



Mindset Exercises

Booklet

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The right state of mind

A design thinking process has various steps and is often carried out with the help of a wide range of practical and creative tools. In such a process, your mindset will determine your success. This means having an open and curious mind when looking at the world around you; when assessing situations and when solving problems.

This booklet includes a host of mindset exercises that will help you to nurture your inner design thinker. Some of the attitudes and behaviours that these exercises aim to train may come naturally and some will require practice. With each exercise, you will find: a description of the mindset, its purpose, why it is important and when you can use it.

The mindset exercises focus on 5 key attitudes and behaviours:

1. **Build up your confidence**

Start by building the belief that your organisation and your team have the power and the ability to turn a great idea into reality. Then continue by building your “creative” confidence: the belief that even if you are not a designer or a creative person, you can train yourself in thinking “outside the box”. Thinking outside the box means to think differently, unconventionally, or from a new perspective. When you’re willing to consider alternative ways of doing and looking at things, you’ll be more open to a variety of different points of view and potential solutions.

2. **Be constructive**

Sometimes, ideas are dismissed during a conversation with responses of “yes but ...” A great way to turn this around is to use “yes AND...”. This simple action will open up a world of opportunities and make your conversation more constructive.

3. **Have empathy**

Empathy means “stepping into someone else’s shoes” - having compassion towards your users and trying to understand their realities.

4. **Learn from Failure**

By failing, you learn. It is best to fail fast, often and early on, so that it is less likely to happen later when it really matters. Allow yourself to try again, and again...as many times as is needed.

5. **Trust the process**

The design thinking process can feel uncomfortable: you might find yourself anxious about not knowing what the end result will be. Don’t be discouraged - uncertainty means you are exploring different possibilities and if you’re following the process, you’ll get to where you want to be!

1. Build up your confidence

Mindset exercise

Compliments Cups

Mindset

Build up each team member's confidence in themselves and each other.

Purpose

This exercise provides perspective on what your team sees as your best qualities, revealing skills and strengths you may not have realized.

When to use

Use this exercise as a teambuilding activity at the start of a new project, or when it is clear that there is a need for stronger collaboration and connection between team members.

Material needed

- As many cups, glasses or bowls as the number of people in your team.
- Pieces of paper (or sticky notes)

Time

Around 20 minutes.

Instructions

1. Write each team member's name on each cup/glass/bowl
2. Every team member gets as many pieces of paper as there are team members present (if there are 5 team members, each person gets 5 pieces of paper).
3. Team members write one positive quality about each team member on a separate piece of paper and put it into the cup/glass/bowl with that team member's name.
4. Each team member reads their positive qualities out loud.



Mindset exercise

Build your dream office

Mindset

Build up your (creative) confidence.

Purpose

This exercise will help you get into the right mindset for prototyping. You will “make more and think less”, and experience how differently you work when you are creating with your hands.

When to use

This exercise is useful to give as daily homework before a design sprint or creative session; the more you do it, the easier it gets. It can also be used at the start of a workshop (as a warm-up or as an energizer). It can also be used as an easy format for prototyping.

