



## **Creating an Experiential Team Building for Future Generation Europe**

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## Abstract

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<p>Effective team collaboration is crucial in modern workplaces, however, traditional team-building events often lack structured learning or specific goals. This thesis was inspired by the author's experience with both ineffective team-building events and those that significantly helped the team become stronger and more resilient.</p> <p>The first objective of this product-based thesis was to create an activity plan for a 3-day-long team building using experience economy and experiential learning, focused on team development, enhancing the community, and education. The second objective was to execute the team building according to the plan on 4 - 6 October 2024 while documenting observations and insights during the activities to identify areas of enhancement, providing an open and inclusive environment, and promoting positive group dynamics. The third objective was to gather participant feedback to evaluate the effectiveness of the activities.</p> <p>Starting with secondary research on the significance and challenges of team building, a conclusion was drawn, which suggested that without clear goals and a plan, team building can be a waste of resources. A SCORE analysis of Future Generation Europe highlighted the organisation's needs, leading to the development of specific goals: strengthening team bonds, integrating new volunteers, providing educational value through non-formal learning, and delivering a memorable experience at a low cost. Integrating the Pine and Gilmore's 4 Realms of Experience, Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle and Tuckman's Team Development model, the event was planned and executed.</p> <p>The team building was consequently organised according to the plan, using experience economy and experiential learning, focused on team development, enhancing the community, and education. Observations and insights of both the author and participants were documented. Participant feedback was gathered during a start-stop-continue activity, providing suggestions on how to enhance the event, what to keep and what should be avoided next time. The event was evaluated mostly positively, with some suggestions for improvements. Furthermore, feedback was gathered 5 months later from voluntary respondents, who claimed that the event was successful, enjoyed by the participants, and that the activities effectively integrated new members.</p> <p>The event also established a foundation for future activities, with the organisation planning to continue using a blend of team-bonding and skill-building exercises. Based on this thesis, a detailed manual was created to guide others when organising a similar activity. This thesis can provide insights for HR professionals or managers wishing to elevate their team-building events and develop soft skills within their teams in an entertaining way. As a reusable and adaptable structure, the concept supports long-term team development, inclusion, and education, contributing to social sustainability.</p>
<b>Key words</b> Experiential learning, team development, team-building activities, experience economy

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## 1 Introduction

In today's highly competitive market, especially within the hospitality industry, client satisfaction is vital. However, behind every satisfied client is a motivated team that feels valued and connected. Companies are increasingly recognising that fostering employee well-being and team unity is not just a "nice-to-have" – it is essential for sustainable success. Particularly in organisations that are based on voluntary work, ensuring that staff feel integrated, trusted, and supported is crucial to maintaining high performance and productivity.

One way which can be effective in cultivating these qualities are thoughtfully designed team-building experiences. According to the Oxford Dictionary, team building is "the process of encouraging a group of people to work well together as a team by having them take part in activities and games". Team building can help break down barriers and improve connections, whether by welcoming newcomers with a smooth onboarding experience or by re-energising long-term staff who are adapting to change. With the inflow of new employees or volunteers, structured opportunities to build trust and learn about each other can reduce friction, improve collaboration, and strengthen company culture (Lencioni, 2002).

The purpose of this product-based thesis is to capture the creation and execution of a teambuilding event using experience economy and non-formal learning, tailored to deliver value to Future Generation Europe (FGE) – a Slovak civil association which organises events and educational opportunities for youth. By focusing on improving skills and team bonding using facilitation, without relying on alcohol or conventional entertainment, this event seeks to provide employees and volunteers with an enriching experience that is both enjoyable and educational. It is designed to emphasise team unity, encourage open communication, and foster resilience in order to drive a productive, client-centred work environment.

There are three objectives of this thesis:

1. Create an activity plan for a 3-day-long team building using experience economy and experiential learning, focused on team development, enhancing the community, and education.
2. Execute the team building according to the plan on 4 - 6 October 2024 while documenting observations and insights during the activities to identify areas of enhancement, providing an open and inclusive environment, and promoting positive group dynamics.
3. Gather participant feedback to evaluate the effectiveness of the activities.

To fulfil the first objective, a detailed plan with the description of the activities will be created. For the creation of the team building, experience economy will be used. According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), a service becomes an experience when a company deliberately engages their guests in

different ways that transform the service into an unforgettable event. The **4 Realms of Experience** (education, aesthetics, escapism, entertainment) will be used to design the teambuilding in an engaging and meaningful way (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). Furthermore, the **Experiential Learning Cycle** (Kolb, 1984) will be used to enhance the educational part of the experience. This model emphasises how people learn through experience. It is a four-stage process (Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualisation, and Active Experimentation), which will serve as a way to emphasise the learning process (Kolb, 1984). The **Five Stages of Team Development** (Tuckman, 1965) will provide a framework for the activities. The model describes the evolution of a team from initial formation, through conflict and role establishment, to effective collaboration and eventual disbandment. The teambuilding will follow the five stages (forming, storming, norming, performing, adjourning) chronologically (Tuckman, 1965). The activities will be chosen according to the stages, based on the nature of the stage and activity. Going through the process in a safe and controlled environment can help the participants be more prepared for this natural flow of teams in real life, making it easier to deal with thanks to having prior experience. It will, therefore, also contain educational aspects. The activities chosen will be inspired by and adapted from the author's experience with facilitation, Erasmus+ courses, and youth work. Moreover, the activities will be chosen to specifically support social sustainability by promoting collaboration and positive group dynamics, fostering an environment where participants feel engaged and valued, and developing social skills that contribute to long-term team cohesion and well-being, contributing to social sustainability. Moreover, the event aims to provide a basic, sustainable structure of the organisation's future team buildings, which can be reused and adapted each time, but also provides a stepping stone for a simpler organisation of events like this in the future.

To fulfil the second objective, the plan will be used in practice and tested with FGE's employees and volunteers. During the execution of the team building, the author will facilitate the activities while observing the dynamics, making detailed notes about the problems that arise or any suggestions for improvement. Furthermore, notes will be made from the reflection sessions after each activity, with the participants sharing and discussing what they learnt and how they felt during the activities. The event can inspire others in their activities, and instead of being a one-time event, it can serve as an inspiration for its participants to organise similar activities in the future, by adapting the activities to their own settings.

In order to gather participant feedback, an exercise called Start-Stop-Continue will be used as a framework for final reflection, giving feedback and suggestions for improvement from the participants' point of view at the end of the event. This way, qualitative feedback can be collected through group discussion. Furthermore, 5 months after the team building, the leaders will be asked to provide insights into its long-term effects and benefits on their work.

This thesis stems from the author's enthusiasm for non-formal education, internal business processes, and event creation, leading to the decision to merge these areas and apply the knowledge and experience gained during university studies and involvement in Future Generation Europe as a project and HR coordinator.

Although the product of this thesis will be created for a specific commissioner, FGE, it can serve as an inspiration for any business or individual wishing to organise a team building which will provide educational and entertaining value, while breaking the ice among team members, helping them to get to know each other better. Moreover, it can inspire further research, potentially leading to a future thesis evaluating its effectiveness, benefits, and outcomes in practice or over time.

