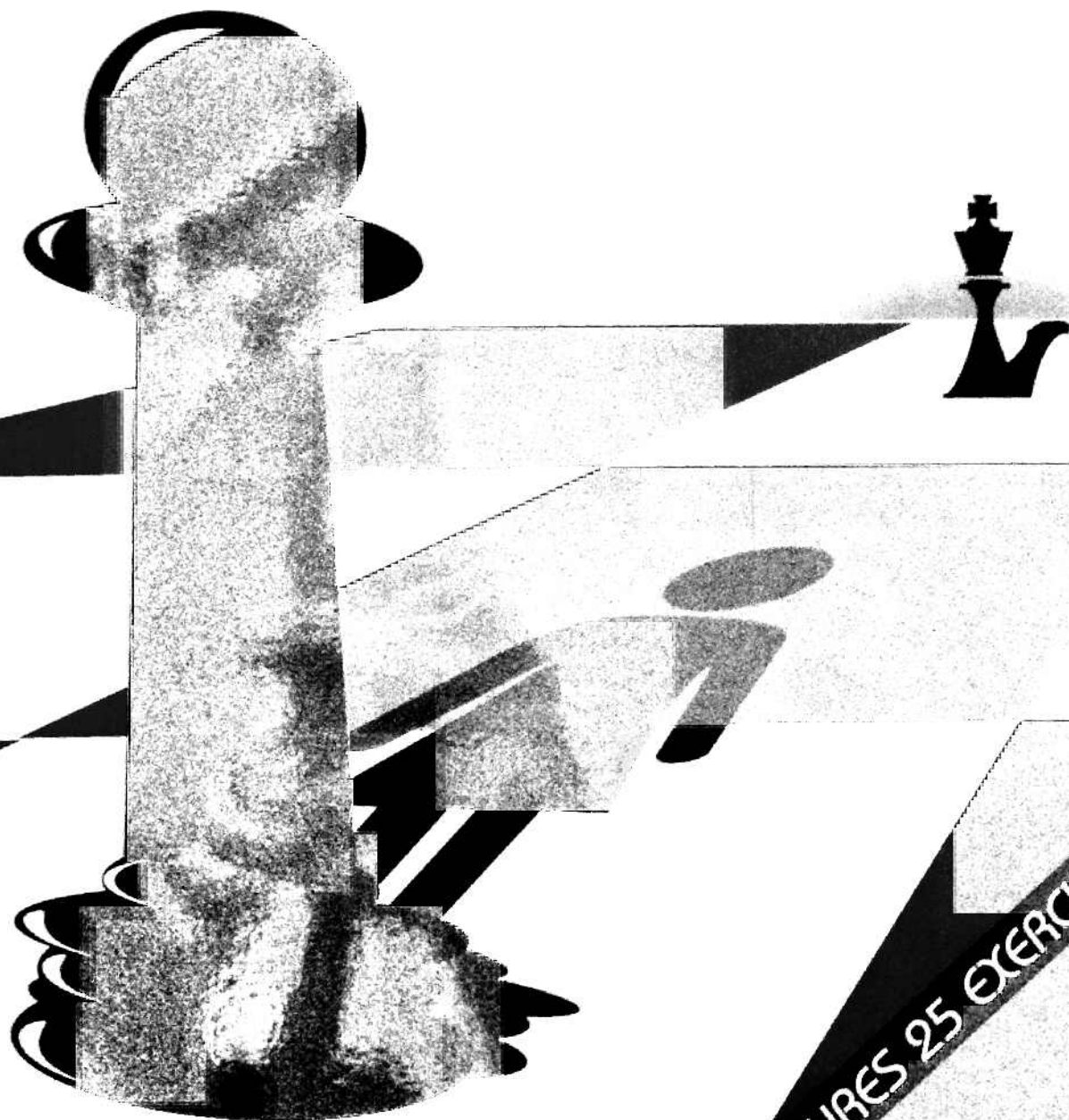


# LEADERSHIP GAMES

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Experiential Learning for  
Organizational Development



FEATURES 25 EXERCISES

## **Purposes**

This exercise demands that participants maneuver around each other in extremely tight quarters. Significant problems of communication, perspective, and role differentiation arise and must be overcome. The exercise simulates well the difficulties of group problem solving in a highly structured organizations. When two groups do the exercise side by side in the same space at the same time, competition between the groups tends to drive out cooperation, even though cooperation has some obvious benefits.

## **Setup**

The only equipment needed for the activity is masking tape or other appropriate material to mark spots on the floor. Enough open floor space to accommodate two parallel columns of between 10 and 14 participants, standing about 18 inches apart, is also a necessity. Diagram 5.1 depicts the layout as it would appear from above.

