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## Fostering team building: An example for business educators

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## FOSTERING TEAM BUILDING AN EXAMPLE FOR BUSINESS EDUCATORS



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### **Abstract**

The rising importance of teamwork is indisputable in any kind of business field. Developing students' ability to work in a team as well as their leadership skills is therefore a persistent challenge in business education. This paper analyses different theories for team development processes and introduces possibilities for integrating team building in business education programs. The method "Teams in Maze" will then be presented and discussed concerning its planning, instruction, realization, reflection and its benefit for teamwork.

### **Introduction**

What is a team without a goal? A bunch of people. To build a team it is necessary to consider group development and resulting changes in the performance curve of teamwork. There are many different team building methods available to create an effective team, but which methods are effective and why? The ability to build and guide a team is a very important leadership skill, especially in international teams with different cultures. Leaders need to focus on group development and performance levels during team building processes. Reasons for team building (or team training) are for example improving communication, motivating team members, getting to know each other or improving team productivity. Depending on the targeted reason, there are many types of team building exercises to choose. Communication exercises should improve team members' communication skills. Problem solving exercises focus on decision-making and teams working together to solve difficult problems. Planning exercises focus on aspects of planning and being adaptable to change. Trust exercises engage team members in a way that should increase trust among them. Business teachers should be aware of the impact of productive communication, cooperation and

trust; not only because they want to foster their students' ability to work on teams but also because they want to work together with their students as a team in the classroom.

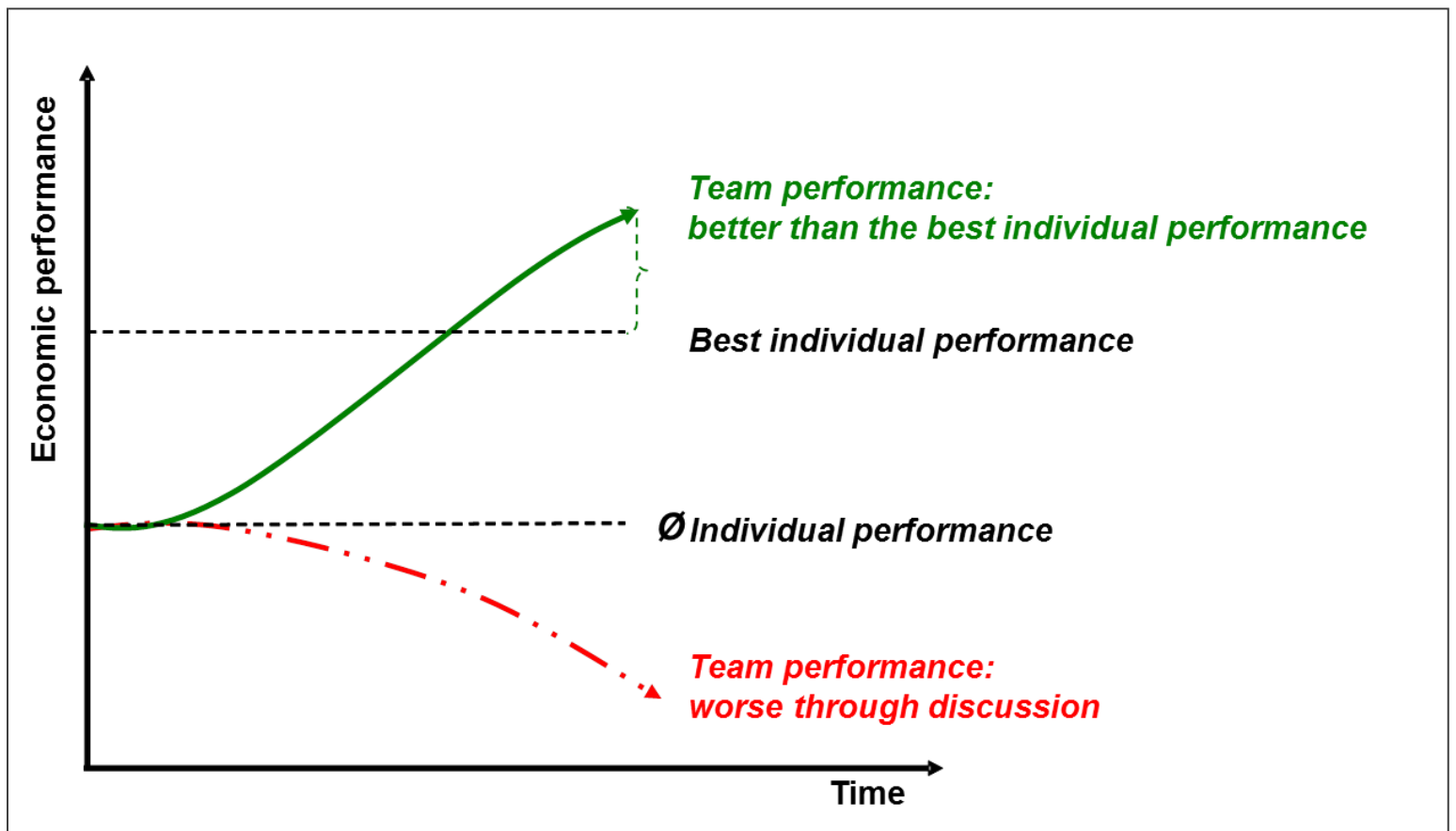
## **Characteristics of Teams and Teamwork**