The thesis focuses on the development and initial testing of tailor-made team building for the commissioner, Future Generation Europe. The scope of the thesis is therefore limited to the technical feasibility and user experience aspects of the programme and activities. The focus will be on a 3-day-long team building happening during an event called FGE Days. This thesis does not cover the entire onboarding process of new employees and volunteers. Elements such as logistics, budgeting and testing of the long-term benefits are outside the scope of this thesis. Additionally, there will be no comprehensive research on employee satisfaction before and after the team building. Instead, insights will be gathered through interviews with the company's leaders who regularly conduct such research. The level of success of the team-building programme and the value provided will be assessed by FGE themselves. The leaders will provide feedback to the author, rather than being measured directly by the author. The programme will not be retested in other companies, although it may serve as inspiration for organising similar events. These boundaries were established to ensure a focused approach to the experience aspect of the teambuilding within the available time frame and resources. While this focused approach may limit the customisation of the programme to address specific company issues, it allows for a deeper examination and initial testing of the team-building experience as a product. By defining these boundaries, the thesis aims to deliver actionable insights into the design, implementation, and immediate outcomes of the experiential team building, while recognising that further research would be needed to explore long-term impacts on team dynamics, individual performance, and organisational culture beyond the scope of this thesis.

As a part of the writing process, generative AI tools like Grammarly and ChatGPT are used occasionally to support spelling, formatting suggestions, and brainstorming. These tools are not used to generate content, and all the analysis and conclusions belong to the author of the thesis. All external sources are cited in the reference list.

## 2 Conceptual Foundations for Experiential Team Building

Team-building events have been organised for decades for various reasons. Before starting to plan a team building, it is essential to find out whether it is beneficial for the company and what challenges may arise that can prevent the team building from being successful. By understanding the advantages and potential drawbacks of team building, we can design and execute a successful team building. This chapter will, therefore, explore the benefits, challenges, and different viewpoints on team building. Furthermore, to gain insights into creating a powerful, enjoyable and educational team-building event focused on team development, three key models – Pine and Gilmore's Experience Economy, Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, and Tuckman's Stages of Group Development will be explored.

### 2.1 Significance of Team Building

Many companies and organisations organise team-building events in order to break the ice among their employees, whether they are newcomers who have just joined the organisation, or "seniors", who have spent many years at the company. In the first case, the company wants to ensure a smooth onboarding and integration of the new staff. In the latter, the employer may want to reinforce the company culture, decrease tension, encourage collaboration across different teams, or support the adaptation to changes. (Indeed, 2024.)

The introduction of a wave of new employees and volunteers may also be considered a big change, requiring specific adaptation steps. The first part of the adaptation is onboarding for new members. According to research by Maurer (2018), effective onboarding programmes can improve employee retention by up to 82%. The report suggests that onboarding helps new hires integrate into the company's culture and understand their roles, which significantly increases their likelihood of staying long-term. As stated by Bauer (2010), successful onboarding has 4 specific levels, referred to as the 4 Cs of Onboarding: compliance, clarification, culture, and connection. Compliance refers to procedures for acquainting the new staff with the basic rules, clarification introduces them to their roles and responsibilities, while culture familiarises the staff with organisational norms. Although many companies address the first three Cs successfully, the fourth one – connection – tends to be overlooked or considered automatic, even though it deserves equal attention as the others. (Bauer, 2010, 2-4). The connection in this sense refers to the development of interpersonal relationships and networks within the organisation. Based on the research of Bauer and Green (1998, 72-83), being accepted by peers is a sign of good adjustment. Furthermore, according to Stein, Hobson, Jachimowicz & Whillans (2021), it has long been clear that employees who feel engaged and connected to their peers have better performance, are less prone to burnout, and their likelihood of leaving the company is lower. One of the ways to improve the connection in a company could be team building.

Research by Carr and Walton (2014) suggests that encouraging collaboration among teams can boost performance by up to 500%, as social cues signalling teamwork have been shown to enhance intrinsic motivation. The research indicates that such cues can increase persistence, enjoyment, and task performance, even when individuals are working independently (Carr, P. B. and Walton, G. M., 2014). Strengthening team bonds enhances collaboration, reduces workplace stress, and significantly improves the employee experience (Stoltz, 2024).

On the other hand, even though team building may appear as an exciting opportunity to bring entertainment to “the office”, it comes with a number of drawbacks and points which should be taken into consideration. While some research supports the idea that onboarding and team building bring benefits to a company, other sources critique their effectiveness. For example, Valdes-Dapena (2018) points out that companies have a tendency to spend money on meaningless team-building activities without any specific benefits or prior goals. This critique is especially relevant for smaller businesses and NGOs, where financial costs play an important role in decision-making. If the benefits of the team building are not clearly defined and measurable, team building becomes superficial instead of impactful, which is a waste of time, money and effort.

This brings us to the next point, as the main discouraging factor when planning to do a team building is the cost. The price of a team building in Slovakia can climb up to 10,000€ for 30 people for one overnight stay at a hotel, based on research of several accommodation providers. That does often not include the activities aimed at strengthening the team, facilitators, or equipment expenses. Team-building programmes and activities organised by agencies specialising in this field cost from 20€ per person per hour, which makes it minimally 1800€ for 30 people for a maximum of 3 hours (Show-Portal, 2024). These programmes often have no specified goals or planned outcomes, and the team building has solely entertaining value. These costs are hardly justifiable for smaller or mid-sized Slovak companies, let alone NGOs.

Another issue going hand-in-hand with costs is time and motivation of the staff. A comprehensive team building does not happen in 30 minutes and needs a much higher time investment (Sharma, B. 25 December 2020, min. 3-4). This means that the teambuilding either has to take place during working hours, which means loss of time for productivity and potential missed deadlines, or during the employees' free time, which, according to some views, makes the employees spend their free time focused on work-related matters “for free”. That may demotivate them from participating, in which case, the teambuilding loses its purpose if only the most motivated staff participate.

Since team building events are so costly both financially and timewise, and their benefits can be difficult to quantify, the return on investment is hard to prove. Without clear, measurable outcomes, companies may struggle to justify these events, especially if previous activities did not show clear

improvements in teamwork or morale (Sharma, B. 25 December 2020, min. 4-5). This suggests that for a team-building event to succeed, it is important to set clear goals and ensure the event brings value both to the company and its employees, making the investment worthwhile.

## **2.2 Enhancing Internal Team Development and Learning Through Experiential Design**

The employees and volunteers in the event and hospitality industry are expected to provide experiences. Ideally, to create a lasting impact and make events that resonate long after they have finished. However, according to Gumasing and Ilo (2023), if the employees are not excited to do their job or are not comfortable in their team, it is much harder to deliver this unique "vibe" to the customers. Moreover, they may be much less satisfied with their job, which negatively affects the quality of the services (Gumasing & Ilo, 2023). For this reason, an environment with a sense of belonging, strong connections, and creative energy should be facilitated. An environment the staff look forward to and enjoy working in. This should especially be the case if the organisation is primarily volunteer-based. The staff need to feel not only the sense of value they provide to the organisation, but mainly the value the organisation and work delivered provide to them. (McCurley & Lynch 2011, 5-10)

In this regard, a question may arise, asking what value is exactly. According to Meriam Webster Dictionary, value is "relative worth, utility, or importance". Numerous internal and external factors motivate people to become volunteers. Volunteering fulfils altruistic values connected to helping others or society (MacNeela, 2008), but also egoistic values such as enhancing one's CV, gaining professional experience or widening one's network (Clary and Snyder, 1999). Whether it comes to volunteers or paid employees, team building has the potential to address some altruistic, as well as egoistic values. These usually involve getting to know new people, connecting, creating memories, and enjoying the moment. However, in case of staff working on events for youth, a well-structured team building has the potential to provide experiences that can be used further as an inspiration in providing the services and events for the consumers.

