



The big walk concept

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77lf7bLiCw>

A crash workshop in a forest using the adventure learning method.

At HFA we have for years been exploring and developing this adventure learning exercise that creates group binding and develops personal competence..

The basic activity is splitting a group of about 10 people into two groups and each group starts at the edge of a forest 2 km from each other. Each has a map showing two points where they will find resources to make a simple camp (tarp, ropes, sleeping bags, mattresses) and things to cook some food with.

No phones allowed and they do not know in advance they are going to spend the night in the forest under a tarp.

The preparation:

1) Getting to know each other during work and social activities for 5-7 days

2) Tuition, non formal workshop in:

- Orienteering with map and compass
- Knots and tarp raising
- General hiking skills (personal equipment and how to move)
- Fire making in nature

3) Social skills - communication - conflict solving (sharing meetings with strict concept (non-violent-communication))

At the time of the workshop they did not know that all these competences were going to be put to the test very soon and in a “real” situation.

So the first learning in the exercise is a trial and error situation that could be concluded by:
Maybe I should have paid more attention when I was taught competences for free - because you never know when they can become useful.

The “adventure situation” teaches us that random unforeseen experiences can lead to

competence if one acknowledges it as a learning situation.
It's an attitude skill that may have to be learnt by trial and error.

Conditions we designed into the Big walk in the forest:

- Exciting, an out of the ordinary experience
- Possible stress (uncertainty)
- Possible stress (out of physical comfort zone)
- Possible stress (uncertainty of your own competence and social role)
- Many uncertain factors:

Weather, individuals reaction to challenges and the way they act and how that affects others.

How will I sleep, how will I eat, I miss my phone.

- Being dependent on others.
- Many social situations that need decisions (it asks for organization, and thus for different types of leadership).
- Time limitations (the sun is going down, it's getting colder, darker)
- Social friction and irritations.

Technically they have been given all the "tools" to handle the situation.

Usually it falls apart. This is how it happens:

A person can generally only behave polite and kind up to a certain point. We try to hide our negative sides to others. After a few days - we start showing more of ourselves.

In a situation when we are tired and maybe hungry and lost in a forest - it escalates. People start showing many new sides. It can become a bonding experience, but also create conflicts that stay unless debriefed and evaluated properly.

They get lost - all groups get lost, just a few hundred meters or so.

They sometimes fail to find the resources (food, tarp, sleeping bags etc) or find them very late.

They split up into even smaller groups due to being irritated by each other. Some of them that have no talent in orienteering feel useless and dependent in the beginning (later there are more tasks to do).

They fail to see the benefit in finding the other group and sharing resources (each group got coordinates to different places and different resources).

They can not agree on goals; how fast shall they walk, how important to start a camp early, is there time for enjoyment and relaxation. Where shall we place the camp, shall we look further.

Who has competence? Is this a good leader - shall I follow this person? Will I find myself lost in a swamp with wet feet?

They have frustrating meetings where there is lots of talk, less listening and low quality decisions. They lack the suitable decision making tools for each situation.

Questions of leadership is put to the point:

- Who has the most competence? How does one know if someone has competence in an area when you yourself have very little.

The risks involved are:

- Your own fear and imagination (forest can be very scary)

- Your social standing, and self image is being tested.
- Getting wet, cold, tired and irritated.
- Not getting nice or enough food.
- Not getting comfortable sleep.
- Am I missing anything in my social digital life?

If done right it is just a wonderful pleasurable social walk in the forest in the company of interesting people. Eating wild berries and mushrooms by a fire while the sun sets. A little adventure.

How some participants described the experience:

Exhausting, exciting, fun, unexpected, tension, tiring, childhood, skill building, chaotic, bonding, beautiful, emotional, loud, lost healing, Challenging, interesting, self discovery, emotional, inner child, supportive, chaos, learning, serenity, intense, cooperative, team, confusing, short, easy.

As an addition, this is a learning experience for the leaders/organizers that needs to put out bags with resources in nature. Select the participants for each team (evaluating their competences and weaknesses to get a good match). Keep the secrecy as long as possible and then as an adventure in the evening try to find the participants in the 1x1 km forest and check if they are alright. Tracking them with vision, smell and hearing and trying to sneak as close as possible.