Three Islands

Overview of the Task: The team is split into three sub-groups, each with its own location, limitations, objectives, resources, and guidelines. The groups must discover, coordinate, and complete a sequence of complex and interdependent tasks to move towards completion of the activity and overall team success.

Sample Activity Focus: The complexity of this activity allows a wide variety of learning goals and/or debrief topics to be addressed. Typically, post-activity discussions focus on some or all of the following:

- transfer of vision and/or a common goal throughout a team
- leadership styles
- individual and team communication processes
- the impact of location on team effectiveness
- the spectrum of independence/interdependence within a team’s tasks
- how a team manages its work
- the impact of roles on team success
- collaboration vs. isolation
- assumptions that inhibit team effectiveness

Time Requirement: 50-60 minutes should be reserved for the activity itself, including 5 minutes to set up the participants in the three locations. The activity lends itself to a substantial debrief. No less that 20 minutes is recommended for a proper debrief, and preferably more.

Number of Participants: The activity is ideal for 10-12 participants, but can be adapted for groups as small as 6, by reducing the number of participants in each sub-group, or for much larger groups, by running multiple, simultaneous set-ups.

Equipment: (Note: this equipment list can be modified based on location of the activity.)

- 1 4’x4’ platform (or 4’x4’ square of PVC pipe)
- 1 rope or piece of webbing tied into a 5’ diameter circle
- 1 rope or piece of webbing tied into a 12’ diameter circle
- 6 Koosh balls
- 1 aluminum coffee can
- 1 plastic bucket
- 2 bowling pins (or two other objects to knock over)
- 4 rubber mats
- 4-10 infinite circle (“handcuff”) ropes
- 4-8 blindfolds/bandanas
- stopwatch
- 1 set of participant instructions (attached)
- 1 puzzle (attached)

Preparation: The equipment should be arranged similar to the attached Set-Up Diagram. Again, flexibility in the set-up will be necessary depending on the space available for the activity. The location of the activity should be such that no participants can observe the set-up prior to the beginning of the activity. The participant instructions (attached) should be cut into three pieces, one set for each sub-group.

Process:

1) Begin with the entire group out of site of the activity area.
2) Of the group of 10, ask for 2 volunteers who are willing to be blindfolded for the activity. Blindfold the two and lead them to and up onto/into the platform (Group 1). Read them the Group 1 participant instructions, handing them the 3 Koosh balls. After re-reading the instructions, hand them the Group 1 instructions and ask them to wait silently until you tell them the activity has begun.
3) Return to the large group and ask for 2 more volunteers. As you lead them to the small rope island (Group 2), tell them they are entirely mute for the activity, beginning now. Hand them the Group 2 instructions and tell them to read the instructions while you return to the rest of the group. (Note: you should write in a time limit
for the activity on the space in their instructions. 45-60 minutes is reasonable.) Before you leave, remind them that they are mute and cannot speak even to each other. Also tell them that the activity has not yet begun and they should wait to do anything until you have told them it has started.

4) Return to the remaining participants and lead them to the large rope island (Group 3). Hand them the Group 3 instructions to read and answer only clarification questions (e.g. what does solve the puzzle mean or which object do you mean by “bucket?”). Quickly get the Group 3 participants into the “handcuffs” and set them going on that task.

5) Check in with Group 2 and answer only clarification questions (giving them a quick chance to speak in order to ask.) Let Group 2 know the activity has begun. (It is helpful to have a stopwatch that you now start and hand to the mute participants to track the time limit.) Let Group 3 know the activity has begun.

6) The activity is complete when all groups’ objectives have been met and all of the participants are standing in the large rope island.

Safety: Spotting of blindfolded participants may be necessary as they are moved from island to island. Care should also be taken that only small and/or soft objects are thrown to participants who are blindfolded.

Facilitator(s) Role during the Activity:

- During the activity, the facilitator(s) play mostly a monitoring role. Guidelines may have to be explicitly enforced. Examples of this are:
  - removing a Koosh ball from the hands of a non-blindfolded person on the blind island
  - not allowing a mute person to touch the rubber mats until the blind people have thrown a ball in the can
  - escorting someone to the blind island who has stepped off another island
- As the activity progresses, the facilitator(s) will need to also become very active. All objects that touch the ground/floor outside the islands (e.g. people, balls, paper, shoes, etc.) must be taken to and placed on the blind island. This will keep the facilitator(s) moving, especially when the participants begin throwing balls.
- All questions raised by participants should be answered with a standard response such as “You have all the information you need to successfully complete the activity.”
- While fulfilling the roles of rule monitor and object mover, the facilitator(s) should also be making observations about the group’s process in order to help tailor the debrief questions to the actual experience. The activity focus areas listed at the beginning of this document provide examples of focus for observations.

Other Notes for Facilitator(s):

- When considering how to split the group among the three islands, 2-4 participants are ideal for the blind island, 2-4 for the mute island, and 4-10 for the large island. It is preferable, because of the partnered “handcuffs,” to have an even number of participants on the large island.
- It can be very effective to assign participant observers with topics of focus for observation provided by the facilitator(s). This allows the facilitator(s) to focus on the other roles mentioned above, creates team ownership in the observations of the activity, and provides a role for individual(s) who choose to not actively participate in the activity.
- The correct answer for the total number of squares in the puzzle is 30.
Participant Instructions

Group 1
Objective: To get a ball in the can
Resources: 3 balls
Guidelines:
• You cannot step off the island onto the ground.
• You may not remove your blindfold until the end of the activity.
• Only a blindfolded person can throw a ball in your can or touch any balls on your island.
• The can cannot be moved.
• Your island cannot be moved.

Group 2
Objective: To aid the blindfolded people in their task
To utilize the available resources
Resources: Four rubber mats
Guidelines:
• Objects or people cannot touch the ground outside your island or they float to the island with the blind people.
• The mats are the exception to the above statement. They float well in place outside your island.
• You cannot use or touch any of your resources until the blindfolded people complete their task.
• No islands can be moved.
• You are mute for the entire activity.
• Only the mute people (you) may move/manipulate the mats.
• There is a time limit of ________ minutes to complete this activity.
Group 3

Objective: To get everyone on your island
To knock over the bowling pins
To get untangled
To have the member of your team born earliest solve the puzzle
To throw a ball in your bucket

Resources: pieces of rope, 3 balls, puzzle

Guidelines:
- Objects or people cannot touch the ground outside your island or they float to the island with the blind people.
- No one can come in any direction towards your island from the next closest island until you have completed all of your other tasks.
- No islands can be moved.
- You can only knock over bowling pins with the balls.
- The bucket cannot be moved.
Puzzle: How many total squares do you see below?  
(You get no more than three guesses.)
Activity Set-Up Diagram

**Group 1**
(a.k.a. Blind Island)
- Platform or PVC square
- 3 Koosh balls (about 5 feet from platform)

**Group 2**
(a.k.a. Mute Island)
- Small rope island
- Rubber mats
- Large rope island
- Bowling pins (at least 20 feet from large island)

**Group 3**
(a.k.a. "Party" Island)
- Plastic bucket (at least 8 feet from large island)
- Infinite circle ropes
- Puzzle

Approximate distances:
- Approx. 12 feet
- Approx. 15 feet