

# Ice Breakers

International Facilitator's Companion

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imaginal training

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# **1**

## **The Theory**



## Section One: The Theory

All human beings share certain needs in meeting others for the first time. When people first meet, they exchange information. They create an image of the other based on what they see and hear - what is said, and how it is expressed. Meanwhile, they are also informing the other of who they are. They are building a self image. This image is a personal creation, but one thoroughly influenced by society and culture.

When we humans meet, we do so following certain structures. Much of the structure is ritualistic, that is the form is identical, or nearly identical, every time people are introduced. These structures everyone in a society knows, in fact most of us know several depending on who is being met, what the setting is and several other variables. They are specific to a society or sub-group in society. In the structure roles are established which inform each of the participants the "proper" way of behaving. These roles inform both horizontal and vertical (hierarchical) relationships.

Each culture and society has appropriate styles for meeting each other, some more formal and some less, and some are long and some quite short. But until the relationships have been established everyone is on guard.

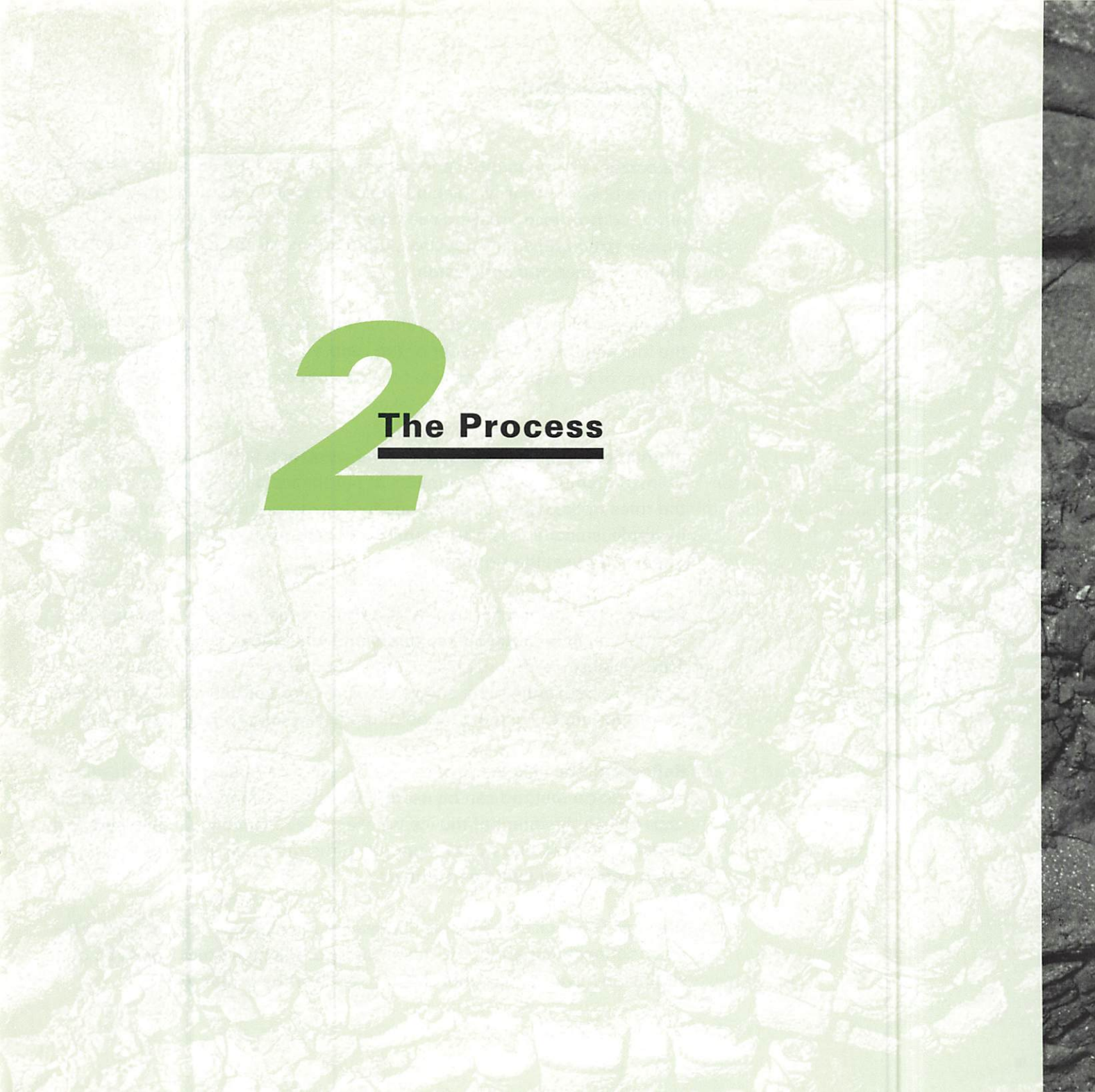
Ice breakers perform some of the same functions that rituals of greeting perform in society. They help overcome the natural nervousness when meeting new people. They create a favourable impression. They allow people to watch others' behavior. They help establish appropriate social relationships among participants. In addition, ice breakers introduce and set the style of the program and establish the role of the faculty.

