Team building activities for work: three paper-only exercises for one room

Team building activities for work are most useful when everyone at a table holds a piece the group needs, and the debrief turns what happened into one way of working. This kit has three original paper-only exercises of 5, 20 and 25 minutes, with printable cards, answer keys and a 60-minute plan for 3 to 40 people at tables. It ends with one team agreement and a date to check it; nobody has to stand, touch anyone or share anything personal.

60 minutes | 3–40 participants | In person, seated, paper only

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The outcome

By the end of 60 minutes each table has solved three cooperative exercises and noted what helped after each, and the group has chosen one team agreement with a date to check it.

Before the session

- For trainers, team leads and facilitators running an in-person team session with adults at work: 3 to 40 people at tables of 3 to 6.
- Print one set per table: code cards, desk cards, desk plan, note cards, welcome sheet and debrief sheet. Cut the cards and put each exercise in its own envelope, with the answer keys sealed in another. Pens are the only other material.
- Set chairs round tables. Nobody stands, touches anyone or shares anything personal. If the group is one real team, decide where the final agreement will be kept, such as the team charter.
- Accessibility: send the cards as plain text a day early to anyone who asks, and offer large print (edit the Word file). A neighbour can read any card aloud. Writer, checker and timekeeper suit people who prefer not to talk much, and anyone can pass.

Included in this kit

A facilitator run of show, participant worksheets with real tables, reference tables, debrief questions, adaptation notes and a follow-up plan. Use the editable Word copy to tailor examples and prompts before delivery.

Original material by Superglue. Timings are suggestions; adjust them to your participants. This resource has not been independently evaluated.

What is inside

- Exercise 1: locker code cards
- Exercise 2: desk cards
- Exercise 2: desk plan
- Exercise 3: note cards
- Exercise 3: welcome sheet
- Debrief and team agreement sheet
- Filled example: welcome sheet
- Filled example: debrief and team agreement
- Facilitator section: run of show, reference tables, debrief and adaptations

Exercise 1: locker code cards

Cut along the lines and deal the six cards round the table. Everyone holds at least one. Read your card aloud; you do not need to show it. Your team's stationery cupboard has a four-digit lock, and the note with the code was cut into these six pieces.

Our code: ____ ____ ____ ____

Card	Your clue
Card 1	All four digits are different.
Card 2	The four digits add up to 20.
Card 3	The first digit is twice the last digit.
Card 4	The second digit is bigger than each of the other three digits.
Card 5	The third digit is an odd number.
Card 6	The code uses no 0 and no 1.

Exercise 2: desk cards

Cut along the lines and deal the six cards. Each card holds one person’s need and one fact about the room. Read your whole card aloud, including the fact. All six people are fictional.

Card	Your role and what you need	Something you know about the room
Card 1	You are the coordinator. You meet visitors at reception several times a day, so you need the desk beside the door.	Only desks 1, 3 and 6 have a locking drawer.
Card 2	You are the designer. You check printed proofs in daylight, so you need a desk along the window.	The door is beside desk 4.
Card 3	You are the writer. You are on calls most of the day, so you cannot sit at a desk that touches the printer or where people queue for it.	Desks 1, 2 and 3 are along the window.
Card 4	You are the analyst. You share a project with the coordinator and pass papers across every hour, so you sit in the same row as the coordinator.	The printer stands at the end of the room and touches desks 3 and 6. People queue for it beside desk 5.
Card 5	You are the team lead. You review figures with the analyst each morning, so you sit at the desk opposite the analyst.	Opposite desks face each other across the room: 1 and 4, 2 and 5, 3 and 6.
Card 6	You are the trainer. You keep the training kit at your desk, so you need a desk with a locking drawer.	Desks 4, 5 and 6 form the row nearest the door.

Exercise 2: desk plan

Put this sheet in the middle of the table. Six desks stand in two rows of three. The window, the door and the printer are not marked: your cards say where they are. Write one role in each desk, and note on the plan what you learn about the room.

Ways to make needs visible: write each need beside the plan before you place anyone, and cross out desks that a need rules out.

	Left	Middle	Right
First row	Desk 1	Desk 2	Desk 3
Second row	Desk 4	Desk 5	Desk 6

What we know about the room

_____

_____

_____

Needs we have placed

_____

_____

_____

Exercise 3: note cards

Cut along the lines and deal all twelve notes. They arrived in the team inbox over three weeks. A new learning designer starts on Monday 2 November 2026. Some notes are out of date: on any topic, the newest note wins. Everything here is fictional.