Material needed

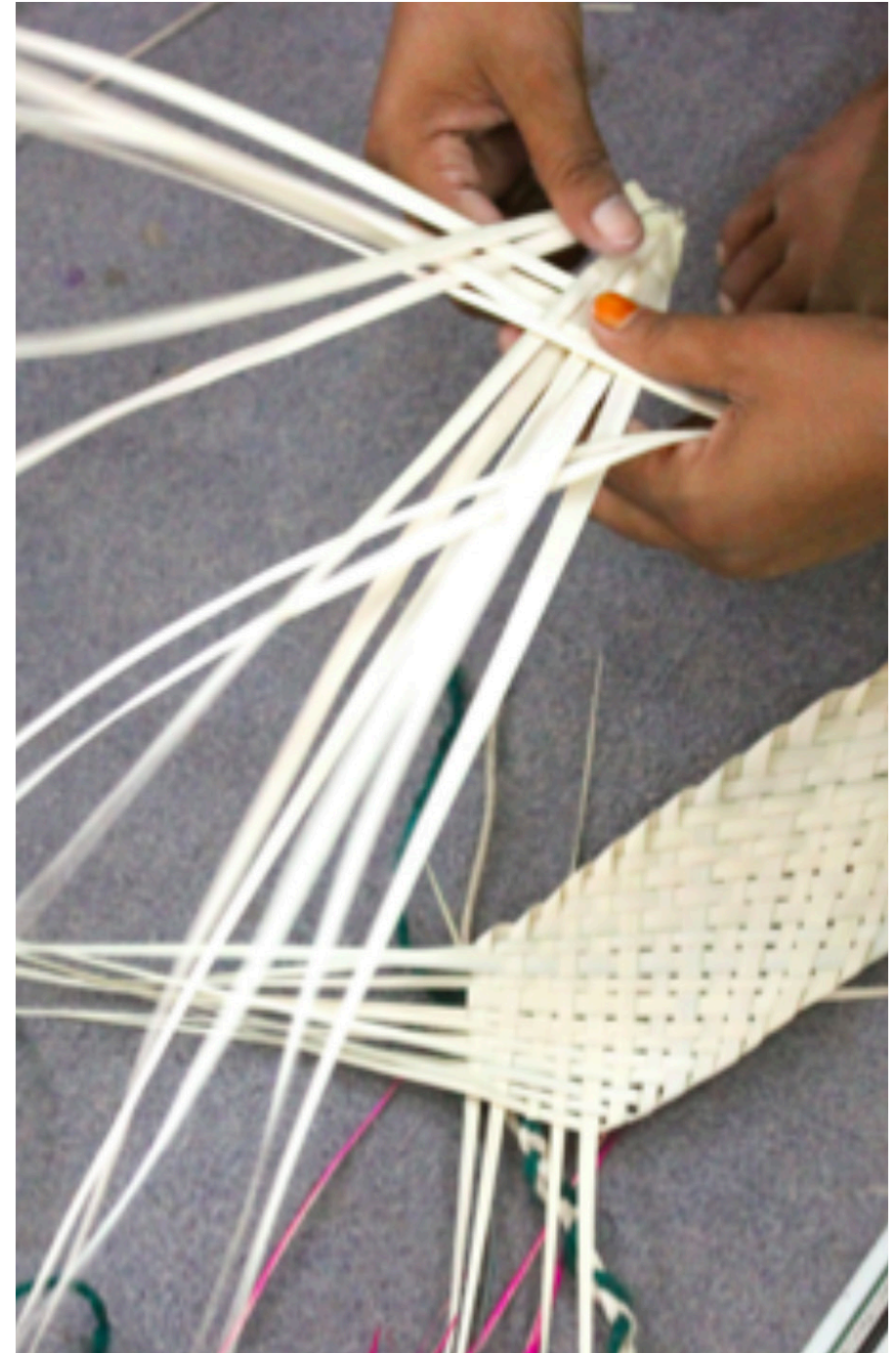
Anything tangible you have at-hand (tape, pens, markers paper, bottles, notebooks, cups).

Time

5-10 minutes.

Instructions

1. By using only the materials you have at-hand, create a three-dimensional prototype of your dream office. Don't take more than 5 minutes.
2. Team members can try this exercise at different locations, in their own time (e.g. at their desk, at a restaurant, at home) and you can ask them to take a picture of the results to share at the office or in a Whatsapp group.



Mindset exercise

Circles Circles

Mindset

Build up your (creative) confidence.

Purpose

This exercise helps you to come up with ideas more quickly and easily.

When to use

This exercise is a good practice that you give as daily homework before a design sprint or creative session; the more you do it, the easier it gets. It can also be used at the start of a workshop (as a warm-up or as an energizer).

