



“You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.”

Plato

The Serious Work of Ethics

Reading an anecdote about a high-level summit that started with a water fight recently got me thinking about the role of playing together (literally) in creating conditions conducive to good ethics work. Games can foster trust and improve cooperation, communication, and creativity while rewarding effective problem-solving, in part by providing a safe space that is seemingly disconnected from “real world” problems. And while the problems posed by games are different from those facing ethics committees and consultants, the strategies and approaches that are used to resolve them can be translated to ethics work such that playing games can be a means of building ethics capacity.

Games increase trust by offering participants an opportunity to take risks and reveal aspects of themselves that otherwise would remain hidden, allowing group members to come to know each other more fully. Similarly, games in which cooperation is a prerequisite for success build trust and hone the skills necessary to work as a team. When everyone plays a role in achieving a desired outcome, games can highlight individual strengths. All of this makes it easier to determine how to function as a group.



Success in games frequently relies on effective communication, both verbal and nonverbal, such that playing builds both general communication skills for the group and specific communication strategies between individuals. In addition, in many games, creativity in generating solutions is essential to success. Game-playing can help to foster an ethos where group members feel they can be creative because there's trust and effective communication. In addition, because stakes are perceived as low, participants often feel more able to be creative in their thinking.

Playing games can serve to flatten power dynamics within a group and help to break down barriers between individuals that might exist due to professional roles or organizational silos. The skills and relationships fostered by games can also help create space within which individuals feel comfortable and safe disagreeing with one another, thus avoiding the risks associated with “groupthink”. Furthermore, games also foster a sense of belonging to a group through achieving something together.

continued on page 2

Game Resources

The following are some favourite resources that provide a useful starting point for games and games leadership – although there are certainly many more games resources available.

Quicksilver

by Karl Rohnke & Steve Butler

Silver Bullets

by Karl Rohnke

The New Games Book

by the New Games Foundation

More New Games

by the New Games Foundation

Finally, games generally involve having fun and laughing together as a group - and the value of fun should not be underestimated. Having fun forges interpersonal bonds and creates a sense of camaraderie and belonging that is essential to effective group processes. Playing gives participants a chance to laugh with each other and at themselves.

For games to be optimally effective as a learning tool, they require someone in a facilitator role. Facilitating games, then, provides opportunities to develop skills that are essential to the work done by an ethics committee or consult team and gain experience in a low-stakes setting. Games are not a panacea and not all games are equal; the group's dynamics, abilities and needs should be taken into account by a facilitator to determine how to best make use of games. Nonetheless, they can form part of a toolkit for developing both skills and working relationships necessary for ethics committees and consultants to be effective.

In the context of ethics work, the problems are real, the stakes are high, and decisions are often wrenching. And games, by presenting imaginary obstacles in a low-stakes setting where decisions have no real-world consequences, can help groups doing ethics work do that work better while also reducing the potential residue from ethics work and forging bonds that improve retention. In short, the ethics committee that plays together stays together and might even make better decisions as a result.

Marika Warren

NSHEN: Coming Events...

November 25, 2009
3:00 - 4:15 pm

Telehealth Education Session, Topic: TBA

Please check with your telehealth coordinator for your local room location details.

January 14 & 15, 2010

Clinical Ethics Consultation Training Workshop
Halifax, NS. Stay tuned for more details!

March 3 & 4, 2010

NSHEN Annual Conference - "Different Landscapes, Similar Views? Health Ethics in the Rural Context"
Dartmouth, NS. Online registration will be available in December at www.nshen.ca

Questions? Comments? Want to join the mail list?

Contact NSHEN

L4108 / L4109, 4th floor Link Building
5850 University Avenue (IWK)
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
B3K 6R8

Tel: 902.470.2744
Fax: 902.470.7388

www.nshen.ca