Note	Date	From	The note
Note 1	Mon 12 Oct	Team coordinator	Day one starts at 09:30. Please tell the new colleague.
Note 2	Mon 26 Oct	Facilities	The induction room is booked until 09:45 on Monday 2 November. New starters that day arrive at 10:00, not earlier.
Note 3	Tue 20 Oct	Reception	New starters come to the main reception on the ground floor. Reception calls the person who is meeting them.
Note 4	Wed 14 Oct	Team lead	I will meet the new colleague at reception on their first morning.
Note 5	Wed 28 Oct	Team lead	I am away on Monday 2 November. The senior trainer will meet the new colleague at reception instead.
Note 6	Wed 21 Oct	Team coordinator	Team lunch on day one at 12:30 in the first-floor café. There is a vegetarian and a vegan choice. Anyone can skip it.
Note 7	Mon 19 Oct	IT desk	The new colleague collects their laptop from the IT desk on the second floor at 11:00.
Note 8	Tue 27 Oct	IT desk	Change of plan: we will bring the laptop to the new colleague’s desk at 11:00. No need to come to the IT desk.
Note 9	Thu 22 Oct	Reception	New starters bring photo ID to collect a building access card. Without one they sign in as a visitor each day.
Note 10	Thu 15 Oct	Team lead	Weekly team meeting: Tuesdays at 10:00 in room 3B.
Note 11	Thu 29 Oct	Team lead	From November the weekly team meeting moves to Wednesdays at 09:30, same room.
Note 12	Fri 23 Oct	Senior trainer	The new colleague’s buddy is the learning coordinator. They will have a coffee together at 15:00 on day one.

Exercise 3: welcome sheet

Your table writes one sheet for the new colleague. Before you start, agree who writes, who checks the dates, who keeps time and who reads. Write one or two plain sentences per topic, with only facts that are still true.

Writer: _____ Date checker: _____ Timekeeper: _____

Topic	What the new colleague needs to know
When to arrive	
Where to go	
Who meets you	
Your laptop	
Building access	
Lunch	
Your buddy	
First team meeting	

Debrief and team agreement sheet

One sheet per table. After each exercise write one line on what helped and one on what got in the way. In the final debrief, each person circles the line that would matter most in real work, and the table drafts one agreement.

Exercise	What helped us	What got in the way
1. The locker code		
2. The desk plan		
3. The welcome sheet		

Our draft agreement: When we…, we will…

_____

_____

_____

The agreement the group chose, and the date we check it

_____

_____

_____

Filled example: welcome sheet

A fictional table's finished sheet. All eight facts are current and none comes from an out-of-date note. Compare the answer key in the facilitator section.

Topic	What the new colleague needs to know
When to arrive	Please arrive at 10:00 on Monday 2 November. The induction room is busy before then.
Where to go	Come to the main reception on the ground floor. Reception will call us.
Who meets you	Our senior trainer meets you at reception.
Your laptop	IT brings your laptop to your desk at 11:00.
Building access	Bring photo ID so reception can give you an access card.
Lunch	Join the team for lunch at 12:30 in the first-floor café if you like. There is a vegetarian and a vegan choice.
Your buddy	Your buddy is our learning coordinator. Coffee together at 15:00.
First team meeting	Wednesday 4 November at 09:30 in room 3B.

Filled example: debrief and team agreement

The debrief sheet of fictional Table A, in a team of 22 people at four tables. The circled line was the first one under "What helped us".

Exercise	What helped us	What got in the way
1. The locker code	Everyone read their card aloud before anyone guessed.	Two of us started guessing codes after the second card.
2. The desk plan	We wrote each need on the plan before we placed anyone.	The trainer's card was not heard until minute six.
3. The welcome sheet	One person read out the dates and the newest note won.	We wrote the 09:30 start before all the notes were read, then corrected it.

Draft from Table A: "When we start a shared task, we each say what we know before anyone proposes an answer."

Chosen by 12 of 22 votes. When we start a shared task, we each say what we know before anyone proposes an answer. We check how it went at the team meeting on Wednesday 18 November.

Facilitator run of show

1 Open and set the rules | 3 minutes

Say: "In the next hour your table solves three short puzzles. Each of you holds part of what the table needs. Read your cards aloud; you do not need to show them. Nobody has to stand or share anything personal, and you can pass at any time. After each puzzle your table writes one line on what helped. At the end we turn those lines into one agreement for how we work." Check that every table has its envelopes, one debrief sheet and pens. Name a table host for each table if the group is larger than 24.

2 Exercise 1: the locker code | 5 minutes

One minute: deal the six code cards round the table, so that everyone holds at least one. Say: “Your team’s stationery cupboard has a four-digit lock. The note with the code was cut into six pieces. Find the code.” Three minutes: tables solve. One minute: give the answer, 4952, and ask each table to write one line on the debrief sheet: what helped, and what got in the way. If a table finishes early, ask them to check every card against their answer aloud.