For this reason, a combination of models and methods will be used as a pillar for the team-building activities. To provide value and elevate the experience without a huge increase of costs, Four Realms of Experience theory by Pine and Gilmore (1999, 28-30) will be implemented to provide the base of the programme. To emphasise the learning process and provide knowledge that will be sustained even after the event finishes, the Experiential Learning Theory will be implemented throughout the programme. To emphasise the educational aspect, enhance the team development, as well as provide a framework for the activities, Five Stages of Team Development will be implemented.

To better identify goals and needs of the organisation, a SCORE analysis will be conducted. It will be based on the information provided by the organisation's chairman, and the leader of the HR team. SCORE analysis is used for strategic planning and problem-solving. It helps assess the situation, identify challenges, explore solutions, as well as measure effectiveness. It consists of 5 components – strengths (S), challenges (C), opportunities (O), responses (R), and effectiveness (E). (Graves, 2006)

The reason for using SCORE analysis rather than other ones, like SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats), is that SCORE encourages solution-oriented thinking, naturally leading to implementation and improvement, unlike SWOT, which mostly focuses on analysing internal and external factors.

### 2.3 Four Realms of Experience

Memorable experiences where emphasis is put on active participation, immersion in the programme and environment, and perhaps escaping one's daily struggles are a great way to learn, create memories, and even strengthen relationships (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). For this reason, an idea to use the experience economy concept developed by Pine & Gilmore (1999, 28-38) in team building has emerged. Not only can it help provide value to the employees, but it can also help them gain new inspiration in their work. After having witnessed the experience economy on themselves during the team building, the employees are more likely to implement it in their work with excitement. Furthermore, it can help the volunteers get to know each other better by solving challenges and creating memories to look back on in the future together (Larsen & McKibban, 2008). In the long term, this may lead to increased employee loyalty and stronger teams, which consequently leads to happier employees. And happier employees generate happier customers. (Zhao & Chamberlain, August 2019). Therefore, Pine and Gilmore's (1999) **4 realms of experience** have been chosen to create the foundation of the team-building activities. It is a framework which demonstrates the ways people engage with activities and events. The four realms include **entertainment, education, escapism** and **aesthetics** (Figure 1). The framework can also be beneficial when transforming a regular service into an experience. By implementing the four realms, a high value can be added with relatively low costs. In this section, we will look at the specific realms and how they can be implemented in the programme of the team building.

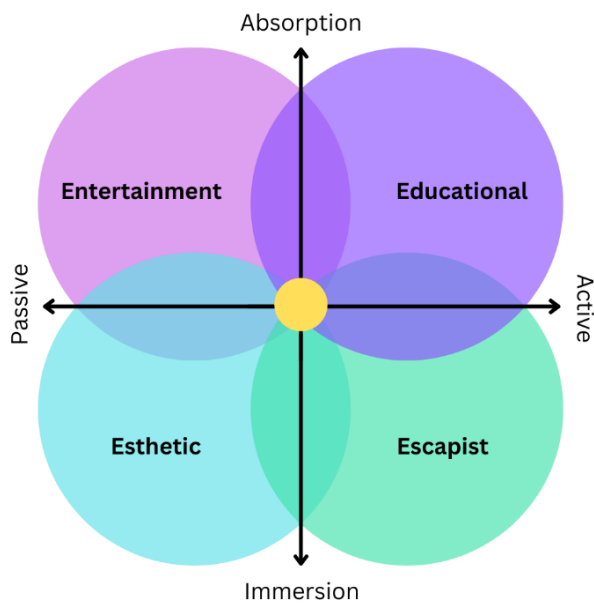


Figure 1. Four Realms of Experience (adapted from Pine and Gilmore, 1999)

The entertainment realm represents the passive absorption of the environment. This, in practice, can mean that the participants are enjoying an experience, where they are watching a performance, attending a concert, or watching a movie, but do not actively shape the environment. (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, 28-38.)

The educational realm involves active participation of the attendants, while they gain a new skill or knowledge. This could be an interactive exhibition, or various facilitated activities which foster learning through active participation. (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, 28-38.)

Escapist experiences are ones during which the attendants are actively immersed in an environment or activity that lets them forget about the "real life". They require active participation, such as treasure hunts, improv, or various adventures. (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, 28-38.)

The aesthetic realm represents experiences involving passive immersion, where the participants enjoy being in a specific environment without directly affecting it. This can include visiting an art gallery or enjoying scenic views of nature. (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, 28-38.)

In the next part, we will mainly unfold how to enhance the educational aspect further, while also focusing on implementing the experience economy in team bonding and development.

## 2.4 Experiential Learning Theory

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) offers a dynamic and holistic approach to understanding learning, emphasising that knowledge emerges through the transformation of experience. Drawing from psychology, philosophy, and physiology, it explains how individuals learn by engaging in a continuous cycle of experience, reflection, and application. (Kolb, 1984.)

One of the key components of ELT is the **Learning Cycle**, composed of 4 stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. (Kolb, 1984.)

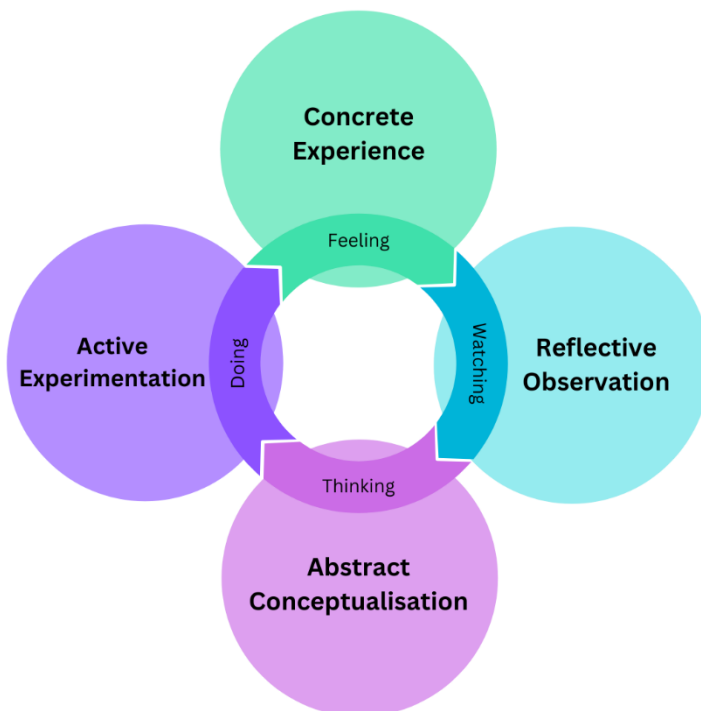


Figure 2. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (adapted from Kolb, 1984)

**Concrete Experience (CE)** is the first stage of the learning cycle. At this stage, the learning process begins, and it is when the participants engage directly with an experience using their senses and perceptions. This could include participating in an activity, facing a challenge, or observing a situation. (Kolb, 1984.)