Although squares would be ideal to identify where participants should stand, single hash marks will do. About an hour should be set aside for the activity and debrief afterward.

## **Instructions**

The facilitator introduces the activity with only a few sentences, suggesting that it is an opportunity for group problem solving and it offers special insight into the problems inherent in hierarchical organizations. The facilitator asks participants to proceed to the grid of squares or hash marks set up on the floor and for each participant to stand on a square, leaving vacant the square that has an X on it. Once all participants have taken up their positions, the facilitator asks them to face in the direction of the square with an X on it, that is, toward the middle of the column in which they are standing. If there are two groups, this means that in each column there will be two subgroups, with people lined up one behind the other facing the center point of the column. Illustration 5.2 shows this configuration.

The challenge, notes the facilitator, is for the members of the two subgroups to exchange places with each other. In the case of columns with an east-west orientation, those facing west need to wind up in the positions of those facing east. In the process of trying to accomplish

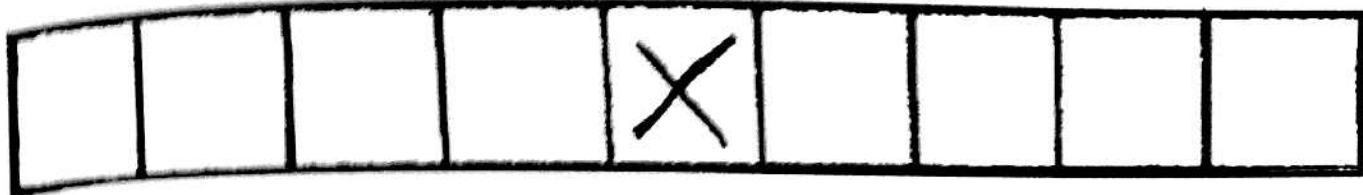
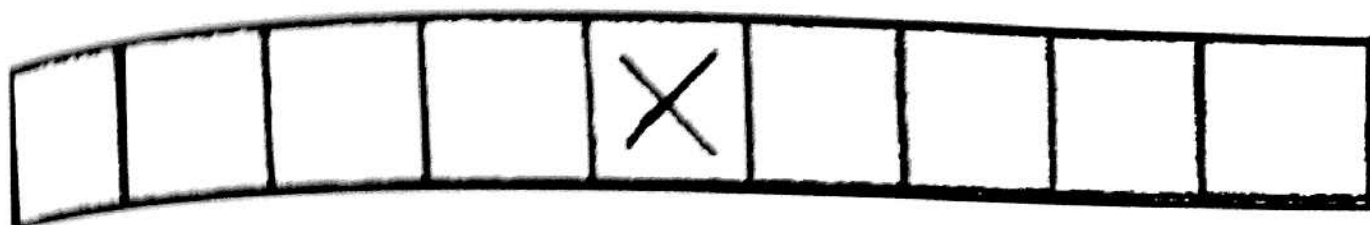
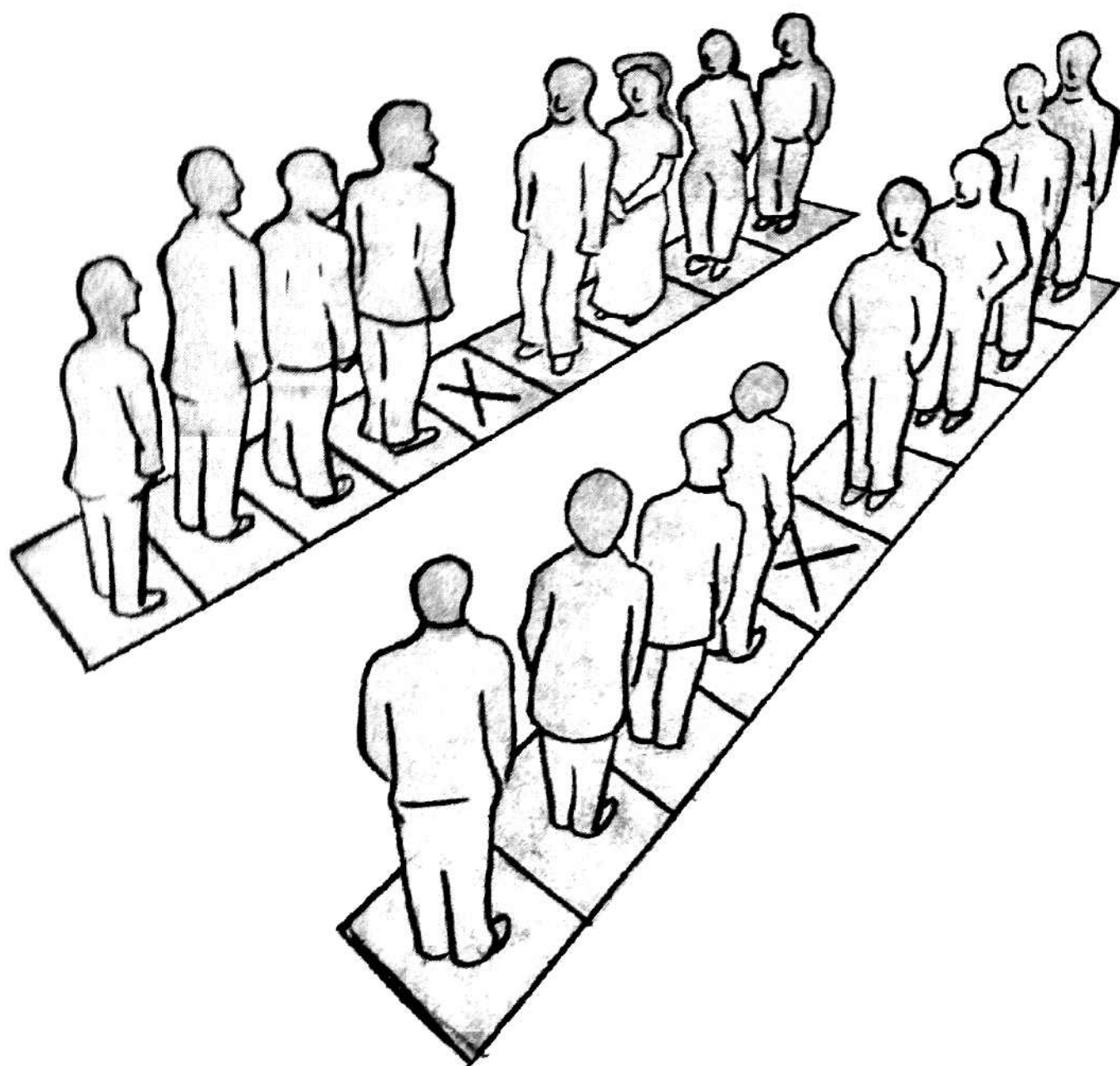