In business a team is a “group of people with a full set of complementary skills, required to complete a task, job or project” (BusinessDirectory, 2012). Those work teams are integral to organizational success in our global economy (Sundstrom, 1999). There are other types of teams (e.g. sport teams, research teams), but this article will focus on teams in business education. These teams can also be distinguished by different criteria: some teams exist only for a specific period of time, some teams are assembled for longterm cooperation; some teams have official leaders and some teams are self-managed; some teams meet face-to-face and some are virtual. But all these teams can have the same goals and will follow the same team building process. The question is: What does it take for groups to develop into teams? (Levasseur, 2011).

As mentioned, a team is characterized by several features. Team members interact regularly with each other in order to achieve a common goal. The team exists over a longer period of time and consists of a small number of persons, best between two and twelve depending on the task. Members find a collaborative way of work and team spirit can be observed. Teamwork is based upon a certain structure with appropriate roles and accepted working rules. Good teams share common values, interests and a performance-oriented attitude to work. (Comelli & Von Rosenstiel, 2009; Katzenbach & Smith, 2003).

Mutual accepted objectives of the team are the basic prerequisites and the key to success. These objectives must be ambitious and challenging in order to justify the teamwork itself. It must be clear that the objectives cannot be achieved without the complementary performance of all individual members. To meet expectations regarding teamwork, the team performance must be higher than the performance of the best individual member. Teamwork is not efficient when the team reaches only an average performance, as shown in figure 1 (Comelli & Von Rosenstiel, 2009).

Figure 1. Demands on Teamwork



To develop the capacity for teamwork, teachers need to focus on cooperative working techniques, an effective communication including feedback, social and leadership skills, especially for teamwork in heterogeneous or international teams. As a consequence teamwork has to be implemented in business education programs, theoretically as well as practically.