During **Reflective Observation (RO)**, which follows after the experience, the participants reflect on what they have experienced and analyse their reactions to what happened during that stage. Reflecting and group discussions support not only peer-to-peer learning but also the ability to see a problem or situation from a different point of view. This is a crucial part of the learning process, which also supports critical thinking. Furthermore, **reflection** is crucial for the participants to share their feelings and new knowledge, which allows for deeper learning. The option to share their thoughts

and feelings makes the participants feel heard and moves them closer to each other. Reflection also fosters a deeper understanding of situations and enhances problem-solving abilities. Furthermore, reflection helps the facilitator to grasp the group dynamic and adjust the activities accordingly, e.g. add more ice-breaking activities if the group is still shy. (Kolb, 1984.)

The **Abstract Conceptualisation (AC)** stage, also called the "thinking stage", analyses the aspects from the reflection, after which the participants draw conclusions. Generalisations or theories based on their reflections are created. This stage can include brainstorming sessions or discussions on how to assess a problem differently, which can generate new tools, theories or strategies. (Kolb, 1984.)

At the **Active Experimentation (AE)** stage, the participants apply their newfound knowledge, tools and strategies in new situations, testing their theories in practice. It should also come with a realisation that there is always more to learn when encountering new experiences and situations. (Kolb, 1984.)

Although this is an idealised model and every individual's learning processes differ according to their culture, job, and life situations, it covers the bases in a learning situation. It allows for experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting, which facilitates a multidimensional learning process. Despite the fact that Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle is an older model, it is still widely used in education and training because of its clear structure and practical applicability (Pesek, Skrabsky, Novosadova & Dockalova, 2020). It helps design activities that do not just engage participants but also guide them through a complete learning process. In this thesis, Kolb's model is used as part of a broader framework, together with established concepts like the Experience Economy and Tuckman's stages of team development. This combination supports the creation of meaningful teambuilding activities with space for reflection and personal insight.

## **2.5 Five Stages of Team Development**

Teams go through various stages of development on their journey. There is no such thing as a functioning team without challenges, conflicts, or occasional tough times. For this reason, it is beneficial if the team is prepared for the fluctuations. Experiencing conflicts, debriefing and setting rules in a safe, gamified environment may help the team become more resilient in similar real-life situations. The relationships, processes, and interactions happening in a group, whether they are favourable or not, are called team dynamics (Pesek et al., 2020). The factors influencing the team dynamics include, but are not limited to, the size of the group, the level of acquaintance of the members, age, and previous experience. Every group experiences team dynamics, whether there is external

intervention or not. However, in order to facilitate the learning process better, group dynamics can be intentionally influenced. (Pesek et al., 2020.)

The model by Tuckman (1965) – **The Five Stages of Team Development** provides a simplified structure according to which every group evolves in 5 stages: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning.



Figure 3. Five Stages of Team Development (adapted from Tuckman, 1965)

**Forming** is the initial stage, where the team comes together and starts to get acquainted. People are polite, and there may be a sense of uncertainty about roles and how the group will work together. Team members tend to be cautious and may rely heavily on the leader for direction. At this stage, the focus is on orientation and establishing ground rules. (Tuckman, 1965.)

The **storming** stage is characterised by conflict and disagreements. As team members begin to form and express their opinions, tension can arise over leadership, decision-making, and individual roles. This stage can be challenging, but it is also crucial, since here, teams start to clarify their goals, values, and working methods. It is important to address these conflicts constructively to move forward. (Tuckman, 1965.)

The team enters the **norming** phase once the conflicts of the storming stage are resolved. Team members start to develop a sense of cohesion, trust, and collaboration. Roles become clearer, and there is more open communication and cooperation. At this point, the group is better able to focus on achieving its goals, and the team becomes more productive. The members realise the goals can be achieved better if they accept the viewpoints of others. (Tuckman, 1965.)

In the **performing** stage, the team is highly effective and works efficiently towards its objectives, following the rules set. Members are fully engaged, and communication flows freely. There is a strong sense of unity, and the team can solve problems, make decisions, and complete tasks with minimal friction. This is the stage where teams achieve peak performance. (Tuckman, 1965.)

**Adjourning** happens when the team's work is completed, and the team disbands. In this stage, members reflect on their achievements, celebrate successes, and say their goodbyes. This phase can bring feelings of loss, especially in high-performing teams that have built strong relationships. (Tuckman, 1965.)

Tuckman's Five Stages of Team Development is one of the most famous theories about the development of team dynamics. It provides a simple and clear structure pointing out specific team behaviour and developmental stages, and can be applied flexibly to various types of teams, from corporate to volunteer settings. However, it comes with a number of limitations. In different settings, the groups can go through the stages differently, and not in a linear way. Stages can be skipped or repeated, depending on the team dynamics. Moreover, since it was developed almost 80 years ago, it may have contextual bias or apply differently in various cultures. Nevertheless, it provides inspiration and showcases the ideal progress of a team through different phases. It has been widely used and cited in literature. It is, however, important to consider the unique nature of every group and the fact that in real life, the group does not always have to proceed through all the stages before the group disbands, but may stay in a specific one for a longer period of time (Pesek et al., 2020).

While the models used in this thesis—such as Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, Tuckman's stages of team development, and Pine and Gilmore's Experience Economy—are widely cited and have strong foundational value, it is important to critically evaluate their reliability and applicability. Kolb's theory has been extensively referenced in educational literature and remains a reliable framework for understanding learning through experience. However, some critics argue that it oversimplifies the complexity of learning processes and does not adequately address cultural or contextual differences. Similarly, Tuckman's model provides a clear structure for understanding group development, but its linear nature has been questioned, as real-world teams often do not progress through the stages in a fixed order. Nevertheless, the simplified scheme provides a stepping stone for introduction and understanding of different team dynamics. Pine and Gilmore's work, although it is highly influential

in the field of business and service design, is more conceptual and lacks empirical validation when applied to non-commercial contexts such as youth training. Moreover, some of the information used in this thesis come from secondary sources or popular literature rather than peer-reviewed journals, which may affect the academic reliability of certain claims. Nevertheless, the chosen models offer a valuable foundation for designing an engaging team-building experience, bearing in mind their limitations and adapting them to the specific context of the activity.

## 2.6 The Methods and Activities

A team building using experiential learning can use a variety of methods and activities. According to the Primer of Non-Formal Learning (Pesek et al., 2020), some of the methods focused on the development of team dynamics include energisers, ice-breakers, and team-building methods. Methods focused on content include reflection, simulations, exercises, discussions, and others. (Pesek et al., 2020.)

An energiser is an activity that aims to boost the energy of the participants and make them more motivated to take part in the next one. Ice-breaking and team-building activities strengthen the interactions within the group, create a pleasant atmosphere and a safe space. A reflection helps the participants get a deeper understanding of what is happening and why, as well as reinforce what they have learnt. (Pesek et al., 2020.)

To enhance the learning, the participants will be guided through the team building by facilitated activities. As Hunter, Bailey & Taylor (2007) suggest, **facilitation** is the process of guiding and managing a group's activities or discussions to ensure that objectives are achieved effectively. It focuses on creating an environment where participants can actively engage, share ideas, and collaborate, while the facilitator supports the process without dominating it. This approach emphasises inclusivity, clarity, and the empowerment of participants to take ownership of their learning or decision-making, which is widely used in non-formal education. (Hunter et al., 2007.)

