

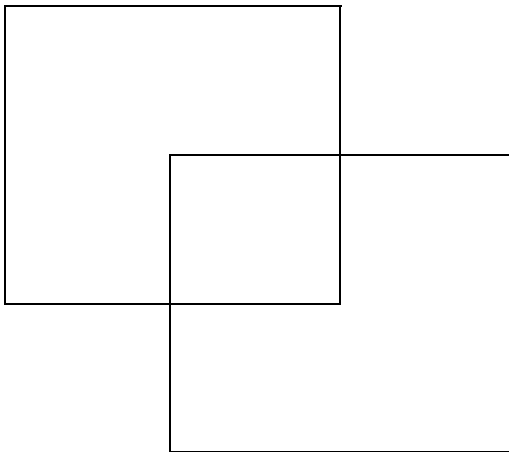
## Exercise: Blindfold Squares

(Source unknown: if anyone knows, please let us know!)

### CEO Instructions

#### Task:

1. Implement the following change program in your organization –
  - Using two pieces of rope, form two squares the same size, and overlap them by exactly one quarter of their area, such as in the following diagram: **NB** each corner of the rope must be held by at least one member of your staff for the final change program to be successful. All members of your staff will be blindfolded.



#### Resources:

- Two pieces of rope
- Blindfolds for all staff
- In addition to your staff the Chairman of the Board has decided to be an observer of your change management skills

#### Rules & Parameters:

- You are to ensure that all staff are blindfolded
- Do not show them the diagram on this piece of paper
- You may **ONLY** communicate the task to your staff once they are blindfolded
- You may not touch either the rope or your staff. Doing so means that you will lose your annual bonus!
- You are aware that your competitors are thinking of implementing the same program so speed and timing are critical
- However, you are aware that the program will only be successful if it results in a quality product/service at its completion

# Running Blindfold Squares

(Timing = approx. 45 minutes – one hour)

## Process

1. This exercise works best with approximately 15-20 people.
2. Select a CEO and an observer
3. Take them out of the room and give them each the briefing sheet to read (page 1 above).
4. While they are reading it reenter the room and then give people a blindfold and ask them to put this on. For blindfolds I use either silk scarves or airline eye shades.
5. Once everyone is blindfolded place two ropes, each about six metres long, in the centre of a cleared space around which everyone is standing.
6. The CEO and observer are brought back into the room. Ask the CEO to commence the change task (reminding them of the “Rules and Parameters”).
7. The building of the squares I usually allow to go on for approximately 25 minutes. When I want to draw the exercise to a conclusion I interrupt and say that we have just heard that a competitor is likely to bring this product to market in the next five minutes so they will lack first mover advantage if this product change is not completed before then.

## Debriefing

1. At the end of the exercise I ask everyone to take off their blindfold and observe the outcome.
2. I ask the observer, who is also the chairman of the board, to rate the quality of the squares on a 1-10 scale. Usually the squares are at least recognizable!
3. I then ask the CEO to say how they think their organization performed. What happened? How did it feel?
4. I then ask the observer to tell the same story – what they saw happening and what they thought of it?
5. I then allow a general group discussion asking them to identify the various change management issues which emerged through the exercise. The discussion is usually lively and loud! Examples are as follows:
  - *Resources* – how were people used to enact the change? Often not all people will be used – or if everyone is used chaos and lack of coordination can occur. Discussion may involve identifying who will be involved in the change, their level of involvement, the timing and sequencing of their involvement and who will not be directly involved in the change and why.
  - *Vision* – did everyone know what was required? What checking of this was done along the way?
  - *Timing* – did people know by when the change was needed? How was this monitored?
  - *Quality control* – what change metrics were built into the process so that people had a sense of the standards they were seeking?
  - *Communication* – how did the CEO handle information sharing? What was their communication style? How was this received? What effect did it have?

- *Group dynamics* – what were these? What was remarkable? Did different teams emerge with natural leaders? What learning if any happened across the teams?
- *Change leadership style* – what was this? What were the implications of the style for producing the change? How involving were they?
- *Motivation* – how motivated were people? What was in it for them? How sustained were the motivators throughout the change process?
- *Comfort zone* – being blindfolded took people outside of their comfort zone – what effect did this have? How did people respond to this? What variations were there?
- *Emotion* – what emotions did the change produce – enthusiasm, boredom, cynicism? Disinterest? Disengagement? How were these emotions handled by the CEO or others in the exercise?
- *Celebrations* – what milestones and celebrations occurred along the way?

Other change topics can also be introduced depending upon the specific issues and lessons that are required.

6. I usually end the debriefing by widening the discussion in three ways:

- How do the issues raised in the simulation relate to their *own experience* of change? Which issues had the most impact on them and why?
- What *change skills* can they identify from the exercise that they personally might need to work on?
- How applicable are these lessons to *particular change situations*? How might they need to be modified give different change situations?

7. Finally, I get the group to thank the CEO and acknowledge how that person was thrown in the deep end at short notice. I get them to think about the implications of this for change leaders.

**Ian Palmer**

UTS

August 2007

Ian.Palmer@uts.edu.au