What are exercises good for?

Physical effects -> energizing function

Cognitive effects -> "learning by doing"

Emotional effects -> internalizing learning; attitude changes

Most exercises combine at least two effects. Some (e.g. role-plays) combine all three. For attitude change, you will always need an exercise that includes an emotional effect as well.

Exercise or game?

Hard to separate the two, however, exercises tend to focus on cognitive effects while games will usually emphasize an emotional component as well (e.g., competition, group-dynamics, self-reflection etc.).

How to choose an exercise?

The topic of the session and its expected outcome should be considered when designing an exercise.

Planned:

- What are the most important content pieces (theory, skills, practices) we want participants to learn, i.e. internalize and not just "hear about"?

- What are the key behavioral, attitudinal changes we see the need to achieve?

- What is the group like, how can they best learn?

- How much time do we have? What are space and equipment needs?

Improvized:

- What is it the group actually needs right now?

Some rules:

- Be aware of the use and effects, potential consequences of the exercise.

- Don't use a game just for the fun of it; it has to have a place in the structure (flow, span) of the training and it has to support the overall learning process.

- Don't design the agenda and the specific objectives of a session around an exercise (e.g., because it was successful in another setting). Exercises should follow the objectives.

- You can be inventive and design exercises – but only if you have the routine to understand how it will work.

- Don't facilitate an exercise you have not tried as a participant (or would not be willing to try it in case you design it).

- Don't use games and exercises which you don't feel comfortable leading, e.g. they don't fit your style, even if you had a good experience with it as a participant.

- When doing an exercise for the first time, and even later, plan the instructions and make double sure to plan for adequate time.

How to form the small groups?

There are many ways and the selection depends on the purpose of the exercise.

E.g.:

- random (e.g. counting)

- designating people to groups (telling them which group to join)

- appointing "team leaders" and people sign up to them or they chose their teams

- assigning the topic and letting people sign up (while ensuring equal distribution)

- "expert line-up" or other line-up methods

Main types of exercises:

Skill building (trying out a new skill in a safe environment)

Case study analysis (reflection on a someone else's story)

Self-reflection (reflection on our own stories through a new lense)

Situational games (fictive situation but acting based on own experience)

Simulation games (based in fictive environment and acting within a given set of rules)

Role plays (acting in a fictive situation in given roles)

Nonverbal expressions (drawing, "sculpting", pantomime etc.)

Creative processes (group process leading to new ideas, new value added)

Debate techniques (confronting opinions, exploring arguments through participation)

General Tips:

- Always consider the type of trainees when designing an exercise.
- Keep an eye on the time.
- Always link to objective of session and expected outcome.