3 Exercise 2: the desk plan | 20 minutes

Two minutes: deal the six desk cards and place the blank desk plan in the middle of the table. Say: “Six colleagues are moving into this room. Each card holds one person’s need and one fact about the room. Seat all six so that every need is met. Read your card aloud; anyone can write on the plan.” Three minutes: each person reads their card silently, then aloud in turn. Ten minutes: tables solve. At minute eight, ask any stuck table: “Has everyone read the fact about the room on their card?” Two minutes: tables open the key envelope and check. Three minutes: each table writes its line on the debrief sheet, and two or three tables read theirs out.

4 Exercise 3: the welcome sheet | 25 minutes

Say: “A new learning designer starts on Monday 2 November. Your table has twelve notes from the last three weeks. Some are out of date. Write a welcome sheet with eight facts the new colleague needs, and nothing that has changed.” Three minutes: deal the notes and agree roles: a writer, a date checker, a timekeeper and readers. Twelve minutes: build the sheet. Three minutes: the checker reads every line against the notes; the newest note on a topic wins. Four minutes: open the key and mark each topic Correct, Outdated or Missing. Three minutes: write the table’s line on the debrief sheet.

5 Debrief: from what helped to one team agreement | 7 minutes

One minute: each person circles the one “what helped” line on the debrief sheet that would matter most in real work. Two minutes: each table writes one draft agreement: “When we…, we will…”. Two minutes: tables read their drafts aloud; join drafts that say the same thing and give each a letter. Two minutes: each person writes one letter on a slip; table hosts count and call out, and you add up. Read the agreement back and set a date to check it, such as the next team meeting. With a group that is not one team, each table keeps its own draft instead of voting.

Reference tables

Answer key: the locker code

The code is 4952. Read the steps aloud if a table asks how it works.

Step	Reasoning
1. Start with cards 3 and 6	The first digit is twice the last, and there is no 0 or 1. So the first and last digits are 4 and 2, 6 and 3, or 8 and 4.
2. Add card 4	With 8 first, the second digit would have to be 9 and the third would be 20 − 8 − 9 − 4 = −1. So 8 and 4 is out.
3. Add cards 2 and 5	With 6 and 3, the middle two digits add up to 11 and the third is odd. The second must be bigger than 6, so the pair is 8 and 3. That repeats the 3, which card 1 rules out.
4. Only 4 and 2 are left	The middle two digits add up to 14, the third is odd and the second is the largest: 9 and 5.

Step	Reasoning
The code	4952. Check: all different, 4 + 9 + 5 + 2 = 20, 4 is twice 2, 9 is the largest, 5 is odd, no 0 or 1.
Which cards are needed	Cards 1 to 5 are each needed for one answer. Card 6 is not strictly needed; it saves time. Say so in the debrief if a table asks.

Answer key: the desk plan

One answer meets every need. Each of the six cards is needed to find it.

Desk	Who sits here	Why
Desk 4	Coordinator	Card 1 needs the desk beside the door; card 2 says that is desk 4.
Desk 5	Analyst	Card 4: the coordinator's row, so desk 5 or 6. Desk 6 fails on the next line.
Desk 2	Team lead	Card 5: opposite the analyst. With the analyst at 6 and the team lead at 3, the trainer takes 1, the writer 2 and the designer is left with 5, away from the window. So the analyst is at 5 and the team lead at 2.
Desk 1	Writer	Card 3 rules out 3, 5 and 6 (card 4 says where the printer and the queue are). Desk 4 and desk 2 are taken, so the writer is at 1.
Desk 3	Designer	Card 2 needs a window desk (card 3 says 1, 2 and 3). Only desk 3 is left there.
Desk 6	Trainer	Card 6 needs a locking drawer (card 1 says 1, 3 or 6). Desk 6 is the one left.

Answer key: the welcome sheet

Eight topics. Four notes are out of date: 1, 4, 7 and 10. The first team meeting takes the day and time from note 11 and the room from note 10.

Topic	The current fact	From	Out-of-date note it replaces
When to arrive	10:00 on Monday 2 November	Note 2	Note 1 (09:30)
Where to go	Main reception, ground floor	Note 3	–
Who meets you	The senior trainer, at reception	Note 5	Note 4 (team lead)
Your laptop	Brought to your desk at 11:00	Note 8	Note 7 (collect from the IT desk)
Building access	Bring photo ID to collect an access card	Note 9	–
Lunch	Team lunch at 12:30, first-floor café, vegetarian and vegan choice, optional	Note 6	–
Your buddy	The learning coordinator, coffee at 15:00 on day one	Note 12	–
First team meeting	Wednesday 4 November at 09:30 in room 3B	Note 11 (day and time), note 10 (room)	Note 10 (Tuesday 10:00)

Running it with a large group

For 25 to 40 people. The timing of the 60-minute plan does not change.

