Effective Team Building Games

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Introduction

We've all been forced to participate in "mandatory fun" at work or school: exercises designed to help break the ice or build a team. Usually they're awful, but they don't have to be. Team building exercises can be genuinely fun and promote real improvements to team effectiveness, but there is no "team effectiveness" dial you can crank up to make your teams better. You need to identify specific goals and design exercises to achieve those goals, keeping different personalities in mind so the training is fun for everyone.

Methods

Using a combination of personal experience, intuition, and psychological research (in that order), I've developed a series of guidelines for effective team building exercise. I rolled these guidelines into a virtual reality multiplayer game using Unreal Engine that provides a principled, guided, genuinely fun team-building activity that's guaranteed not to increase your suicidal ideation by more than one standard deviation

Spectrum of Team Building Objectives

Learning About Your Team			Building Confidence in Your Team		
Trust		Communication		Collaboration	
Overcoming Latent Distrust	Building Positive Trust	Theory of Mind	Proactive Communication	Real-time Feedback	Complex Plans

Fun / Lame axis with exercises plotted: This Game, Paintball, Bowling, Escape Room, Camping, Collective Training

*Exercise names are off-center to imply weighting of objectives

Player Archetypes:

The Krogan (Warrior Grunt)
"It's just a scratch!"

He likes to fight, and he likes to be in the thick of it. Why waste time with complicated plans when you have a shotgun?

The Gazlowe (Warrior Engineer)
"I can't believe that worked! Awesome."

There's nothing more satisfying than seeing a plan come together, especially when a delicately placed house of cards tricks your enemy into sealing his own fate.

The Reinhardt (Pacifist Grunt)
"Get behind my shield!"

He says he doesn't like violence, but he always finds himself in the thick of a fight, defending his teammates.

The Mercy (Pacifist Engineer)
"I'll heal you!"

She doesn't have a lot of fighting spirit, but she won't leave her friends to fight alone. She supports them without directly attacking the enemy.

Literature Cited

Rhodes, R. E., Kopecky, J., Bos, N., McKneely, J., Gertner, A., Zaromb, F., ... & Spitaletta, J. (2017). Teaching Decision Making With Serious Games: An Independent Evaluation. Games and Culture, 12(3), 233-251; Arnab, S., Lim, T., Carvalho, M. B., Bellotti, F., De Freitas, S., Louchart, S., ... & De Gloria, A. (2015). Mapping learning and game mechanics for serious games analysis. British Journal of Educational Technology, 46(2), 391-411; Klein, C., DiazGranados, D., Salas, E., Le, H., Burke, C. S., Lyons, R., & Goodwin, G. F. (2009). Does team building work?. Small Group Research, 40(2), 181-222; Costa, A. C. (2003). Work team trust and effectiveness. Personnel review, 32(5), 605-622.

Acknowledgments

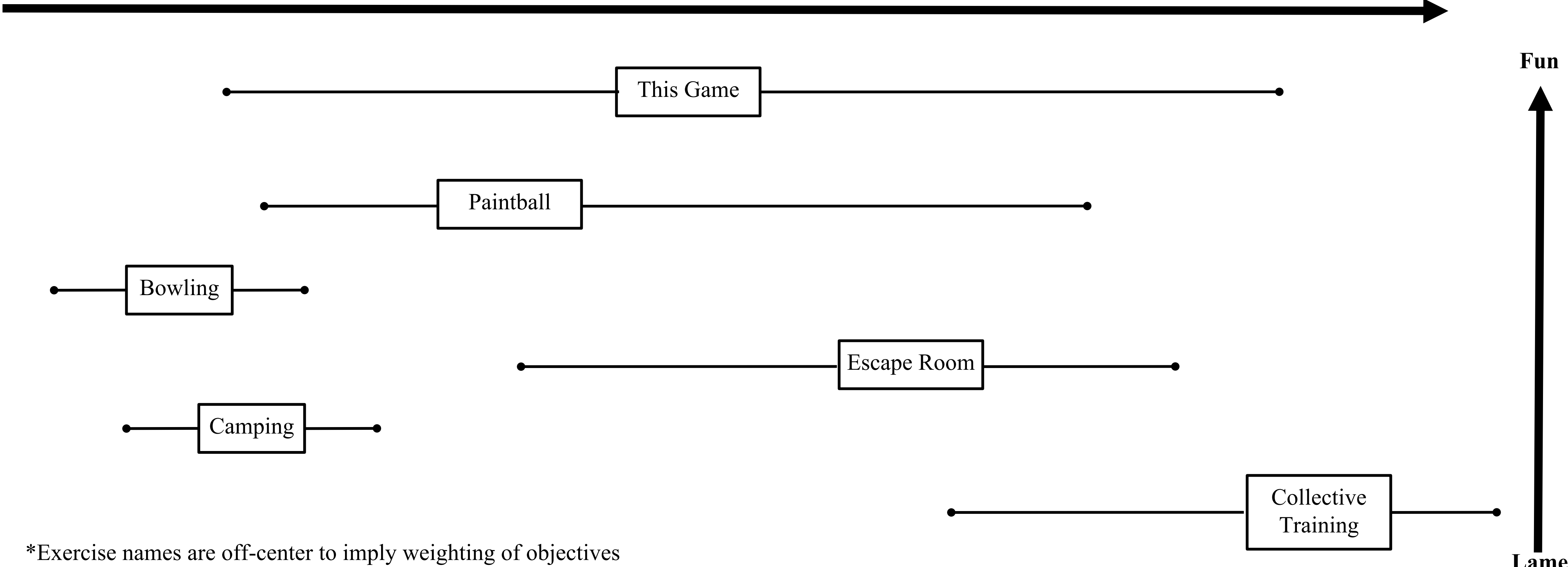Kandice Klumb, Paul Woodruff, and Clay Spinuzzi are cool and stuff.

Further Information

https://www.oculus.com/rift
https://www.unrealengine.com/en-US/what-is-unreal-engine-4
https://mud.co.uk/richard/hcds.htm

Try out the game!