

Activity 2.9 Challenging Taboos to Enhance Creativity

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Description

Our imagination is often restricted by internalized taboos. While these restrictions may be appropriate in some cases, we are often unaware or subconsciously influenced by taboos. Uncovering taboos that affect us can provide creative breakthroughs for how we think about issues.

Learning Goals

- Identify the presence of taboos in everyday life.
- Challenge self-censorship and expand creative thinking by becoming more aware of taboos.

Instructions (50 minutes)

Set Up	<p>Prepare for the Activity</p> <p>Organize participants into small groups (4-6 ppl).</p> <p>Share the Ping Pong Ball Challenge on a handout, screen, or projector.</p> <p>Note: Unlike most activities in the toolkit, this activity works better if you DO NOT introduce the learning goals in advance.</p>	
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¹ **Citation for this activity:** Jack Byrd, Cuda Zmuda, and Eric Schmucker (2023). Challenging Taboos to Enhance Creativity. In Hartman and Byrd (Eds), The Interactivity Foundation Collaborative Discussion Toolkit. Retrieved from <https://www.collaborativediscussionproject.com/activities/module-2>

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<p>Step One</p>	<p>Introduce the Ping Pong Challenge</p> <p>Review The Ping Pong Ball Challenge as a full group:</p> <p>An eight inch long metal pipe is embedded in concrete at one end. The pipe is perpendicular to the ground, facing upward. A ping pong ball is at the bottom of the pipe. The ping pong ball fits loosely into the pipe.</p> <p>You have the following tools available to you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A one-foot length of rope (0.1 inch in diameter) ● A metal file <p>You need to remove the ping pong ball from the pipe with the following restrictions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● You have no other resources available to you. ● You cannot move or bend the pipe. ● The ping pong ball cannot be damaged. <p>Ask the groups if there are any clarifying questions but do not provide any additional information.</p>	<p>5 min</p>
<p>Step Two</p>	<p>Individually Generate Ideas</p> <p>Ask each participant to write down their individual ideas. How are they going to remove the ball from the pipe?</p> <p>Facilitator Tip: Restrict the use of devices and internet searches during this challenge. If participants indicate that they know the answer, request that they actively listen but not participate in the next steps.</p>	<p>5 min</p>
<p>Step Three</p>	<p>Discuss Ideas in Small Groups</p> <p>In small groups, invite participants to share their ideas.</p> <p>As each of the ideas are presented, ask the other participants to build on them.</p> <p>Instruct the group that they must decide on a single best solution to present to the full group.</p> <p>Facilitator Tip: As the participants work through their idea sharing, observe: Did they help build on each other's ideas? Did any participants suggest an idea that could be considered a taboo?</p>	<p>10 min</p>

<p>Step Four</p>	<p>Present Solutions to the Full Group</p> <p>Invite one representative from each small group to present their final solution to the challenge.</p> <p>While listening to the solutions, ask participants in the full group to evaluate each small group's idea with a thumb's up, thumb's down, or thumb's sideways vote. Tell them the criteria for their vote should be: Did the group adhere to the rules? Would the solution work?</p>	<p>5 min</p>
<p>Step Five</p>	<p>Explore Taboos as a Full Group</p> <p>If no group came up with the solution, reveal that the most effective solution is to urinate in the pipe and let the ping pong ball rise to the top.</p> <p>Full group discussion prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What's your reaction to this solution? Does it make you feel uncomfortable? Did any of you think of this but might have been afraid to voice it in the discussion? ● Talking publicly about urination is generally frowned upon or considered taboo. What else do you consider to be taboo? <p>Generate a list of taboos on the board, flip chart, or shared screen. Discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Are these taboos universal? How do we know when our imagination is restricted by a taboo? 	<p>15 min</p>
<p>Step Six</p>	<p>Debrief as a Full Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Let's review our list of taboos. What purpose do these taboos serve? Who or what decides that these topics are off limits? ● What are the trade-offs associated with taboos? ● How can identifying taboos open up possibilities or imagination? 	<p>10 min</p>

Reflection Journal

- Which past taboos are no longer off limits? What are the events or shifts in culture or mindset that caused this to happen?
- Research one medical, technological, or environmental breakthrough that was discovered simply by refusing to be limited by a taboo. How was the person or people behind this breakthrough perceived at first? What insights can you learn from this example?

Practice Journal

This week, make a list of taboos, often “the third rail” issues that no one wants to touch, that affect your everyday life. Reframe these taboos using positive language.

Dive Deeper: Additional Resources

- [Article on Taboos](#): Wray Herbert. “Theology, Taboos, and Creative Thinking.” *Association for Psychological Science*, www.psychologicalscience.org/news/were-only-human/theology-taboos-and-creative-thinking.htm. Accessed 26 Aug. 2023.

Activity Cluster

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[3.3 Awareness of Context, Bias,
& Assumptions](#)