### **Team Building and Development**

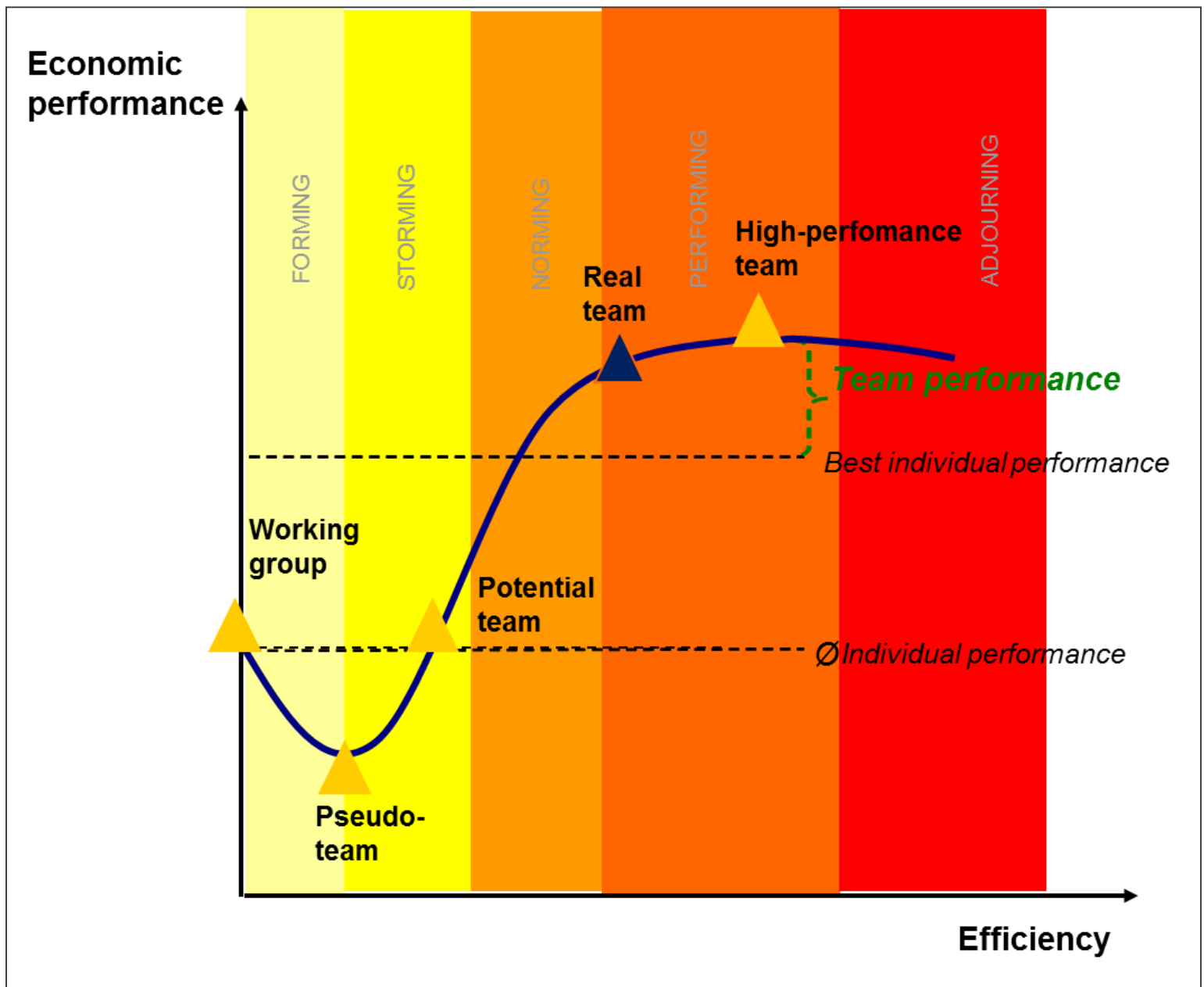
An efficient team is not built by chance. It emerges at the end of a common, often very difficult, group dynamic developing process. New but also existing teams go together through learning processes to develop an efficient approach to their teamwork. Tuckman defines these processes with a four-stage developmental model in 1965. Together with Jensen he included a fifth stage in 1977 in order to acknowledge the separation of a team after completion of its goals. Figure 2 describes these five stages of a team building process with special focus on the several roles of team members and the team leader (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977).