The concrete activities for all the stages of team development were based on the author's experience with the facilitation of various programmes for youth. Subsequently, they were adapted to the specific needs and goals of FGE and fitted into the structure of 5 Stages of Team Development, ensuring the elements of the experience economy and Experiential Learning Cycle. Most of these activities were implemented, adapted and executed by multiple organisations and educators worldwide. Therefore, it was nearly impossible to find the authors. However, there are several collections of such activities and tools available on the internet, such as Salto Youth.

Although there are various resources which deal with non-formal education context, the Primer of Non-Formal Learning was chosen as an innovative resource written by experts on non-formal

education in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (Pesek et al., 2020). Although the concept of non-formal education may differ in other countries, this was specifically chosen for this thesis as the team building takes place in Slovakia, within a Slovak organisation.

### **3 FGE Days Experiential Team Building**

This chapter will document the background of the creation of the main product, its execution and post-event outcomes. Before the implementation of the project, the specific situation of the organisation has to be introduced in order to better comprehend its needs and goals. Based on that, a SCORE analysis will be done. Afterwards, specific goals for the team-building event will be set, and the process of creation, execution and analysis will be described.

#### **3.1 Introduction of the Commissioner – Future Generation Europe**

Future Generation Europe (FGE) is a Slovak civil association that is a form of non-governmental organisation. FGE is dedicated to preparing young people for the future through unique projects and tools they have created. The projects revolve around important topics which develop over the years, based on the needs of youth, as well as employers. These days, the focus is mostly on finding the right career path for students in secondary education, upper secondary education, and tertiary education in Slovakia, leading to better employability. That is done through career information projects such as Minierasmus, Kompas, and others. Apart from that, they also focus on the development of soft skills and other transversal skills – as referred to by Matus Jarolin – “skills of the 21st century”. After COVID-19 and the start of the war in Ukraine, they also added the topics of motivation, self-validation, mental health, and well-being. The organisation promotes these topics not only through their projects but also through marketing and public campaigns to reach the broader public. (Jarolin, 2024.)

In all of its initiatives, Future Generation Europe exemplifies a holistic approach to youth development, focusing not only on career-oriented growth but also on creating a nurturing and collaborative environment for its volunteers and employees. Through the combination of project work, skill-building, educational opportunities and community, FGE continues to support young people in building successful and sustainable futures not only as their project attendants, but also for their employees and volunteers. (Jarolin, 2024.)

Furthermore, as described by Matus Jarolin (2024), the founder and CEO of FGE, the organisation takes an attentive approach to balancing passion and work intensity. This means being vigilant about the potential for burnout among its volunteers and employees, ensuring that while ambition and enthusiasm are encouraged, self-care and manageable workloads are prioritised. Therefore, apart from development and high quality of events, FGE places high emphasis on well-being as well (Jarolin, 2024).

FGE is constantly expanding, therefore the HR team is constantly recruiting new volunteers and employees (Cesnekova, 2024). The new staff inflow was particularly noticeable in September 2024, when, according to the CEO Matus Jarolin, 16 new members joined the 35 already experienced ones in the organisation. This was the reason why a great emphasis was to be put on the teambuilding aspect of the October 2024 FGE Days. Most of the volunteers who joined FGE in September 2024 stated, that they are joining the organisation to develop themselves, as well as to meet new people and join a community of like-minded individuals (Cesnekova, 2024). This motivation stemmed mostly from the fact that these volunteers started studying at university for which they had moved to a new city, without having many acquaintances.

This connects to FGE's main value – community. According to Matus Jarolin (2024), in FGE, it is believed that skills can be gained during volunteering, therefore, aspiring volunteers are not expected to have any specific prior experience. The most important factor to consider when recruiting is the motivation to learn new things and become a part of the community. Over the 10 years of FGE's functioning, the most loyal staff were proven to be the individuals whose main initial motivation was to join the community and meet new friends (Cesnekova, 2024). It was challenging to collaborate with individuals who were not interested in community-building or getting to know their fellow volunteers in person and were not attending the internal events. This was negatively influencing the workflow, as well as the sustainable development of the organisation, because of higher fluctuation rates. (Cesnekova, 2024). As the main goal of the organisation for 2025 is its sustainable development (Jarolin, 2025), loyal volunteers seem to form the cornerstone of this goal.

In FGE, team building is a part of a comprehensive onboarding process. Twice a year, typically after the intake of new team members, FGE organises "FGE Days." These internal events, usually held from Friday to Sunday, provide members with an opportunity to meet in person with people from different teams outside of the usual work setting. As a previous start-stop-continue analysis has revealed, the participants enjoyed the educational nature of the event including lectures and workshops aimed at their personal and professional development, and a relaxed free time in the evenings which they were able to use for organising their own activities and having conversations. (Future Generation Europe, 2024.)

However, according to Cesnekova (2024), until now, there has not been much focus on deepening relationships and strengthening team bonds in a structured way with a specific goal, therefore, it was not measurable. The events were focused on developing specific skills, and there was time for informal socialisation in the evening. The evenings were free, which, on one hand, gave space for fun and catching up. On the other hand, this often resulted in activities linked to excessive alcohol consumption and exclusive group formation, when people would get into smaller groups where they

knew each other, rather than “mingling” and talking to people they were not working in a team with. Despite the inclusive nature of the team, newcomers and introverts often found it challenging to integrate and fully embrace the organisation’s culture. Realising the lack of focus on the community despite it being one of the main values of the organisation, the HR team started organising in-person meetings one evening a month. These could still, however, be classified as informal and had never had specific goals or structure, and attendance was relatively low, mostly involving the people who attended most of the events. (Cesnekova, 2024; Jarolin, 2024.)

This inspired the author to design a team building aimed at “mixing” the staff from different teams, promoting networking, and offering fun without relying on conventional entertainment or alcohol, while still keeping the educative value for the majority of the time.

### 3.2 SCORE Analysis

At the beginning of the process, the SCORE analysis framework was used to evaluate the current situation of the organisation. SCORE analysis is used for strategic planning and problem-solving. It helps assess the situation, identify challenges, explore solutions, as well as measure effectiveness. It consists of 5 components – strengths (S), challenges (C), opportunities (O), responses (R), and effectiveness (E). (Graves, 2006.)

The reason for using SCORE analysis was that, unlike other more commonly used tools such as SWOT (which mostly focuses on solely analysing internal and external factors), SCORE places more emphasis on actionable steps and effectiveness, naturally leading to implementation and improvement, which made it a useful tool for planning the team building. The aim was to reflect on internal strengths and challenges based on the information from the chairman of the organisation, as well as its HR leader. Based on these, possible options were explored, and responses that would support future development were defined. The analysis also served as a base for setting the main goals of the activity. The specific outcomes of the SCORE analysis are presented in this section.

The **strengths** involve the advantages, resources or capabilities that an organisation already possesses (Graves, 2006). In the case of FGE in regards to team building, one of the strengths is the fact that putting emphasis on forming a community and fostering good well-being and relationships among their staff is one of their key values. The atmosphere is positive overall, and the organisation has an inclusive nature. Another advantage is that the community is constantly growing, helping the organisation to expand. The newcomers are motivated to take part in internal activities and contribute to the community. According to the feedback from previous FGE Days, the participants enjoyed the educational value of the event and free time in the evenings.

