

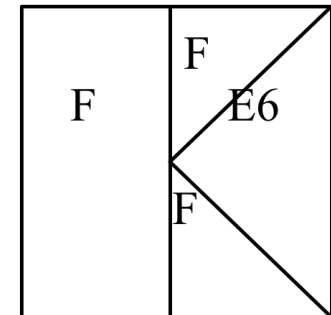
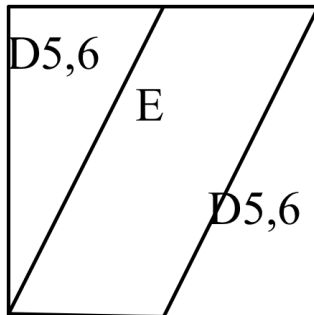
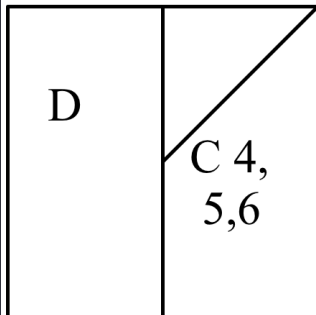
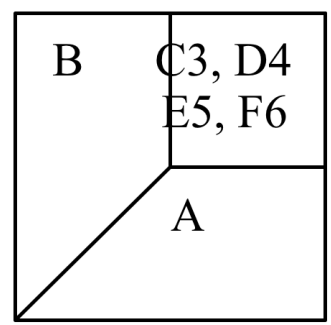
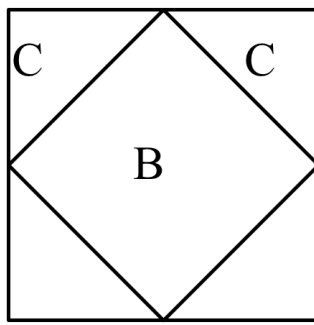
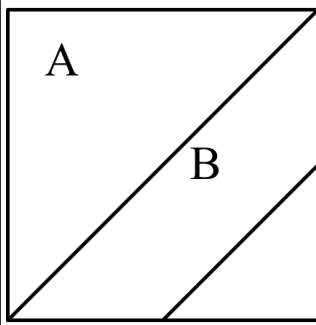
Building Collaborative Groups with Broken Squares

written by CD | APRIL 6, 2019

In his book [The Culture Code – The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups](#), Daniel Coyle refers to a competition at Stanford where business students in university squared off against kindergartners. The four-person teams had to beat the clock and build a tower using uncooked spaghetti, tape and string with a marshmallow on top. You would think that obviously, the group of MBA student would easily outperform a group of kindergartners. It turns out it's good to [act like a bunch of 5-year-olds](#) – well, at least when it comes to working in a groups. The kindergartners do better than the business school students.

He further mentions a "[sociometer](#)" which can measure the energy level of an interaction, and use it to determine levels of engagement. Most important, it can combine its data with email and social media to form detailed maps that reveal the inner workings of a team, company, or classroom. There are lots of interesting insights he derives from that.

However, you may not wish to invest in a spaghetti tower competition or a sociometer, but you might try an exercise that's worked for me in putting teams of four to compete against each other. It's a fun exercise I learned on the path to my teaching credentials was Broken Squares (see various links below). You pit the groups of four against each other where each group, without speaking must complete making four squares from four envelopes of pieces give to each participant. You only win when all four squares are completed. The sets of four envelopes are grouped such that only one holds all the pieces to make a square. The others can't successfully complete their squares unless they get pieces from the other participants including the one who had a complete set. As you observe the competing teams, you'll often see someone compete their square and get frustrated that his or her teammates aren't doing their part. The team that collaborates by giving up pieces (you can give but not take and no talking) of their, possibly already completed square, to allow their teammates to all complete their squares is the one that gets all four squares.



Observing the group dynamics and then talking them through can be quite insightful – you might even choose to make the envelopes with a complete set to the people that tend to be leaders to help them discover how effectively and collaboratively they lead.

In [The Culture Code – The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups](#), Daniel Coyle goes into the various aspects of how teams function effectively. After doing a broken squares exercise, this might be a good book to suggest to your leaders.

See Also:

- [Orange Observations](#)
- [Hunter College – Building Dynamic Groups – Broken Squares](#)
- [Humber Centre for Teaching and Learning Instructional Strategies Teaching Methods Classroom Strategies Designing Instruction Activities and Games Broken Squares](#)
- [Stanford Education Department – Broken Circles, Broken Squares](#)
- [Workology – Online HR Learning on Your Schedule – Broken Squares](#)
- [Book: Daniel Coyle The Culture Code – The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups](#)
- Stanford Store: [Broken Squares: A Simulation Exploring Cooperation and Competition](#) Regular price \$12.95