At the very beginning of a course, every participant is insecure about other participants and his or her place in the group. They want to be acknowledged in some appropriate way. They want to be invited into the group. They expect an appropriate level of respect. People need to understand what is going on and how they fit in.

In the normal rituals of greeting, it is its ritualistic nature that creates a safe environment because everyone knows the ritual and knows what they are expected to do. The faculty and the ice breaker are responsible for creating a relatively safe situation.

Ice breakers tend to put everyone in the same social situation. In multicultural situations they have the advantage of not making one cultural form of greeting the dominant one. In situations where the normal social relationships need to be altered, ice breakers can help.

The style of the ice breaker informs the participants what kind of course they will be participating in and their role in it. The ice breaker creates images of what is important in the course and what kinds of roles are expected from the participants. The content of the program can be suggested by the content of the ice breaker.



# 2

## **The Process**



## Section Two: The Process

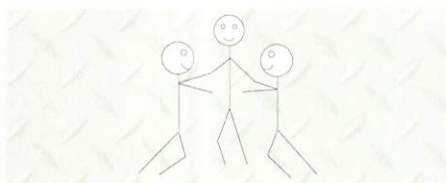
Ice breakers come in thousands of varieties. They are as simple as having groups of two interview each other and then one person introduces the other. Complex ice breakers can take hours. Generally, they have a similar structure: an introduction, instructions for the ice breaker, act out the ice breaker, and conclusion.



**The context** Ice breakers generally begin with a context which includes the introduction of the leader of the ice breaker, perhaps introduction of the rest of the staff, stating what the objectives of the ice breaker are and approximately how long it will take.



**Instructions:** The second phase of the workshop is to provide some kind of instructions for the participants about the ice breaker. This can include the rules of the game or directions for how to participate. Often an example is useful. It is also useful to answer questions. It is particularly important to set the right mood at this point.