The **challenges** highlight areas needing to be improved or obstacles (Graves, 2006). One of the challenges is the fact that the team buildings lack focus on specific goals, therefore, the results are difficult to quantify. Booking an external team-building provider also poses a challenge due to high costs, which are difficult to cover for an NGO. Internally, one of the challenges is the formation of exclusive groups which do not interact much in spite of the potential benefits for themselves as well as the quality of the organisation's output. If teams interact, in most cases, it is connected to alcohol consumption which adversely impacts health and may shed a negative light on the nature of FGE's internal events. Despite being a strength overall, the large number of new volunteers may pose a challenge in integrating them well if not assessed correctly. Another challenge includes the relatively high fluctuation of volunteers.

The **options** look into possible solutions, attempting to address the challenges (Graves, 2006). In order for the teambuilding to be more structured and measurable, specific goals should be set, such as team bonding, improving communication, or problem-solving skills. Since hiring an external company is not an option, a more sustainable and low-cost possibility could be having someone from the internal environment, such as the HR team, facilitate the activities. Furthermore, an option could be finding ways to increase the value without increasing the costs. Activities where people interact and "mingle" as much as possible could be involved to address the challenges of exclusive group formation and the rapidly expanding community. Providing experiences where people create new shared memories with new people could increase the volunteer loyalty to the organisation. Further options resulting from the strengths of the previous FGE Days involve keeping the educational aspect as well as providing time for a free programme in the evenings.

The **responses** designate concrete actions which can be taken from the chosen options (Graves, 2006). In the case of FGE's teambuilding, the goal could be team bonding, which involves activities focused on strengthening relationships, fostering communication, and improving empathy and problem-solving (Webber s.a.). That could be achieved through ice-breakers and networking activities in the beginning, followed by team challenges and activities requiring cooperation. To give the team building a structure, 5 Stages of Team Development (Tuckman, 1965) can be used as a framework. This will, among other things, provide an educational value since the participants learn about the 5 stages in a non-formal way. To increase the value and provide better memories without a significant rise of the costs, 4 realms of experience (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) can be used. For enhancing the educational value of the team development, Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) will be applied. Furthermore, through non-formal education, the team leaders and coordinators can gain inspiration to organise their own programmes at their projects, providing even more educational value and making the impact long-lasting. In the evenings, the team-building attendees will be encouraged to spend time without the use of alcohol, being provided with games to play, socialisation ideas and

voluntary possibility to participate in facilitated games, however, there will be no structured, compulsory programme planned in order to address the request of free time.

The **effectiveness** measures the impact of the implemented actions and evaluates success (Graves, 2006). The FGE Days team building will be evaluated through start-stop-continue analysis where the participants of the team building discuss what they believe should be kept, what should be implemented, and what should be eliminated if team building is organised again in the future. The organisation will also send out feedback forms to measure the success. Although this is out of the scope of this thesis, the effects can be measured over time, e.g. how has the knowledge gained been used at the projects, or whether it has influenced the teams in the long run.

Based on the SCORE analysis, three main goals of the team building have been draught out:

1. Strengthen team bonds and relationships across all groups, supporting integration of new volunteers.
2. Provide educational value through engaging, non-formal learning.
3. Deliver a memorable, inclusive, and engaging experience at a low cost.

The objectives of the teambuilding will be evaluated through reflective discussions, observation, Start-Stop-Continue Analysis with the participants, as well as feedback from the organisation's chairman. The indicators include improved cross-team interaction, a stronger sense of belonging among new volunteers, engagement levels, and the ability to deliver a memorable and inclusive experience within a limited budget.

To deliver a strong experience at a low cost, Four Realms of Experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) will be used to create a base for the programme. To enhance the team development, as well as provide a framework for the activities, Five Stages of Team Development (Tuckman, 1965) will be implemented. To emphasise the educational aspect, the above-mentioned will be supported by the Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984).

The desired, **long-term outcome** of this process is that the participants learn to communicate better and realise that there may be different points of view among the team members, thanks to shared reflection and discussion. This might motivate them to want to explore and discuss more, in order to become more efficient as a team. This could also help facilitate the strategising process in the future, resulting in a more organised and productive team, being able to generate more ideas and assess different problems and situations effectively. This process could therefore contribute to social sustainability, as open communication, understanding of different perspectives, and building trust and empathy among team members is essential for long-term collaboration. Moreover, providing a safe

environment where all voices are heard promotes equity and inclusion. This can improve the well-being of members, leading to a more resilient community.

### **3.3 Pre-Event Phase**

Before the event took place, several aspects needed to be considered. The venue and date were pre-planned by the organisation. FGE Days was going to take place at Hotel Zatoka in Senec, Slovakia. The accommodation, materials, and meals were to be covered by the organisation.

Two months before the event, the preparations started. The activities were planned according to the theories and models, and the organisation purchased the materials required. A detailed schedule was done, attempting to realistically estimate the time slots for the activities. The slots had to be big enough for the activity to follow a natural pace, while at the same time, ensuring there was enough time for all the activities to take place.

Based on the model by Tuckman (1965) – The Five Stages of Team Development, the structure and nature of the activities during the team building were going to follow these 5 stages: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. Tuckman's Five Stages of Team Development provides a structured and insightful approach to understanding and supporting team growth. By tailoring the activities in the FGE team building to align with each stage, the event would create a comprehensive environment for participants to engage, learn, and grow together. Tuckman's model provided a clear structure for guiding the team through the natural stages of development, ensuring each phase contributed to stronger collaboration and problem-solving abilities. (Tuckman, 1965.)

In addition to this framework, the Experiential Learning Cycle was to be implemented during these stages. Its significance was expected to be highest mainly during the storming, norming and performing stages, when the participants would experience a concrete experience (conflict - storming), after which they would reflect and conceptualise (norming), and that would be followed by implementation of their new theories and knowledge during the active experimentation (performing). The Experiential Learning Cycle was planned to complement the other models by encouraging participants to reflect on their experiences, develop new strategies, and apply them in practice. (Kolb, 1984). This model was going to be used throughout the activities in the team building to see how it could be implemented and whether it was possible to cover all four stages. It was supposed to support the team development by engaging the participants personally in various challenges and simulations (CE), on which they would subsequently reflect and debrief (RO), followed by brainstorming strategies for similar situations (AC), which they would later be able to apply in the next activities (AE). (Kolb, 1984.)

Furthermore, all stages and activities were going to involve key aspects of the experience economy. The Experience Economy was meant to add depth by blending education, entertainment, immersion, and aesthetic appreciation, creating an environment that would capture participants' attention and foster meaningful engagement. To maximise the experience by combining elements from multiple realms, the team building was going to involve activities requiring active participation as well as activities focused solely on perception, and dynamic as well as static activities. This was done to help increase the value of the event to the employees and volunteers of the organisation without the need for a high investment. Participants would learn about Tuckman's Stages of Team Development (education) while enjoying non-formal activities and games like icebreakers, energisers, and team challenges (entertainment). They were also going to escape the "real-world problems" by immersing themselves in engaging activities and taking on different roles (escapism). Finally, the aesthetic value was going to be added by presenting of the participants' creations, photos, and videos at the end (aesthetics). (Pine and Gilmore, 1999.)

By combining the frameworks of the Experience Economy, Kolb's Learning Cycle, and Tuckman's Five Stages of Team Development, the team-building activities were designed to be both engaging and purposeful. The use of these models aimed to ensure that participants not only enjoy the experience but also gain valuable skills and insights. Together, these approaches were going to attempt creating a dynamic and impactful team-building event that would equip the participants with tools and experiences that would extend beyond the activities on their own and prepare them for future challenges as a cohesive and effective team.

