

Classroom Activity

EMOTIONAL CONTAGION EXERCISE

Source: Bull Schaefer, R. A., & Palanski, M. E. (2014). Emotional Contagion at Work: An In-Class Experiential Activity. *Journal of Management Education*, 38(4), 533–559.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562913489030>

It is recommended that this activity be used *before* any discussion of how emotions affect groups or teams.

Step 1: Pre-activity Assessment and Instructions (10 minutes). Organize students into small groups of 4-6. Pass out an affect **pre-activity assessment**. Collect the assessments after a couple of minutes and tell the class they will complete a small group activity. Ask for a leader from each group to speak out in the hallway, ostensibly to give instructions on the activity. (If possible, it works better to speak with leaders confidentially the day before class so they have more time to prepare for their role. Then make it appear as though you have selected them spontaneously during the activity.) Inform the leaders what emotional contagion is and how emotions spread, then let them know that they will be given a **logic puzzle** to figure out within their groups. Each leader decides whether he/she will be extremely negative while working with the group or extremely positive. The goal of the exercise is to demonstrate the ease at which emotions, both negative and positive, can spread throughout a group. Give leaders advice about how to communicate their emotional displays to ensure their displays are perceived by group members. Let them know that if they are performing their role correctly, they will probably feel they are faking emotions or being really obvious, and that is okay.

Step 2 Small Group Activity (5 minutes). Leaders go back to their groups. There should immediately be shouting, really positive and negative instructions as the leaders enter the room and introduce the logic puzzle to their groups. Groups have 5 minutes to complete the puzzle. When the five minutes are up, distribute the affect **post-activity assessment** before discussion begins.

Step 3: Debrief (15-20 Minutes). After collecting the post-activity assessment, debriefing begins with sharing the **puzzle solution**. Next, groups get a chance to comment on leader behaviors. Explain to groups that leaders were asked to behave in a particular manner. Finally the class is guided through a discussion of emotional contagion and the role it plays in team performance.

Step 4: Outside of class time. Organize pre- and post-activity assessments by group. Calculate average group scores (excluding the leader) for positive and negative emotions before and after the puzzle activity. Calculate average perceptions of leader emotions. Finally calculate average positive and negative emotions before and after the activity for the leader. Make notes on whether each group accurately perceived the emotions displayed by the leader and whether the group, on average, became more positive or more negative after only 5 minutes.

Step 5: Announce Results. Even when students perceived their leader was faking or exaggerating emotions, contagion almost always happens across the group. Entertaining discussion of the details include just how positive or negative they perceived their leader's emotions, which of the groups emotions grew stronger and why, and whether the leader him/herself became more positive or negative by the end of the activity.

PRE-ACTIVITY ASSESSMENT

Name _____

Please report on how you are currently feeling today. To what degree are you currently experiencing the following emotions? Please circle one response for each feeling below.

No Degree

To Some Degree

To a great degree

Enthusiasm	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Optimism	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Happiness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Love	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sadness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Unhappiness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Fear	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Anxiety	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Irritation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Frustration	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

POST-ACTIVITY ASSESSMENT

Name _____

When you were working on this puzzle with your group, to what degree did you experience each of the feelings below?.

No Degree

To Some Degree

To a great degree

Enthusiasm	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Optimism	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Happiness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Love	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sadness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Unhappiness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Fear	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Anxiety	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Irritation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Frustration	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

To what degree did you group leader display positive emotions while your group leader display positive emotions while your group was solving the puzzle?

No Degree

To Some Degree

To a great degree

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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To what degree did your group leader display negative emotions while your group was solving the puzzle?

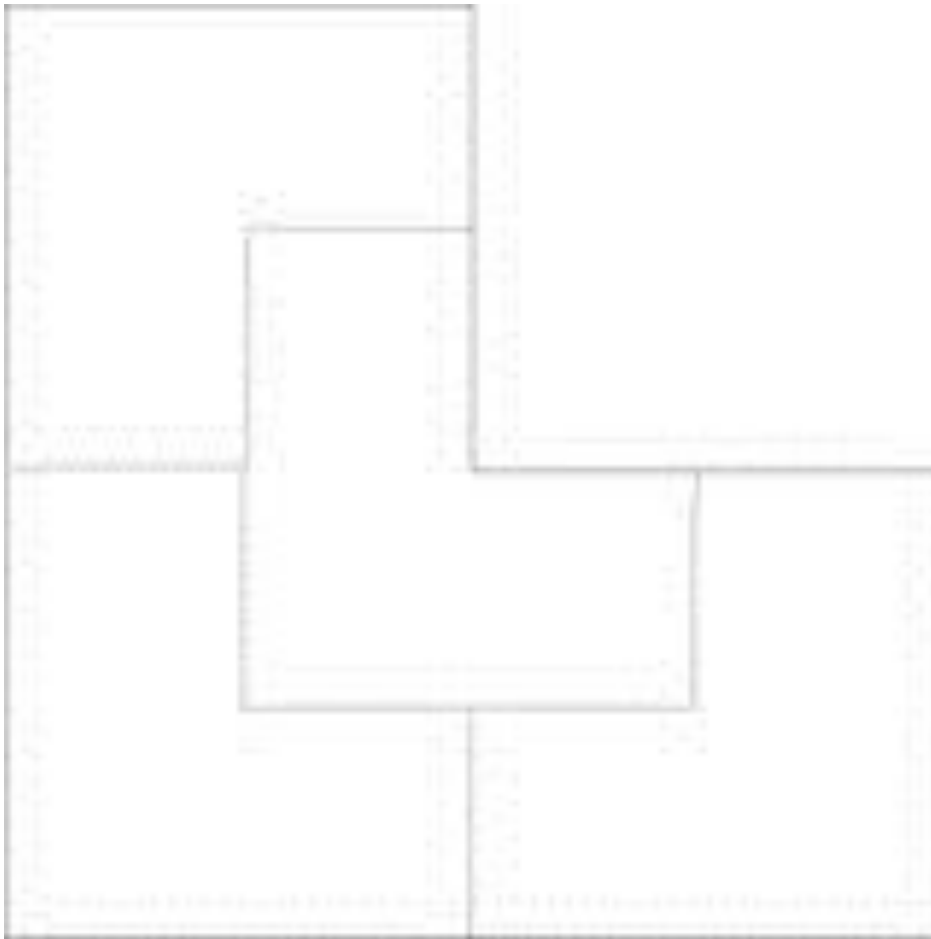
No Degree

To Some Degree

To a great degree

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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LOGIC PUZZLE SOLUTION



LOGIC PUZZLE

Instructions: Divide the figure below into four parts of equal size, shape and area.