Material needed

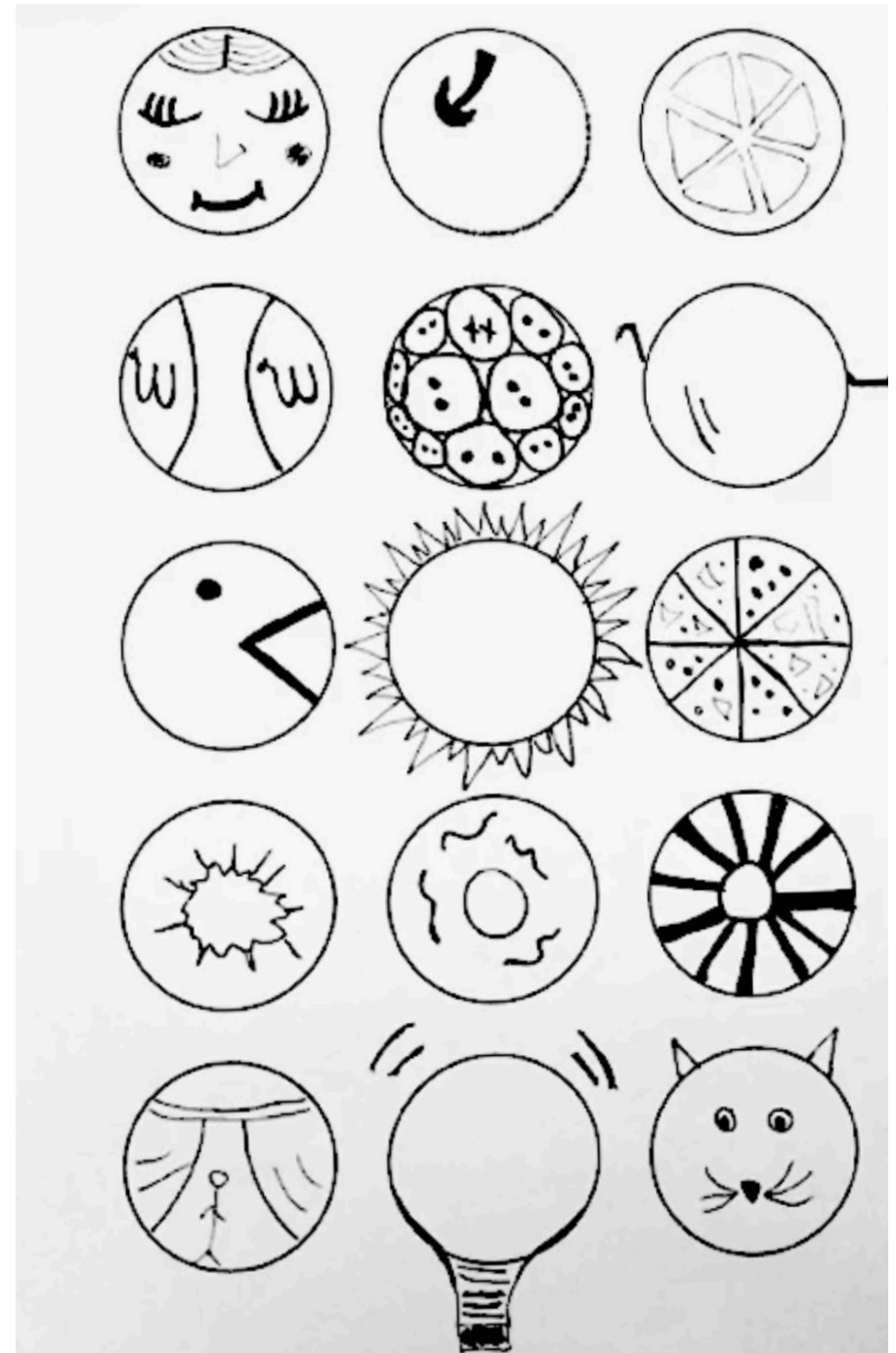
Paper, pens or markers, a glass.

Time

5-10 minutes.

Instructions

1. Draw circles on a piece of paper. This can be done by tracing a round object, like a glass.
2. Now transform the circles into something else. Try and do as many circles as possible. If you do this regularly, it will become easier, quicker and more creative.



Mindset exercise

1.000 Uses

Mindset

Build up your (creative) confidence.

Purpose

This exercise will encourage you to come up with wild ideas and think outside of the box. Thinking about what you can do with an object outside of its normal use encourages you to think beyond the obvious. The more you try, the easier it will get!

When to use

This exercise is a good practice that you give as daily homework before a design sprint or creative session; the more you do it, the easier it gets. It can also be used at the start of a workshop (as a warm-up or as an energizer).