The learning cycle was going to be supported through carefully designed activities led by a trained facilitator from the internal team, who was, at the same time, the author of this thesis. Using facilitation techniques, the facilitator of the activities would guide participants through each stage of the cycle, ensuring engagement in specific experiences, reflection on those experiences, the development of concepts, and their practical application. This approach was chosen to help keep the process interactive and focused on achieving the goals of experiential learning without direct intervention in the process or providing specific answers on how to deal with a certain situation.

One week before the event, the participants were sent an infopack (Appendix 1), covering all the important information about the logistics, nature of the team building, and the fact that it was a product of a bachelor's thesis, which was to be tested for its usability. The infopack was made to be easily readable, with graphics complementing the text. The colours and fonts were in the brand identity of the organisation. The programme part only revealed the basics of the activities in order to keep the element of surprise important for the strength of the experience, but the participants were given the option to ask for any further information they might need. Furthermore, it contained a short

introduction of the facilitator, as well as the safe-zone coordinator, whose responsibility was to make sure participants felt comfortable and could talk to the coordinator privately at any time. This role was given to the head of HR team, as this already aligns with creating a supportive and confidential environment. All the members were already familiar with her thanks to prior communication, which helped establish trust. Additionally, she was not a leader of any of the main projects, which helped to establish distance and increase trust. Apart from the team building activities themselves, the infopack included the information about the rest of the programme during FGE Days, as it was requested by the organisation, but were not directly a part of the team building or this thesis. Those included taking pictures, a workshop on giving feedback, and 'PrinciplesYou' assessments.

The organisation sent a form to the participants, which, apart from logistical and organisational aspects, included the agreement with photographs being taken for the duration of the team building, which might later be used in the thesis. The participants were provided the option to disagree. Afterwards, the final list of participants was created.

Based on the list, the participants were pre-divided into teams for the activity during the "performing stage". It was done in a manner that each team was made up of people who normally did not get to interact much during their work, or worked in different regions. Each team had the same number of participants, and males and females were distributed evenly. The team distribution also mixed newcomers with more senior members. Shortly before the event, however, the list had to be reorganised because of members dropping out due to illness.

### **3.4 Implementation of the Event**

This part introduces the flow of the event and the real situations that arose. It follows the natural sequence of the activities. FGE Days took place between 4 – 6 October 2024 in Senec, Slovakia. Since The 5 Stages of Team Development were used as a structure of the team building, this part is divided into sections based on the model. During each reflection, the participants revisited the model and were asked to share their thoughts about the specific stage. Afterwards, a definition was revealed.

#### **3.4.1 Forming**

After all the participants had arrived on Friday evening, there was a short introduction where they were welcomed, and the facilitator and aims of the event were introduced. To ensure a smoother course of the event, the organisational matters regarding the accommodation, food, logistics etc. were communicated. Participants had space to share their expectations, wishes, and questions. To enhance the experience aspects, the specific activities were not introduced in detail. They were also informed that this event was part of the product implementation for the organiser's thesis, the

participation was voluntary, and the participants had the option not to participate at any time during the event. In order to reduce researcher bias, throughout the team building, the participants were encouraged to provide feedback on any improvements. They were informed that the product was mainly for them, and it was now being tested for its usability. For that reason, they were repeatedly reminded that any of their suggestions would be helpful and utilised for the next events at FGE.

Because of the acoustics and small size of the room, an interactive rule was established to facilitate silence if anyone needed to announce something. It was called the 'CocaCola rule', when a person said "coca", and the rest of the group made a "shhh" sound, like when a can of coke fizzes after opening. This helped with organising the group in a calm way providing a cooperative atmosphere instead of shouting or repeating instructions.

The programme started with some **name games** and **ice-breakers**. These activities helped the participants learn each other's names in an entertaining way and help people feel more relaxed together. Since almost half of the participants were either newcomers or had not interacted with the rest of the group before, these activities were crucial for setting a good atmosphere and preventing the group from forming sub-groups. Therefore, the objective of this stage was for the people to get acquainted, learn new names, and "mingle", especially with people they did not have much time to get to know. To help with the names in such a short time, participants additionally received stickers to write their names on and attached them to their T-shirts.

The first activity started by standing in a circle. At first, participants said their names one by one, while making a move. Once a name was said, the rest of the group repeated the name and the move. Everyone took a turn. After that, a ball was added, which was passed between participants while they were saying their own names. After each participant had had the ball at least twice, the rules changed and now, when a participant got the ball, they had to shout the name of another participant and then pass the ball to them. Consequently, the participants were given the option to make the game even more dynamic, however, the majority preferred not to, since it was already evening.

The next activity of the forming stage was called **Speed Friending**. This activity aimed to both ease the tension, as well as get the participants who do not know each other to interact and discuss various topics through structured, timed conversations. Moreover, they continued practising the names.



Figure 4. Participants preparing for Speed Friending

The participants were all in one big room. Each of them received a paper and a pen, and the only instruction they got in the beginning was that they were supposed to draw a circle with 12 numbers inside, like a clock. The next task was to arrange a “date” for each of the full hours. It was emphasised that once someone arranged a date for, e.g. 2 o’clock, both of the people have to write one another’s name to the hour of 2 (e.g. Sarah writes “Oscar” next to 2, and Oscar then writes “Sarah”). Once all the hours were filled and everyone had a date for each of the hours, the participants got to know the rest of the rules. The facilitator shouted out time (e.g. “It’s 6 o’clock!”), and the participants found the dates they had arranged for this hour. The hours were not in chronological order to make it less predictable. Once everyone was in pairs, they got a question/topic to talk about. Participants had 2 minutes to talk about the given topic. When the 2 minutes ran out, the facilitator gave them a signal as a sign that the participants should finish their discussions and move on to another date, when they got a different topic to discuss.



Figure 5. Participants discussing the questions during Speed Friending

When the activities finished, the participants were invited for a short **reflection**. They had an opportunity to share how they felt during the activity or what they had learnt. The reflection questions given by the facilitator included: What was something surprising you have learnt about another person? Did you feel comfortable or nervous while meeting new people? Do you feel more confident to reach out to the new people than before? What was enjoyable about meeting new people?

After Speed Friending, no more formal programme was planned for the evening. However, participants were encouraged to spend time with the group and continue in the discussions that they had started, as well as to try and talk to people they had not spent much time with yet.

### 3.4.2 Storming

The next morning, the programme started with an energiser and thematic introduction into the storming stage, called **Snowball Fight**. This was an energiser that helped the participants get to know each other even better while providing a dynamic and entertaining start to the day.

After that, the “**Storming Stage**” followed. The activity in this stage was focused on inducing uncomfortable situations, bringing tension, heating discussions and exchange of opinions. Since in this stage, conflicts and tension are completely natural, the facilitator had to be prepared for stronger emotions arising and conflict handling. At this stage, group reflection and debriefing were going to be extremely crucial, since unresolved issues could escalate and obstruct the team’s ability to move forward.

The **Maze of Frustration**, as the name suggests, was slightly different than the usual funny and entertaining activities. Since the main point of the storming phase is the team getting into a conflict or difficult situation where there is tension and exchange of opinions, an uncomfortable situation was facilitated. Maze of frustration tested the ability of the team to communicate, strategise, and handle unexpected situations. During this activity, natural leader(s) could be exposed. The aim was to test the team's **communication, strategy, and adaptability under pressure**. As it was a challenging activity, debriefing was crucial. The safe-zone coordinator did not actively participate in this activity, ready to help and step in if needed.