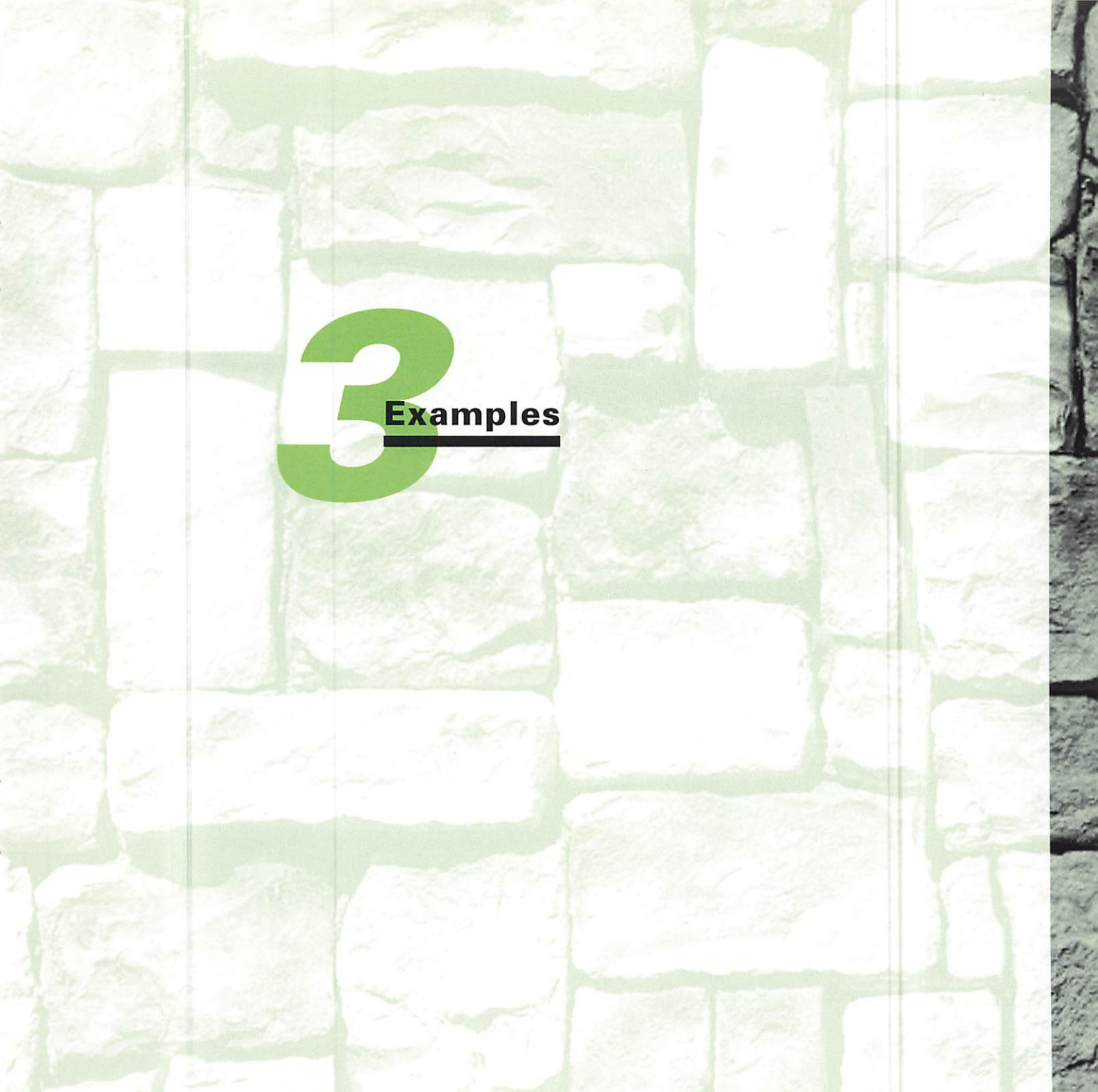
**Activity:** The ice breaker begins. If it has rounds, one or two sample rounds will help participants understand what they are expected to do. This will allow additional instructions about the game to be given and any more questions to be answered. Any mistakes can also be corrected. It is important to keep the mood of the group appropriate to the game.



**Reflection:** The next stage of the ice breaker is a reflection. The basic conversation method can be used. The kind and content of the reflection depends on the intent of the ice breaker. The reflection will give people a better understanding of other people in the group. In any case having the group reflect will deepen its impact.



**Closing:** The final step in an ice breaker is the closing. This may include an announcement about the next activity or taking a break. It can be quite simple and even the normal closing ritual for the program.