Diagram 5.1.



this exchange, however, members of the subgroups must observe certain rules, as follows:

- The only possible movement of participants is to a vacant square; in other words, participants facing each other may go around each other, but only if they use the vacant square to accomplish this maneuver.
- Participants facing in the same direction may not go around each other, regardless of the availability of a vacant square to do so.
- Participants may only move forward, that is, in the direction they are facing; in no instance can they move backward.
- A participant making a move can only go around one opposite-facing person at a time.
- Only one participant can be standing on a square at a time.
- Although participants can talk with each other freely to solve their common problem, they may not at any time stray from their assigned positions; there are only two exceptions to this rule—first, trial, error, and reset is allowed, and second, participants at the end of a column may rotate to the front at the will of the subgroup.
- Roughly half an hour is assigned the activity, although the facilitator may allow more time if the group is close to solving the problem.
- Participants are not to use paper and pencil, pennies, or other objects to simulate the problem; the only objects available to them are their bodies and minds.

As participants grope for a solution, the facilitator stands back and observes behavior, such as the relative levels of engagement of different participants, the extent of interaction between participants in the two separate columns if any, the nature of the brainstorming used to solve the problem, and the role of the group versus the individual in problem solving.

### Success Markers

That some participants become disengaged from the activity or even overtly frustrated with lack of progress is not cause for concern. On



the contrary, such reactions offer much to discuss in the debrief, for example, what it feels like to be out of the loop on a matter that affects you. In this exercise, the facilitator has to stick to his or her guns regarding the rules, not only those that distinguish legal from illegal moves but also those that apply to total group behavior, particularly the mandate that everyone remain in place on the grid throughout the activity. The learning from the exercise depends on tight compliance with the rules.

### **Strategic Considerations**

Bureaucracy is best done after a group has engaged in team building and has met some success in working collaboratively on its main task. Because the activity is structured to allow only a few to be at the center of decision making, many participants feel extraneous to the problem solving at hand and unclear about how to help their colleagues. It is important, therefore, for a group to establish beforehand a solid foundation of positive working relationships. For some, the exercises can be quite sobering about the true extent of collaboration and teamwork in their organization. It makes sense that it be situated in the middle of a set of interventions, not at the start or at the end.