This exercise can also be used when a grantee is stuck with a problem by encouraging them to look at it from a different perspective.

Material needed

Paper, pens or markers.

Time

Around 15 minutes.

Instructions

1. Make equal-sized groups.
2. Each group picks a notetaker to mark down answers.
3. Pick a random object (e.g. a pen, a lemon, a cup)
4. Each group has 2 minutes for each group member to come up with as many uncommon uses for the object as possible. Here are some ideas to get your creative juices flowing: sit on the object; put it in between your toes, balance it on your head... You will notice that if you do these types of exercises more often, it will become easier and faster to think out of the box.
5. When time is up, each group shares the ideas they generated. The group with the most ideas wins!



2.

Be constructive

Mindset exercise

Rephrase your problem

Mindset

Be constructive.

Purpose

This exercise will help you to think in terms of opportunities and possibilities, rather than problems and restrictions.

When to use

This exercise can be used in team sessions at the start of a project when you are defining the problem you are solving.

Material needed

No materials needed.

Time

Around 15 minutes.

Instructions

1. State a problem that you or your organisation is facing.
2. Rephrase the problem you are trying to tackle by describing it as an opportunity instead of a problem. Try to come up with several opportunity statements.

Example

Problem: Plastic waste is polluting my city.

- Rephrase:
- Waste collection could be a lucrative job opportunity.
 - Plastic containers can be upcycled and sold for profit - as homemade planters or bracelets, for example.



Mindset exercise

Superhero Party

Mindset

Build up your (creative) confidence.

Purpose

This will help you to think in opportunities and possibilities, rather than problems and restrictions.

When to use

This exercise can be used in a workshop setting to demonstrate the power of constructive thinking. The “Yes and....- rule” can be useful in a brainstorm or group discussion.

Material needed

No materials needed.

Time

Around 20 minutes.

Instructions

1. Each team member presents themselves as a superhero and shares their main superpower.
2. The superheroes want to plan a party! Find a superhero partner to plan a party with. For round one, everyone starts each sentence of their party planning conversation with “Yes, BUT”.
3. For round two all participants start their party planning conversation with “Yes, AND”.
4. After the second round, ask the group how the 2 rounds went and compare the two conversations. The differences between the two will be striking!

Variation

You can also do this exercise starting with a statement everyone in the team can relate to (such as “How about we organise a joint plastic collection around our community?”)

One week challenge

In the coming week, every time you want to start a sentence with “Yes, but...”, replace it with “Yes and...”.



3.

Have empathy

Mindset exercise

The Thinking Hats

Mindset

Have empathy: changing perspectives

Purpose

This exercise will help you to think from a different perspective and consider those different from your own and encourages equal participation.

When to use

This exercise can be used in team sessions at the start of a project, when you are defining the problem you are solving and looking at it from different perspectives.

Material needed

No materials needed.

Time

Around 15 minutes.

Instructions

1. Come up with a problem: it can be a problem faced by your organisation, a global problem or an everyday problem.
2. Each team member chooses a “thinking hat”. If there are more team members, more than one person takes the same hat.
3. For five minutes, brainstorm on the problem from the perspective of the hat that you are wearing.
 - **red** - the pessimist: points out all the negative aspects, weaknesses, and possible dangers.
 - **yellow** - the optimist: points out positive effects of or solutions for the problem.
 - **white** - the realist: points out what is known about this problem, what can be learnt from it and what information is needed to solve it.
 - **black** - the harmonist: keeps a pulse on team morale and tries to resolve possible tensions or misunderstandings.
4. Discuss everyone’s experience with the exercise.



Mindset exercise

Empathy Triangle

Mindset

Have empathy.

Purpose

When interacting with others (e.g., team members, customers or stakeholders), it is natural to have assumptions about what they mean, think or feel. In order to create solutions that really take others' ideas into account, it is important to be aware of our own biases and to truly listen. This exercise will help you to overcome the difficulty of listening without bias and train you in listening attentively and curiously.

When to use

This exercise can be used as an energiser at the start of a project or research phase. It is especially useful to do at a project kick-off or before starting your research. After this exercise, it can be useful to review any interview questions you had prepared to see if these follow an active listening approach.