# 3

## Examples



## The Animal Game Ice Breaker

**Rational Objective:** To introduce the group to each other in a fun way.

**Existential Aim:** To experience the fun of an ice breaker and to see its importance.

| Step              | Procedure                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Notes |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| <b>Context</b>    | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 <i>Good morning, My name is ..... We now want to invite you to participate in an ice breaker. This is a way of introducing ourselves.</i></li> <li>2 <i>This is a simple exercise which will take about 45 minutes and will help you to learn about the people in the group.</i></li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |       |
| <b>Movements</b>  | <p><b>Instructions</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 <i>We will seat ourselves in a circle, so please take your chairs and put them in the middle of the tables. I'm going to ask you to very slowly go around the room and give your name, the village or town or neighborhood where you were born and the name of an animal you identify yourself with most.</i></li> </ol> <p><b>Activity</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 <i>Go around the room and let everybody give their name and association. Then give your own name, point at someone and give his or her name and ask</i></li> <li>2 <i>X could you please find for me the person who's animal is A? Don't look at that person.</i></li> <li>3 <i>Then if Y is found, X asks, Y could you please find for me the person who was born in M village? Alternate animals and birthplaces. When everybody has done this, ask participants to change chairs, to avoid associations with positions. Same procedure.</i></li> </ol> |       |
| <b>Conclusion</b> | See below                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |       |

## The Animal Game Ice Breaker

Rational Objective: See above

Existential Aim: See above

| Step       | Procedure                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Notes |
|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Context    | See above                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |       |
| Movements  | <b>Reflection</b><br><b>1</b> <i>What is one moment you remember while doing this game?</i><br><b>2</b> <i>What was fun?</i><br><b>3</b> <i>How would you describe the atmosphere during the game?</i><br><b>4</b> <i>How is that different than one hour ago?</i><br><b>5</b> <i>What do you know about this group?</i> |       |
| Conclusion | <b>1</b> We want to move into the next section of the program by having Mr/Mrs ??? give a lecture on ???.                                                                                                                                                                                                                |       |



### *Example Two*

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In a culturally heterogeneous group have each participant demonstrate how they greet each other in their own country.

### *Example Three*

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Participants brainstorm what they want to know about each other. The group then selects the 3 or 4 key items on the list. Each person introduces him or herself using the selected items from the list.





# 4

## **When Appropriate**

## ***Section Four:*** **When Appropriate**

Ice breakers are generally used as introductions. They can be used as transitions from one section of a program to another, especially if the program changes dramatically.





# 5

## **How to Develop**

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## **Section Five:** **How to Develop**

Use the Ice Breakers form.

- 1** Write the topic of the program at the top of the form.
- 2** Write the rational objective of the ice breaker in the box. What is its intended result?
- 3** Write the existential aim of the ice breaker in the box. What is the mood of the exercise?
- 4** Write the activities you will have participants do in the center box called Activity. Describe exactly the steps they will take. (See example one.)
- 5** Write the instructions for the ice breaker in the box called Instructions.
- 6** Write the reflection on the experience in the box called Reflection.
- 7** Write how the introduction of the ice breaker is going to be done in the box called Context.
- 8** Write how the ice breaker is going to be concluded in the box called Close.

Read the ice breaker over, imagine participants doing the activity, and answer the following questions:

- 1** How does this ice breaker fit the intent of the course?
- 2** How will participants feel while doing the activity?
- 3** What could go wrong?
- 4** What would it look like if it really succeeded?
- 5** What could be improved?

Test the ice breaker on a group of colleagues or at least ask some one else to check it.



# 6 **Worksheets**

Topic

|                     |               |                  |       |
|---------------------|---------------|------------------|-------|
| Rational Objective: |               | Existential Aim: |       |
| Step                |               | Procedure        | Notes |
| Context             |               |                  |       |
| Move-ments          | Instruc-tions |                  |       |
|                     | Activity      |                  |       |
|                     | Reflec-tions  |                  |       |
| Closing             |               |                  |       |





## **Tips for Developing and Using**

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## *Section Seven:* **Tips for Developing and Using**

Ice Breakers should offer a safe, clear and acceptable structure. They should be interesting but relatively harmless. They should allow participants to create and receive impressions of one another.



# 8

## **References**



## **Section Eight:** References

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**"More Games Trainers Play: Experiential learning Exercises"** by John W. Newstrom and Edward E. Scannell, McGraw Hill Book Company, New York, 1983.

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