers who are either from the same organization or who are from different organizations and are participating in a leadership development program.

Time Required

Approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

Materials

None.

Physical Setting

A large open space, without tables or chairs.

Facilitating Risk Rating

Medium.

Process

1. Ask participants to find their own spaces in the room and to stand, making sure that each person has some space around himself or herself.
2. Ask each participant to reflect on what his or her current mood is. After a few moments, ask participants to each take on a body shape or gesture that reflects that mood.
3. Next, ask the participants to add a movement to the shape—one that still reflects their current mood—and to begin to move their body shapes within their own spaces.
4. Now ask the participants to continue the shape and motion and to move around the room, noticing the other people and what shapes and movements they are expressing.
5. Ask participants to each find several other people who have assumed a similar shape and/or movement and to form a small group with those people. (If there are several people left over who cannot find anyone with a similar shape, ask those “unique shapes” to form a separate group. If there are only one or two people who are left over, ask them each to join a group that is the most similar to his or her shape/movement.)
6. Ask the small groups to discuss within their groups what each person’s mood was and why they chose the shapes and movements that they did.
7. Have each group, in turn, demonstrate their shapes and movements to the larger group, and ask a spokesperson from each group to summarize their group discussion.
8. Ask the following questions of participants to debrief the activity:
 - How did you feel during the exercise?
 - Did it make a difference in your mood to find other people with similar moods and shapes?

- How do you feel now?
- Did your mood change during the course of the exercise? If so, why?
- What did you learn about how your body reflects your mood?
- How might your moods and emotions impact your work?
- How can getting in touch with what you are feeling help you to better manage your moods and emotions in the workplace?

Variations

This exercise could be used for a variety of training objectives, including the following:

- *Emotional Intelligence*: To help participants get in touch with their moods and emotions
- *Presentation Skills*: To help participants become more aware of their body language
- *Cultural Diversity*: To help participants explore cultural differences in the meaning of body language
- *Communication Skills*: To help participants understand the impact of their moods and body language in communication
- *Team Building*: To explore differences in body language among various personality types (use in conjunction with a personality type assessment tool)

Submitted by Yael Schy.

Yael Schy, MSW, is a leader in using expressive arts in organizational learning and development. She is principal of Dramatic Strides® Consulting, specializing in leadership development, communication skills, team building, and creative decision-making techniques that help people and organizations move forward together. Ms. Schy also serves as a faculty member at the American Management Association and at City College of San Francisco. She brings a unique perspective by combining twenty years of management experience with her background in improvisational theater and dance to create dynamic interpersonal skills training and coaching in the workplace. Ms. Schy's unique Teamwork Tango® workshop, which teaches leadership and team-building skills through the metaphor of partner dancing, has been presented at numerous professional conferences and organizations in the United States and abroad. She is co-author of the book, Teamwork Tools: A Revolutionary Approach for Managers and Trainers (2008).