Material needed

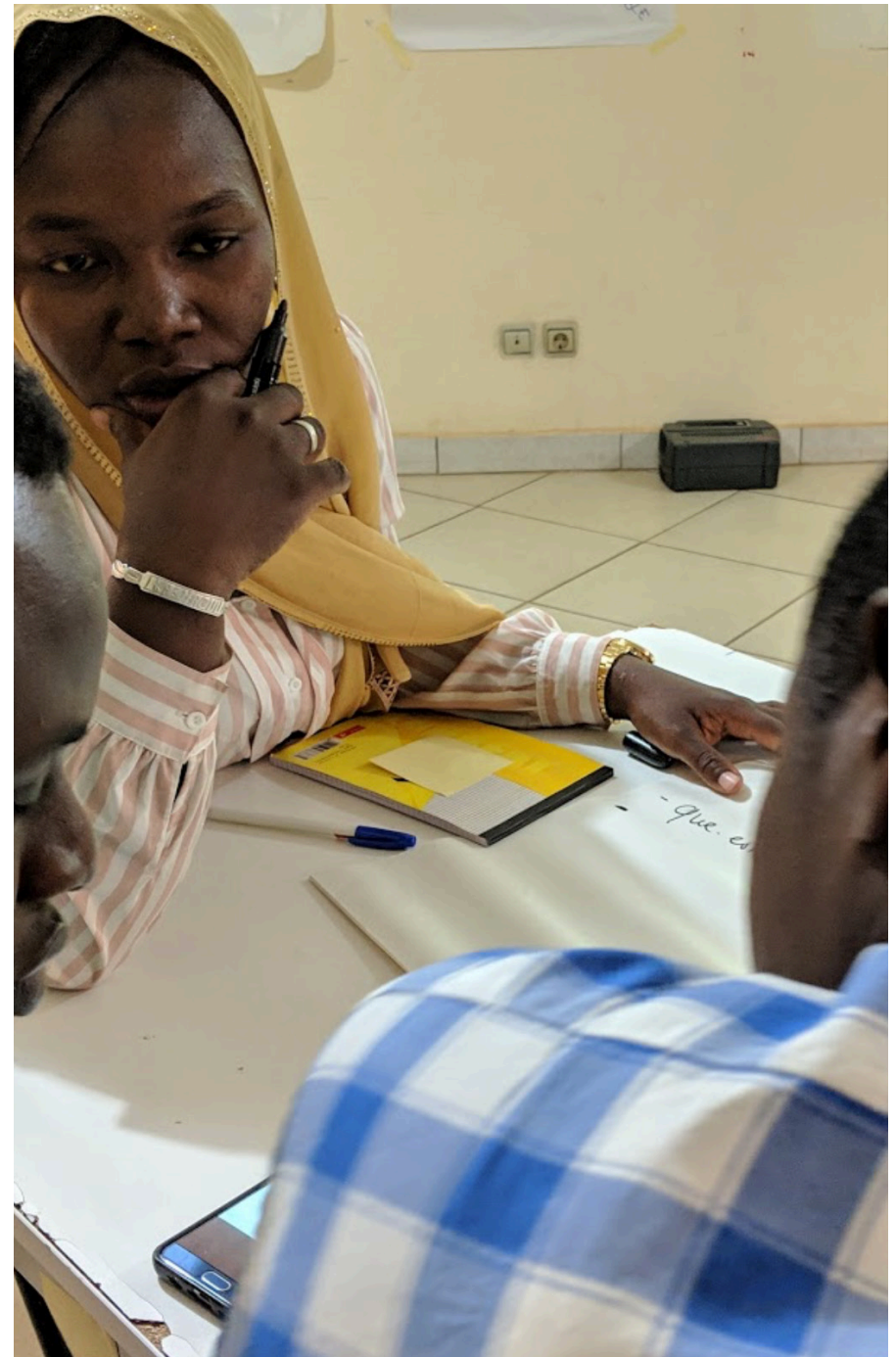
No materials needed.

Time

Around 15 minutes.