Figure 2. Team Development Model

Tuckman's team development model					
	Forming ⇨	Storming ⇨	Norming ⇨	Performing ⇨	Adjourning ⇨
<b>Team members</b>	Orientation	Conflicts, different opinions	Development of in-group feeling	Shared vision	Completing of tasks
	Identification of boundaries	Tension	Clarification of goals and roles	Focus on over-achieving goals	Breaking up the team
	Exploration of dependences	Power struggle	Acceptance of norms	Self-monitoring	Mourning about the dissolution
	Uninformed about goals and plans of the team	Need of tolerance and patience	Increased openness	High degree of autonomy	
<b>Team leader</b>	Directing style	Coaching style	Participative style	Delegative style	Disassembling style

It is necessary to complete the forming, storming and norming stage first, before a team can grow and work well in the performing stage (Tuckman, 1965). Some teams run through the forming, storming and norming very quickly. For others it takes longer and it can occur that they have to go through these stages more than once, especially when new members enter the team or a new leader is nominated. Katzenbach and Smith (1993) distinguish among several forms of teams depending on their performance. Working groups and pseudo-teams do not function as a team yet. Potential teams however show intention and effort towards improving teamwork, whereas real teams already act in an efficient way to reach the accepted team objective. The highest level on the team performance curve is achieved by a high-performing team that places additional emphasis on the personal development and success of all individual team members (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). Figure 3 illustrates a combination of the three theories for team building and development presented in this paper (Winkelbauer & Riebenbauer, 2010).

Figure 3. Synthesis of Team Development Theories



The consolidation of these concepts makes sense, because team developing processes run parallel, they complement each other and they define contiguous aspects of team building and developing. The synthesis enables a holistic perspective for the integration of team developing process in business education programs (Winkelbauer & Riebenbauer, 2010). While it is certainly important to discuss team theories with the students, it is also profitable for students to experience these group dynamic processes intensively in a common project including the attendance in team leader meetings or the participation in special team building methods.

### Methods for Team Building and Training

There are many different methods for team building. Some of them are related to traditional teaching-methods, others are adapted from games used in sports. The goal is always to achieve a higher efficiency. Group dynamic games are one way to build a team. Of course a good team needs more skills than just team skills. For example the team members need expertise in their field and good communication skills. If there is a team with brilliant people who cannot work together, the team will fail. Typical objectives of group dynamic games are:

- Getting to know and motivating team members
- Improving team productivity: communication, problem solving, decision-making
- Increasing trust and ability to change

As usual when teaching a method, the typical course of a group dynamic game is:

- Instruction: goal, task
- Action: procedure of the exercise, assignment of observing roles for communication, leadership, quality/rules
- Reflection and feedback

Usually a method tries to develop more than one competence or skill. Communication or feedback skills are often included in methods for team building.

### **Team Building Method: “Teams in Maze”**

This article presents a team building method, which is easy to perform, does not need too much time but provides many opportunities to work on the team building process. The objective is that the team must find its way through a labyrinth or maze.

#### ***Instruction and how to play***

The instructor creates a labyrinth in form of a checkerboard pattern (typically 5x5 or 6x6 fields) at the floor, using tape or chalk. The participants receive the following instructions as a handout (Dürschmidt et al., 2005):

- The group’s aim is to reach the maze’s opposing side with as few errors as possible.
- The time available is 45 minutes.
- Each error reduces the starting capital, which amounts to 1000 USD, by 100 USD.
- Your objective is to find the only possible way through the maze.
- The areas making up the correct path can only be found by trial and error.
- First, you search for the starting area, from which the correct way originates. Wait for the result, which the trainer discloses. If you have found the correct area, you may proceed to the next area of your choice. Again, wait for the trainer’s feedback.
- Only an adjacent area can be entered (foreward, backward, sideways, diagonal).
- If you enter a wrong area, it costs you nothing at first. You must leave the maze however. You may reenter the maze and take the same path back to where you had to leave the maze. Entering a wrong area cost you 100 USD.
- If a group member enters an area already identified as being wrong, it costs you 100 USD.

- As the correct path may feature “curves”, it is possible that an area is wrong when entered from one adjacent area, yet correct when entered from another adjacent area.
- There is a specific order of movement among the participants. If you violate this order you pay 100 USD.
- There may be only one person within the maze. All other participants have to wait behind the starting line (later this is the finishing line). Violations cost 100 USD.
- It counts as movement, if you touch an area with your feet.
- Your preparation time is 15 minutes. You pay 100 USD for each additional minute.
- It is strictly forbidden to take any notes or mark any areas during the exercise.
- During the planning phase you are allowed to talk to each other. In the execution phase it is forbidden to talk or make any noises. Each infraction is fined by 100 USD.

