



CASE STUDY

USING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ACTIVITIES IN HYBRID IN-PERSON & VIRTUAL GROUPS IN JAPAN

Axel and Karin Wellbrock lead Kay Group, a talent and leadership development company, based in Tokyo, leveraging their global life sciences leadership and management consulting experience.

The CEO of a leading US medical device company in Tokyo with a recently established new entity approached Kay Group with an urgent need to bring his team together and to raise their focus on common achievements.

In a team off-site, Kay Group conducted exercises for team building in a hybrid setting, with some team members on-site and others dialling in remotely. A breakthrough moment for experiencing teamwork in action was the use of RSVP Design's Hollow Square.

"We were amazed by how easy it was to adapt Hollow Square to a hybrid delivery setting without losing the impact and user experience" Karin remarked.

Kay Group used Hollow Square to sharpen the communication and collaboration skills of the team members. For the exercise, the team was split into three breakout groups: two groups were face-to-face on-site and one group with half of members on-site and the other half online. Each breakout group decided who will be the 'planners' and 'operators'. The planners had a diagram of the completed Hollow Square whereas the operators had the physical pieces (tiles).

The planners' task was to communicate to the operators in 15 minutes how the tiles for the Hollow Square fit together without revealing their plan or drawing anything – just verbal communication. Meanwhile the operators had to take their own notes and ask for information so that they could build the square. Remote participants could easily be integrated into the activity as planners by sending them digital copies of the shape.

Since the client's company culture is ambitious and aspirational, the three breakout groups started to compete against each other. Despite initial doubts about the effectiveness of remote sessions and exercises, it was the hybrid team that stood out. They quickly aligned and focused on the outcome, describing the shape and tiles by using concise yet creative languages, e.g. using the Japanese alphabet to describe shapes of tiles. While observing the on-site teams, such creative use of language and descriptions was not observed whereas frustration and withdrawal could be seen. Out of the three teams, only the hybrid one succeeded in building the Hollow Square according to the plan or diagram.

For anyone using Hollow Square, Karin observed that Kay Group found it very useful to have

"a dedicated observer in each breakout who commented on the participants feedback".

Through Hollow Square the entire team learnt that focus and clarity about the outcome help to overcome work settings, as well as the importance of both *"creativity and resilience"* in team communication. The team could easily see the workplace application where medical professionals regularly communicate complex ideas and solutions to customer-facing team members.

Summing up her thoughts on Hollow Square, Karin said:

“It is a very powerful tool to allow a personal and team experience on the effectiveness of communication. The exercise also draws out the good and bad of each participant as it can be rather frustrating to describe a shape multiple times while the ‘operators’ still shake their heads. The session’s success is also proof of the effectiveness of the Hollow Square design in the Japanese cultural context.”

Hollow Square is one of two experiential learning activities packaged in the Learning Squared product from RSVP Design. Broken Square is also included with the Learning Squared product.

For further information see <https://rsvpdesign.co.uk/learning-squared.html>