Instructions

1. Make groups of three people.
2. Each group divides members into 3 roles: the talker, the listener and the observer.
3. For five minutes, the talker shares a challenge/problem from their own perspective. The listener can only ask clarifying questions and cannot offer opinions. The observer does nothing but observe the talker and the listener.
4. After 5 minutes, discuss the process with the groups by using the following questions:
As a talker: did you feel that you could share anything? Was the listener not trying to advise you or direct your thoughts?
As a listener: how hard was it to not give your opinion?
As an observer: what did you see happening?
5. Explain the objective: 1) to become very aware of how much of our own opinion we tend to share, even when we are listening. And 2) if there are (outside) observers as part of an interview setting, they will also have an impact on what is shared.



4. Learn from failure

Mindset exercise

Fail Fair

Mindset

Learn from failure.

Purpose

This exercise will help you to embrace your failures, to reflect on them and to turn them into opportunities.

When to use

This exercise can be used in team sessions, especially during the prototyping phase, as it helps to build a culture where failure is celebrated.

It can also be given as daily homework to create a habit of accepting and celebrating failures.

Material needed

No materials needed.

Time

Around 15-20 minutes.

Instructions

1. Make small groups (ideally 3-6 people).
2. Each person in the group shares a failure they have experienced in the past month, and they mention 3 things that they have learnt from this failure.
Use the format: "My failure is but I learnt and and"
3. Then the other group members celebrate the failure by sharing what they have learnt from this failure. Use this format: "Thank you for sharing this failure because it helped me to"

Homework format

Create your own Failure Diary where you celebrate a failure every day. At the end of each day, think back on how everything went - where did you fail, make a mistake or think you messed up? What can you learn from these failures? Don't forget to appreciate these experiences - they will help you grow!



Mindset exercise

Worst Case Scenarios

Mindset

Learn from failure.

Purpose

This exercise will help you to embrace your failures, to reflect on them and to turn them into opportunities.

When to use

This exercise can be used in team sessions, especially during the prototyping phase, as it helps to build a culture where failure is celebrated.

Material needed

A big sheet of paper.

Time

Around 10 minutes.

Instructions

1. On top of the big sheet of paper, write down your vision for your organisation
2. Brainstorm as a group: "What could be the absolute worst thing that could happen while trying to achieve this vision?". Write these worst-case scenarios underneath the vision.
3. Turn each disaster/failure into an opportunity.

Example

Vision: To build a community economy based on plastic recycling.

Disasters/failure: The project will encourage more plastic pollution.

Opportunity: We can employ people to track all the plastic streams at the start of the project to keep an eye on the increase/decrease.

Vision: To open a business selling a new type of sustainable fuel.

Disasters/failure: Competition from larger fuel companies makes it impossible to stay in business.

Opportunity: Sell the business idea to the larger companies and use the profit to fund a new sustainable venture.



5. Trust the Process

Mindset exercise

Head-Torso-Feet

Mindset

Trust the process

Purpose

This exercise will help you to see that unexpected results can add value and innovation to your work.

When to use

This exercise is a good warm-up exercise at the start of a creative team session.