The instructor must ensure that the rules of this method are clear to all participants. During the game it is necessary that these rules are strictly observed.

### ***Analysis, Problems and Outcome***

The method Teams in Maze can be implemented with various groups in different stages of team development. It is especially suited for teams in the forming or norming stage. Caution is advised with regard to teams in the storming stage: This stage is often fraught with potential conflicts, which might be escalated by this method. Performing and adjourning stages of team development are also less well suited for this method, as team members are already well attuned to each other, which only allows for a marginal learning effect. The size of the group can vary to a certain degree – a group size of at least six members is recommended. In groups of more than 25 members, however, the method is no longer feasible. As with all methods, variations from the recommended group size can make sense in certain situations.

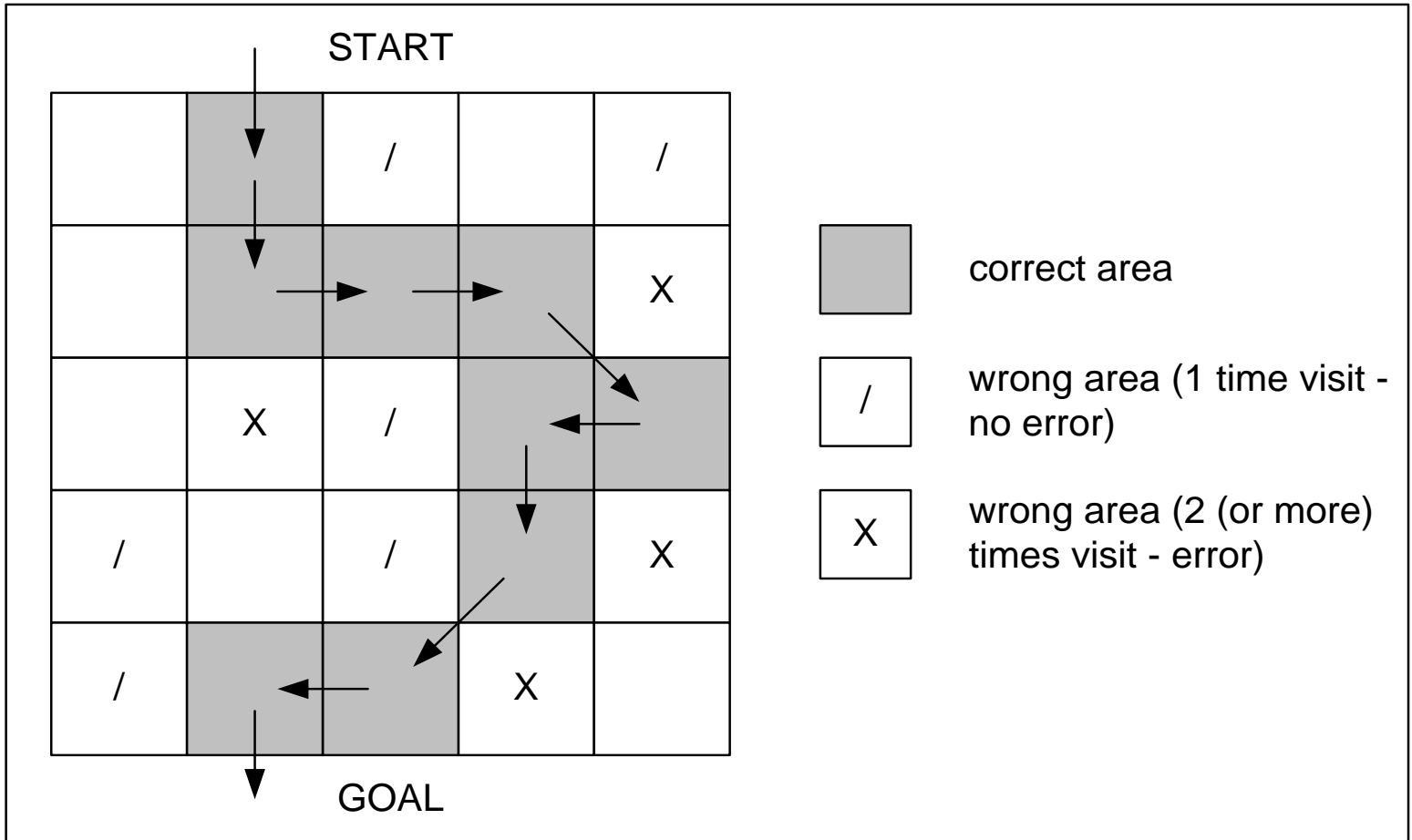
The size of the labyrinth depends on several factors. The larger the labyrinth, the more time has to be allocated to this task. The labyrinth should not be too small either (4x5 at least), as a smaller labyrinth does not allow the observation of group processes. A larger labyrinth provides a greater challenge for decision-making in larger groups. It is the instructor’s responsibility to determine which processes should be observed in the group. In case of larger groups it is often useful to assign one or more people the role of observers and have them report their impression of the team development at the end of the game.

