

TRAINING 101

The PIE Factory

Prepare people for performance efforts by having them make pie boxes.

By Rick Sullivan

Illustration by Brandt Day

This exercise is designed to help participants in a performance improvement course or initiative understand factors that can affect job performance. The PIE (performance improvement exercise) Factory places participants in teams to produce boxes for carrying pies (smaller versions of actual pie boxes).

Here's how it goes.

Show participants the box they're to create (the performance standard), and ask them to estimate the number of

boxes they'll be able to produce in five minutes. That's their production goal; record on the chart shown. The exercise has at least three rounds.

During the first round, the teams produce as many boxes as possible. After five minutes, inspect the completed boxes and record the number that meet the standard. Prior to the second round, give teams an opportunity to revise their production estimates, then record those estimates on the chart.

Hand each team an envelope (they shouldn't be aware those are coming). Some envelopes will contain good news, but most will contain bad news. The envelopes contain situations that can affect performance, and most will result in barriers to production (see instructions). These barriers will affect the teams' ability to achieve their goals. They continue to make the boxes.

After five minutes, inspect the completed boxes and record the results on the chart. Prior to the third round, the teams again revise their estimates, without knowing what news will be in their envelopes during the next round. Distribute the mystery envelopes, and resume production.

Following the third round, inspect the boxes, and record the results.

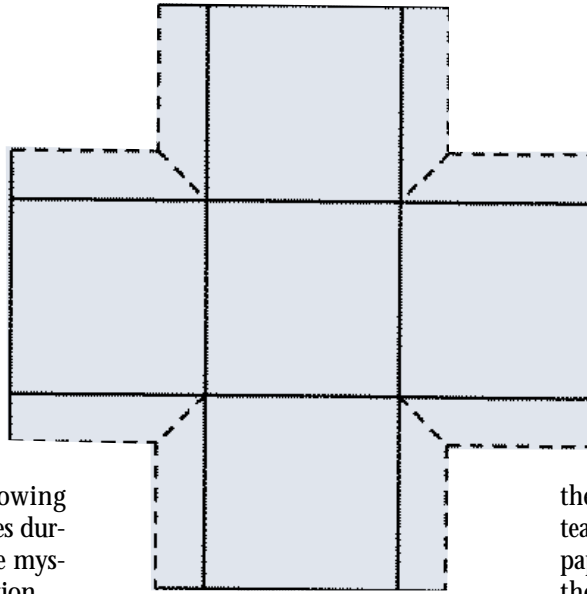
The facilitator leads a discussion focused on how the various performance factors affected each team's ability to achieve its goals.

After completing the exercise, participants should be able to describe the effect that various factors can have on job performance.

To prepare

1. Use construction paper to make a copy

PIE Factory Box Pattern



of the box pattern (see figure) for each team.

2. Fold one box to serve as the performance standard.
3. Provide each team with one pair of scissors, one roll of transparent tape, one pattern for the box, and about 100 sheets of construction paper cut in squares the size of the pattern. Put all of the materials in paper bags, one to each table where the teams will work.

4. Divide participants into teams of

about six members.

5. Prepare the production chart (below) to record the results of each round.

Instructions

1. Explain that each group is to act as a production team at the PIE Factory. Each team should select a team name and a supervisor. Record the team names on the chart.

2. Demonstrate how to make the box, using the construction paper, pattern, scissors, and tape.

3. Instruct each team to estimate the number of boxes they think

they can produce in five minutes. Each team should write its estimate on a slip of paper along with the team name and give the slip to the facilitator; that prevents hearing other teams' estimates. The facilitator records the teams' production goals under the Goal column for Round 1. Give the teams five minutes to produce as many boxes as possible. Alert them when they have one minute remaining, 30 seconds left, and then end the round. Ask the teams to turn in their completed boxes for inspection by the quality control inspector (the facilitator). Record the number of boxes produced to standard by each team in the appropriate column of the chart.

PIE Factory Production Chart

	Team Name		Team Name		Team Name		Team Name	
Rounds	Goal	Produced	Goal	Produced	Goal	Produced	Goal	Produced
1								
2								
3								
4								

5. Discuss with the teams how their goals compare to actual production. Ask how they dealt with production problems and how they were able to develop better production processes during the five minutes. Next, ask the teams to write their goals for Round 2 on slips and give those to the facilitator.

6. Pick up any partially constructed boxes along with any cut patterns and tape. Ask team members to return all of the supplies to their bags and prepare for Round 2.

7. Prior to starting Round 2, give an envelope to each team. The envelopes contain information related to one or more performance factors. Most will have a negative impact on performance that will affect the teams' ability to reach their Round 2 goals.

Here are some examples of the messages to enclose in the envelopes:

- Monitoring indicates that all workers are performing to standard. Have a nice day!
- Two workers have been selected for training. Two team members sit out this round.
- Equipment and supply orders weren't submitted on time. No access to the tape for the first two minutes.
- Two workers lack motivation because they haven't received feedback on their job performance, so they're late to work. Two team members start two minutes later.
- The manager failed to arrange a contract for equipment maintenance. No scissors for the first minute.
- Lack of clear job expectations results in all workers (except the supervisor) not understanding their roles on the team. No one other than the supervisor works for the first minute.

8. Give the teams five minutes to produce as many boxes as possible. Signal when they have one minute remaining, 30 seconds, and then stop. Ask the teams to turn in their completed boxes

for inspection by quality control. Record the number of boxes produced to standard by each team in the appropriate column of the production chart.

9. Discuss with the teams how their goals compare to actual production in relation to the problems they faced. Then ask them to write their goals for Round 3 on slips and give them to the facilitator.

10. Pick up any partially constructed boxes along with any cut patterns and tape. Ask team members to return all of the supplies to their bags and prepare for Round 3.

11. Prior to starting Round 3, give an envelope to each team. If a team received the "no problem" envelope in the last round, make sure it gets a problem envelope in this round.

12. Following Round 3 (or Round 4 if time and interest permit), lead a discussion as described next.

Processing

The objective of the PIE Factory activity is to help participants become acquainted with the impact of various factors on job performance. Ask the teams to reflect on their ability to maximize performance to achieve production goals in the face of the problems presented in the envelopes. Ask whether those problems would affect performance in a more critical environment, such as a health-care facility.

This exercise should prepare participants for a more formal presentation of performance improvement and the factors that can affect performance.

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