The Puzzle Crossing

Participants: 5 to 32 (with more than 18 people, two teams competing against each other works better)

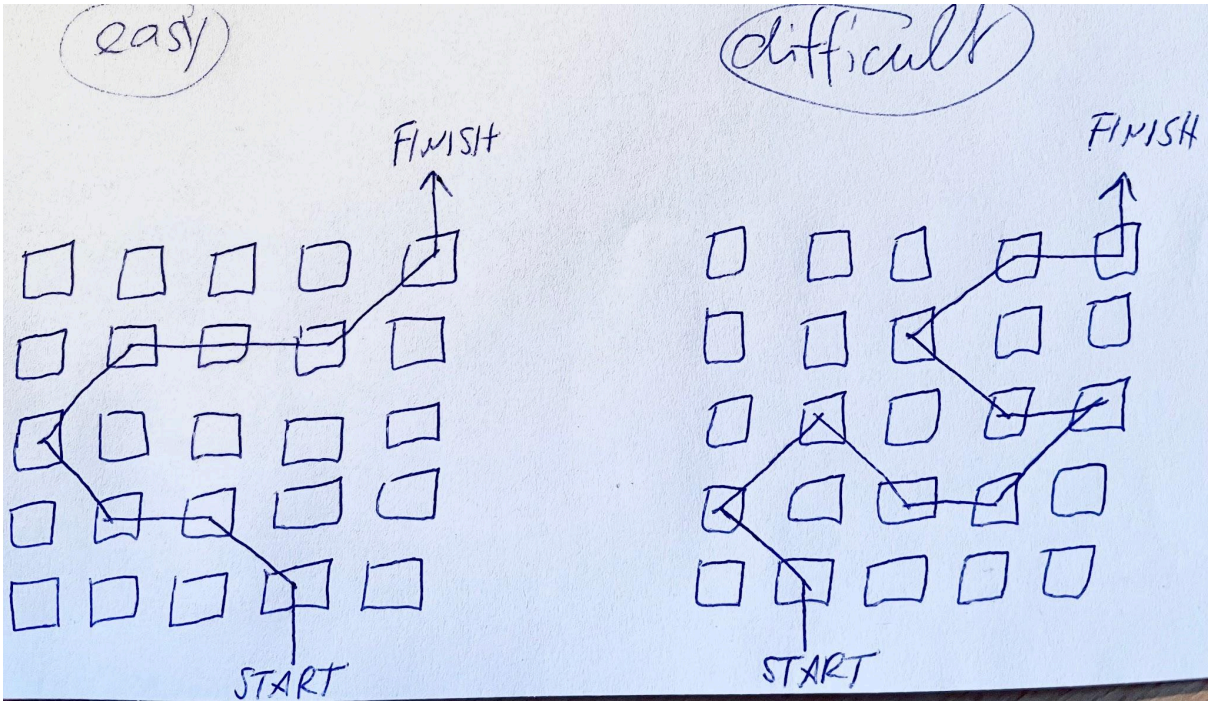
Location: Inside or Outside

Time Needed 45- 55 Minutes plus debrief 5 minutes

Materials needed
25 pieces of the same to step on (this can be stones (need to be the same shape and color), bricks, plywood or even pieces of A4 paper (stable and big enough for someone to step on with 2 feet). One playing field is enough also if they are 2 teams.

Description

This activity is another variation of the river crossing. It has several stones which are “not stable” and those that are “stable”. There is only one correct way to cross the river using the stable stones. The stones are arranged in rows with each row having 5 stones. The facilitator then on a piece of paper draws a specific pattern (puzzle) aligning with some of the stones which will be considered the only correct pattern. Participants do not get to see the pattern. For two teams, the pattern is the same.



Instructions

The facilitator calls all the participants to where the puzzle is set up for instructions. The participants are to pass from one side of the river to the other as a team, one participant at a time through only specific stones that are stable. When a participant steps on a wrong stone, they fail and are required to go back and inform their team members which stones are correct and which ones are not. The next participant always starts from the beginning no matter where the last participant failed from. The goal is that all participants cross. The team only wins if all have crossed. If one remains behind, they lose all (even the ones who have crossed). If two teams are competing, the team which crosses first wins.

Once a participant has crossed, he/she CANNOT go back to his team and will need to remain in silence on the other side.

Tell the participants that they have 45 minutes to cross. Tell them that each stone is maximumly used only once and that some stones will not be used to cross at all.

Participants can walk from the stones to the left, right, forward and diagonal (forward and backwards). They cannot jump stones. The correct next stone is always one of the stones around the current one.

Tell them what is NOT allowed and that apart from this everything else is allowed.

- It is not allowed to use any objects to draw or save the correct way (e.g. no phones, no papers, drawing on the ground, using objects like stones to place them on the ground, etc.)
- The team(s) is not allowed to see when one person comes to the river/puzzle. They must face the other side (or find a physical barrier like a door or around a corner or behind a bush, etc.)
- Not observing the rules might lead to disqualification of the participant

Advise them to take the first 5 minutes to lay a strategy as a team (this is the most interesting time for the observer for the selection process).

Flow of the activity:
After the initial strategy time, one first person comes to the puzzle (while everyone else CANNOT see this) and needs to attempt by him/herself to cross. Each time the participant steps on a stone, the facilitator calls “correct” or “not correct”. After a correct step, the person continues as for as long as the person steps on a wrong stone, after which he(she is sent back to the group (and should pass on information to the rest of the group).

Tips:
Aften groups use a numbering system in the strategy time like A1, A2, B1, B2….

Make sure the correct path is not being marked by dirt accumulating on the stones/papers. If so, switch them around.

After some time, participants might use lines on their hands to study the correct path or a shirt with squares on it or place themselves in rows of 5 to make a representation of the puzzle. All these are fine, as long as no objects are being used (like pens, stones, phones, paper, etc.)

If after a short period the first person reaches closer to the last lines or if after a long time no one seems to advance much, consider changing the pattern to make it harder or easier in the last lines (DO NOT change part of the pattern that people have already correctly gone through).

There is generally no going back or trying again if a person fails, however if you observe some people struggle too much and are not getting through the first one or two lines, you might give them some small tips (without the group hearing this).

The time is usually too short for everyone to cross and the activity has been designed like this.

Often the first one to cross, might “fail” intentionally at the last stone, to be able to go back to the team and help others learn the correct path.

<u>Have a debrief at the end after the time is up asking questions like:</u>
- What did not go well and why did you fail?
- What did go well?
- If you would do the activity again tomorrow, what would you do differently?

Focus for the selection

Areas to observe in the activity;

1. Communication

How are the teams able to communicate with each other? The selection team should be able to identify who within the team is communicating and seeking for support.

2. Creativity

Who is creatively generating ideas

3. Taking initiative and leadership

Who is able to take steps towards getting the team forward? Some team members might be authoritative and discouraging others, some might be dormant while others might lead others. The selection team needs to identify who is falling where.

4. Supporting others

The goal is not to cross as an individual but rather as a team. Who is able to not focus on crossing to the other side but rather support others. Specific consideration should be for those who instead of crossing over stay somewhere on the river and offer support.

5. Dealing with Failure

How are participants coping with continuous failure?