What	How
Table host	Ask one volunteer per table to open the envelopes on your signal, keep the table to time and count the table's votes. The host plays too. Nobody has to accept the role.
Envelopes	Pack one envelope per exercise per table, plus one sealed key envelope per exercise. Write the table letter on each. You do not need to walk round with keys.
Time signals	Say the time aloud and show it on a slide or a large printed card: "Two minutes left." Do not rely on a bell or a sound alone.
Report-back	After each exercise ask two or three tables, in turn, to read out their "what helped" line. The other tables keep theirs for the final debrief. With 40 people, every table speaks at least once in the hour.
Drafts and the vote	Join drafts that say the same thing and give each a letter on a flipchart or slide. Each person writes one letter on a slip of paper. Table hosts count their table and call out the numbers; the co-facilitator adds them up. Nobody needs to stand or raise a hand.
Co-facilitator	From 25 people, a second facilitator watches the time, adds up the votes and helps any table that is stuck. Agree before the session who opens the key envelopes.

Debrief and next steps

Questions for reflection

- In which exercise did your table first hear every card, and what changed once it had?
- What did someone know that nobody else at the table could have guessed, and how did it come out?
- In the welcome sheet, how did your table decide which note was current, and where does that happen in real work?
- Which one habit from today would help most next week, and what would we see if we kept it?

Adapt the session

- For 3 to 5 people, use one table and deal so that everyone holds at least one card: in a group of three, each person holds two code cards, two desk cards and four notes. Skip the vote: the group agrees one sentence directly in the last two minutes.
- For a 30-minute version, run the locker code (5 minutes), the desk plan (20) and a 5-minute debrief to one agreement. Keep the welcome sheet for another session; it works on its own with 25 minutes and a 5-minute debrief.
- The online version of this idea is the online team building activities kit, which has its own three exercises. These cards also work in breakout rooms if each person receives their cards by private chat and the table shares one document, but the desk plan is easier on paper.
- Nobody needs to move, see colour or share anything personal. A person who prefers not to speak can be the writer or the date checker, or pass a card to a neighbour to read aloud. Send the cards as plain text in advance to anyone who uses a screen reader or wants time to read.

- If the team is in a tense period or has just had a conflict, run the exercises but skip the vote: ask each table for one draft and take the drafts to the next team meeting. A shared puzzle is not a way to settle a real dispute.

After the session

Within one working day, send the agreement and its check date to everyone, and add it to the team charter or the place the team keeps its working agreements. On the check date, spend five minutes at the team meeting on one question: “When did we keep this, and when did we not?” Keep, change or drop the agreement. If the group was a mix of teams, ask each person to take their table’s draft back to their own team and to propose it there. Keep the cards: they can be reused with a new group.

Questions people ask

What are good team building activities for work that need no equipment?

Short cooperative puzzles in which each person holds part of the information work well with paper and pens only. This kit has three: a locker code from six clue cards (5 minutes), a desk plan for six fictional colleagues (20 minutes) and a welcome sheet built from twelve dated notes, some out of date (25 minutes). The hour ends with one team agreement.

How is this different from the online team building activities kit?

The online kit is for a video call and a chat, with a line-up puzzle, a trip with hidden constraints and a skills swap. This kit is for one room with people at tables, with three different exercises on printed cards, a plan for up to 40 people at parallel tables and a written vote that ends in one team agreement.

Can I run it with a large group or a very small one?

Yes. From 3 people at one table up to about 40 at seven tables of five or six. From 25 people, use a co-facilitator, a table host at each table and sealed key envelopes, so that nobody needs to walk round. The workbook works out tables, table sizes and copies to print from the number of people.

Does anyone have to move, touch anyone or share something personal?

No. Everyone stays seated, nothing is physical, there are no blindfolds and no contact. The puzzles are about a fictional office, so nobody shares anything about themselves. Anyone can pass.

Will these activities improve how my team works?

A one-hour session does not change a team on its own, and this kit has not been independently evaluated. It gives you a shared experience, one agreement in plain words and a date to check whether it holds.

What is included in the free and editable files?

The open PDF has the locker code cards, the desk cards and desk plan, the twelve note cards, the welcome sheet, the debrief and team agreement sheet, two filled examples, the 60-minute facilitator plan and the three answer keys. Subscribers also receive the editable Word file, an Excel workbook with the session plan, a table planner for up to 40 people, a code checker, a desk plan checker, a welcome sheet score sheet and an agreement vote count, and a CSV of the session plan.

Use and sharing

Free to use and adapt in your own training sessions, including paid client work. Do not resell or redistribute the unmodified download as a standalone product. Share the resource page instead.