Material needed

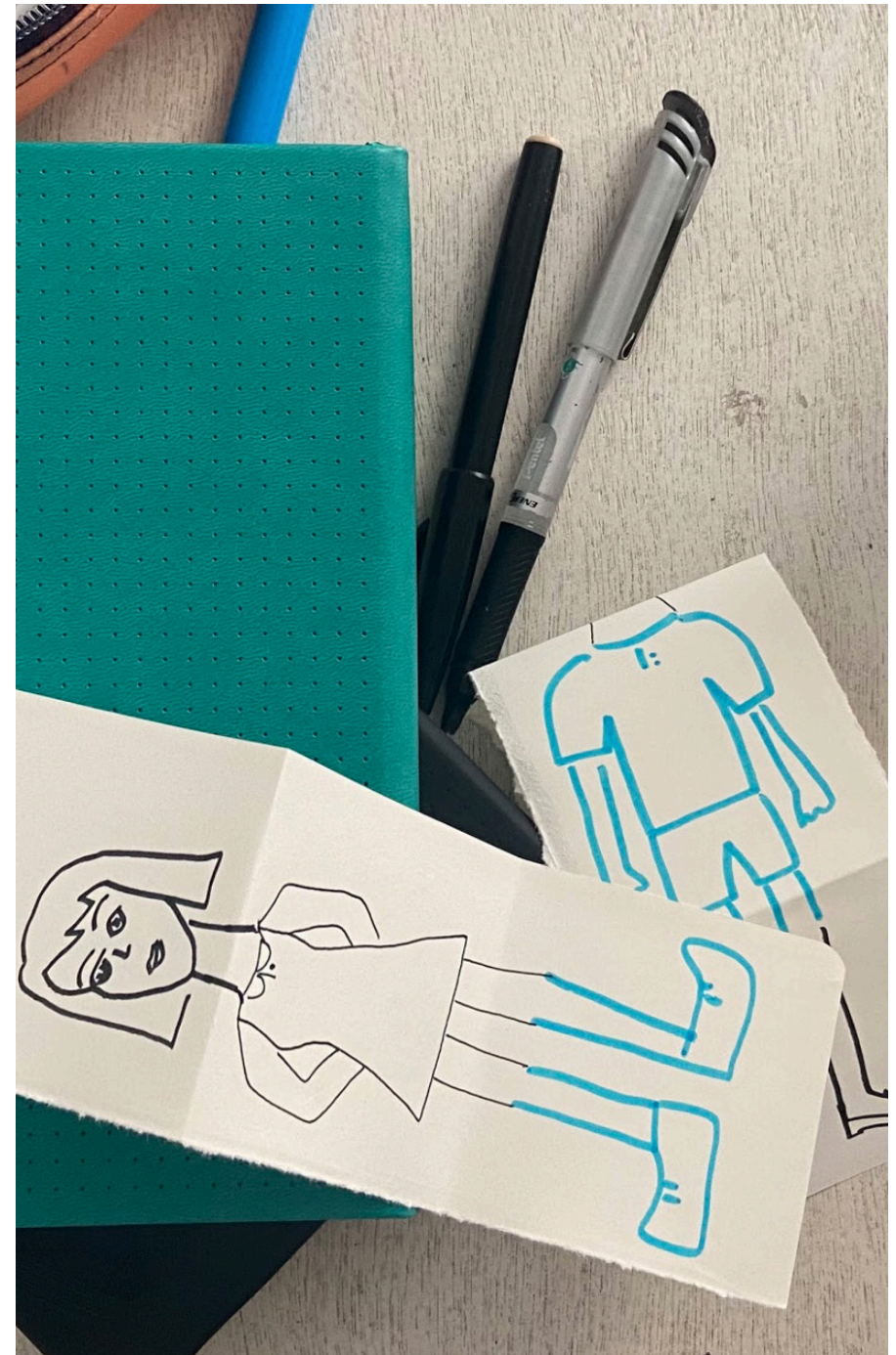
Paper and pens or markers.

Time

Around 10 minutes.

Instructions

1. Each person takes a piece of paper and folds it in three parts.
2. In the first round, each person draws the head of a character on the top part, then folds down the piece with the drawing of the head so that it is hidden to the others.
3. Pass the paper to the next person, who draws a torso and folds the paper again so the drawing of the head and the torso are hidden to the others.
4. Pass the paper again to a third person who draws a pair of feet.
5. Unfold the paper. You will see that even if you did not know what the other drew, the end result works!



Mindset exercise

Close Your Eyes

Mindset

Trust the process

Purpose

This exercise will help you to trust your team and to embrace the unexpected.

When to use

This exercise is a good warm-up exercise at the start of a teambuilding session.

Material needed

No materials needed.

Time

Around 10 minutes.

Instructions

1. Stand in a circle.
2. Choose one person who will close his/her eyes and will start walking, slowly.
3. The person next to them nudges them gently towards someone else in the circle (do not lead, just nudge).
4. The person with their eyes closed keeps walking until the person who they are being nudged towards “catches” them and directs them towards someone else.
5. If it goes well, you can choose several people to walk at the same time with their eyes closed. Make sure to keep an eye on everyone to make sure everyone stays safe!

Variation in case physical contact is not appropriate

1. Make pairs.
2. One person will close his/her eyes. The other person directs them towards the other side of the space. This is done by verbally indicating the right direction.
3. The person will keep walking with their eyes closed until they reach the other side of the space.







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