

# Fishing for Communication

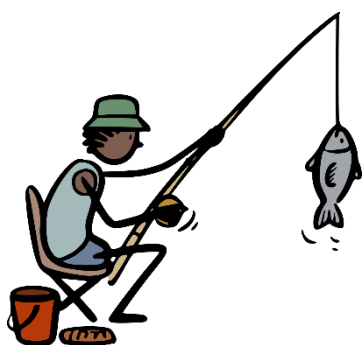
## *(experiential group-dynamics and communication activity)*

<b>Short description</b>	<p>The “Fishing for Communication” activity is a structured experiential simulation in which small groups manage a shared resource under conditions of limited communication. Through metaphorical gameplay, participants enact patterns of cooperation, competition, and negotiation. The task functions as a projective group-dynamics tool, revealing communication barriers and supporting reflective learning about interdependence and social responsibility.</p> <p>The intervention combines experiential simulation with structured written and dialogic reflection, drawing on experiential learning theory (Kolb, 2015), group dynamics (Lewin, 1947), social dilemma research on shared resources (Ostrom, 1990), and needs-based communication approaches (Rosenberg, 2015).</p>
<b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop intra- and intergroup communication skills</li> <li>• To examine cooperation, competition, and resource-sharing behaviours</li> <li>• To foster negotiation, collective decision-making, and strategic thinking</li> <li>• To raise awareness of social dilemmas and interdependence</li> <li>• To explore emotional reactions related to scarcity, trust, and fairness</li> <li>• To promote reflection on inclusion, exclusion, and conflict resolution</li> </ul>
<b>Duration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructions and grouping: 5–10 minutes</li> <li>• Game simulation (10 rounds/days): 20–25 minutes</li> <li>• Debriefing and reflection: 10–15 minutes</li> <li>• Total: approximately 45 minutes</li> </ul>
<b>Social form</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three small groups (minimum 3 participants per group)</li> <li>• Intragroup decision-making</li> <li>• Whole-group reflection during debriefing</li> <li>• Facilitator-led discussion</li> </ul> <p>For minimal 9 person plus moderator</p>
<b>Materials and organisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scoreboard or flipchart</li> <li>• Table drawn with: <i>10 rows (days)</i> <i>3 columns (villages/settlements)</i></li> <li>• Pens/markers</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Divide participants into three groups</li> <li>• Ask each group to choose a <b>name</b> for their fishing village</li> </ul>

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- Explain that they represent separate settlements that historically do not communicate
- Prepare the board with the 10-day table
- Prepare fish tokens and reproduction rules

## Step-by-step description



### Step 1: Group formation and identity building

Participants are divided into **three small groups**, with a minimum of three members per group to ensure meaningful interaction and shared decision-making.

Each group is asked to **create a name for their fishing village/settlement**. This step serves both organisational and psychological purposes. Beyond simple identification, choosing a group name fosters:

- group identity formation
- a sense of belonging and ownership
- early cooperation and consensus-building
- emotional engagement with the role-play scenario

The facilitator briefly emphasises that each group represents a separate community of fishermen living independently and traditionally not communicating with the other settlements. This narrative framing supports immersion in the simulation and strengthens the perception of intergroup boundaries, which is important for later observation of communication and negotiation dynamics.

Group names are written on the board and used consistently throughout the activity when recording results and addressing the teams.

### Step 2 Narrative framing

The facilitator introduces the story:

Three settlements of fishermen lived on the shores of the lake. They did not meet and, since ancient times, they fished according to an agreed schedule. One group fished at 6:00 a.m., the second at 9:00 a.m., and the third at 11:00 a.m. Fish were their only source of livelihood.

Fish could reproduce overnight. Four fish were needed to produce one new fish. For example, if there were 13 fish, only three groups of four could reproduce, resulting in three new fish. The lake could never contain more than 20 fish.

Due to boat size and local agreements, each group could catch only 0, 1, 2, or 3 fish per day.

You are these fishermen. Your task is to provide for your village as well as possible during the next 10 days.

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### Step 3 Daily rounds (“10 days of life”)

For each day:

1. Groups privately discuss strategy
2. Each group decides how many fish to catch (0–3)
3. Decisions are announced simultaneously
4. Fish are removed from the lake
5. Reproduction rule is applied overnight
6. Results are recorded on the board

Groups are initially instructed **not to communicate with other groups**.

### Step 4 – Observation of process

During the game, the facilitator observes:

- leadership emergence
- negotiation patterns
- cooperation vs. competition
- emotional reactions
- risk-taking or conservative strategies
- attempts to communicate across group boundaries

### Step 5 – Debriefing and reflection

After 10 days, participants form one circle.

Guiding questions:

- What strategy did your group use and why?
- How did you feel about the other groups?
- Did you trust them?
- What happened to the fish population over time?
- When did cooperation or conflict emerge?
- How does this resemble real-life communication or resource-sharing situations?
- What helped or blocked communication?

Participants connect the metaphorical game to real social or organisational contexts.

## Variations and differentiation

- allow intergroup negotiation after Day 5
- introduce a common meeting or treaty
- change reproduction rules
- add “crisis events” (storm, pollution, scarcity)
- assign roles (leader, recorder, negotiator)
- shorten rounds for younger participants

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## Practical notes

- Avoid giving strategic advice
- Maintain neutrality
- Allow natural tensions to emerge
- Emphasise reflection over “winning”
- Psychological safety is essential

The symbolic distance of the fishing scenario enables participants to explore sensitive themes (competition, mistrust, fairness, exclusion) indirectly and more openly.

After the simulation, participants may have given time for **individual written reflection** before engaging in group discussion. Each participant briefly documents:

- what happened during the game,
- how their group made decisions,
- how they felt about the outcomes,
- what frustrated or surprised them,
- what they needed from the other groups,
- and how communication (or lack of communication) influenced the results.

This writing phase serves as an emotional regulation and meaning-making step, allowing participants to process their experiences before verbal sharing.

Subsequently, a **facilitated group dialogue** is conducted. Participants are encouraged to articulate their needs, expectations, and emotional responses clearly and respectfully. Typical reactions include feelings of unfairness, anger, entitlement, or distrust toward other groups. These reactions are treated as valuable learning material rather than problems to be corrected.

The facilitator guides participants to:

- recognise underlying needs (security, fairness, survival, trust),
- differentiate between emotions and accusations,
- express needs explicitly,
- practise constructive communication and perspective-taking.

The aim of this phase is not to evaluate success or failure in the game but to develop **self-awareness, emotional literacy, and assertive communication skills**.

## References | Sources

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