When implementing the method, the instructor has to keep an eye on the observation of general rules, the labyrinth and the already explored paths. For this purpose, it is useful to mark the right path, the wrong areas visited for the first time and the wrong areas which are visited repeatedly (and are therefore classified as mistakes)



in a sketch of the labyrinth (figure 4). The order of team members should also be documented for larger groups.

Figure 4. Example for the Instructor's View



Experience has shown that the implementation of this method takes a similar shape in most groups. Preparation time is rarely used completely. Usually there is no one to take on the role of team leader in these stages. The first group members to enter the labyrinth tend to act as lone wolves, while the rest of the group takes on the role of observers. Only when the game is in full swing, group members gradually begin to support each other. It also takes a while for the people within the labyrinth to become aware that their teammates can provide support from outside. This change of group dynamics can be used as a point of connection for the subsequent reflection.

Often, teams are well aware that the method is intended as a team building exercise. This might lead to certain group members not taking the method entirely seriously. In order to prevent this, the formation of two teams who compete against each other is recommended. The competitive elements ensure that the method is taken more seriously and add more urgency and conflict potential. The competitive version of this method should only be used when a group is relatively free of conflict, or when conflicts within the group should be triggered on purpose. In this case more time has to be spent on reflection and processing the experience. A similar urgency can be achieved when group members only get a short amount of time for accomplishing their task. If desired, the instructor can also send the team back to the start of the labyrinth after the task has been successfully dealt with. The group members then have to retrace their steps in reverse. This version of the method is useful, when the reflection has been particularly intense or when the game has led to the revelation of major conflicts within

the group. As groups usually have fewer difficulties to accomplish this task, this version of the method can contribute to the reduction of tensions within the team.

Most groups have a lot of fun with this method. A lot of importance should be attached to reflection, in order to ensure that the experience leaves a lasting impact on group members. Participants, observing persons and instructors reflect together while sharing their experiences during the game and discussing their learning outcomes – individual and for the teamwork.

## Conclusion

There are two reasons why business educators have to focus on team building. On the one hand they act as teachers and must be team players themselves. On the other hand they must develop the team competences of their students. When business educators accompany team developing processes, they ensure team efficiency and provide their students with adequate tools for their future jobs as team members as well as team leaders. If a business educator wants to develop these competences with team developing methods, clear aims, a good instruction and, most importantly, sessions for reflection and feedback are needed. If there is not enough time for reflection, the method will just be a little game for fun but it will not help students increase their targeted learning outcomes; neither will it help them develop their ability to work in teams.

In this field further research is needed, for example concerning the effective benefit of several team building methods. Another future research question is how to foster team building with international teams who are located at different areas and virtually linked.

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