Figure 6. Participants during the Maze of Frustration

At the start, the group sat together, without any hints apart from the activity's name. Their task was to choose a "queen" (or king) without knowing the role's details. After some time and discussions, one person volunteered, and the group agreed. Subsequently, the "king" was informed that the activity involved blindfolds, and it was ensured that they had no health issues preventing participation. The "king" then left the room with the safe-zone coordinator, who kept them company and made sure they did not hear the conversation of the rest of the group. They were also told they might have to wait before returning.

Meanwhile, the rest of the group were acquainted with the rules. A maze was created with a masking tape in the centre of the room with a 'start' and 'finish' (a picture of a castle). The task of the group was to plan how to guide their "king" from the 'start' to the 'castle' without stepping on the tape, staying within the designated area. The catch was that they could only speak one word at a time, in a predetermined order (e.g., "Make" – "one" – "step" – "forward"). If a rule was broken or the "queen" stepped outside the maze, they had to start over.

The team had as much time as needed to prepare. Once they announced they were ready, further discussion was not allowed, and they were not allowed to speak unless it was their turn. The “king” was then called back, positioned at the start, still having no information, and the game began. Since it was difficult to estimate the time needed for this activity beforehand, enough time was left for unexpected prolongations, as it was crucial to finish the activity once started. There was also an extra activity prepared in case the maze took much shorter than anticipated.

Once the “king” completed the maze, the blindfold was removed, and debriefing followed immediately. Some of the reflective questions asked what would have changed if the participants had done the activity again having all the information; how the “king” felt; what were the biggest issues that the group faced; etc.

### **3.4.3 Norming**

Norming already began during the reflection on Maze of Frustration. Team members started to develop a sense of cohesion, trust, and collaboration. Roles started becoming clearer, and there was more open communication and cooperation. The members move towards agreeing on shared values and expectations.

The reflection was followed by creating a code of conduct based on what the team had learnt so far. As during the debriefing, the team realised that some rules should have been agreed in advance to better handle unexpected situations, in the norming phase, the whole group agreed on team rules. These included ways of handling conflicts, needs, ways of better collaboration, team values, etc. Everyone was encouraged to contribute their ideas. The team rules were written down and kept in a visible place, ready for the team to come back to it if needed, for the rest of the team building. As this was still a part of the previous reflection, no further reflection was done in the norming phase.

### **3.4.4 Performing**

In this stage, the team’s strength was tested, and the rules that had been established were challenged. The team should have achieved peak performance through solving problems, making decisions, minimising friction, and working towards a common goal. The aim of this stage was to connect the participants and make them collaborate on different tasks for which they had to collaborate, solve problems, work under time pressure and allocate tasks.

For that reason, Mission (Im)possible followed. Named after a popular action spy film series, this activity involved a set of tasks and challenges that the teams had to accomplish within a specific time frame. For this activity, the group of participants was to be divided into 5 teams. This had been carefully planned before, as the participants in the teams were as mixed as possible. Each team of

5 participants had at least 2 people who have freshly joined the organisation, 3 who had been part of the organisation for at least half a year, while there were 2 males and 3 females in each team. This was to ensure balance and creating a group of people which would normally not have collaborated on tasks together. That was to increase the challenge and have people communicate, get to know and work with different people.



Figure 7. Beginning of Mission Impossible

Before the activity, the room was been prepared, the materials had been laid out, the lights dimmed, and the facilitator was dressed like a secret agent. The participants only received the command to arrive exactly at 15:00. At that time, the room was unlocked and they were able to enter. They sat on the chairs prepared, looking at the presentation reading “Mission Impossible”. Once everyone was seated and silent, the slide changed to saying “under your chair”. Once everyone started looking underneath their chairs, a 90-minute timer appeared on the screen. Every person found a name highlighted in a specific colour under their chair. They found the person with the name and figured out the colour meant the team they belonged to. Consequently, the teams found bags with their colours represented, in which there were instructions, tasks, and envelopes with materials to be used for fulfilling the tasks. The tasks ranged from creative to logical ones, some needed interaction with other people and environment, and others were focused on using specific skills for the organisation, like making videos, photos, or interviews, but in a humorous and playful way. When the teams finished the tasks, they returned back to the room. Since all the teams managed to complete all the task within the given time, the “Mission Impossible” sign changed to “Mission Possible”.

After that, a facilitated reflection followed, when the participants had space to share their experiences, learning points and challenges. They were also invited to make changes or adjustments to the Team Code of Conduct.



Figure 8. Participants finding their team-members



Figure 9. Participants solving a task



Figure 10. Teams meeting while completing Mission Impossible

### 3.4.5 Adjourning

Since the actual team was not drifting apart after the team building, this stage provided a great opportunity for a well-deserved celebration which reinforced the morale and cohesion of the group. The team reflected on the team building and the knowledge gained, as well as shared how it might be used when working on FGE's projects.



Figure 11. A team being rewarded for their successful performance

However, the main activity of the evening was announcing the results of Mission (Im)possible, followed by a small cinema of the pictures and videos shot during the game. The teams were not ranked from the “best” to the “worst”, but each team was a winner of a different category. This way, all the efforts could be rewarded, as the main goal of the activity was to have fun and work together as a team, which everyone managed. The categories were all based on something personal and unique for each team, such as ‘the fastest team’, the team with the funniest video, the team with the most people interviewed, or the team with the highest number of points. Each team got a prize and then the cinema of the day started. The participants had a great laugh while seeing what other teams came up with, experienced, and even the way they approached the tasks. The adjourning finished by looking back on the day in this entertaining and reflective way. No more formal programme was planned, leaving out free space for the participants, who decided to keep socialising and organised a karaoke evening.

### **3.5 Evaluation of the Event**

This chapter analyses the activity in connection with the theory and looks at the reflections and feedback from the participants. Firstly, it explores the extent to which the models have been used. Secondly, it assesses the team building by analysing the feedback from the participants and the organisation’s executive board. The main evaluation took place right before the end of the event on Sunday morning. All the participants who took part in the event were present at the end for the Start-Stop-Continue analysis.

Five months after the event, the team was invited to share their insights on whether the event had helped them in any way. They were asked to share whether they felt like the event had any long-term benefits on their functioning in the organisation, and if they used any of the activities or methods during their projects. This was asked in a group chat to reach all the organisation’s members, however, they were encouraged to answer in a private chat by typing a message or recording a voice message. This was because of confidentiality and convenience.

#### **3.5.1 Evaluation of the Activities**

The main activity of the **forming** stage, “Speed-friending”, engaged participants in an interactive and engaging experience. From the Four Realms of Experience (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) perspective, the experience element was reinforced when the participants received pens and paper to draw a clock, after which they mingled and found a “date” for each full hour. The environment was adjusted to look like a café, while space for sitting/standing was available. That was to enhance the escapism aspect. To support the education aspect, some of the pre-given discussion topics were intentionally aimed at learning new things and inspiring each other (e.g. Talk about your favourite book and why

you would recommend it). Other topics were more fun to keep the activity entertaining (e.g. When was the last time you had a good laugh? Why?).

Some of Experiential Learning Cycle parts were already involved in this activity. After the Concrete Experience (CE) of speed-friending, a facilitated reflection followed as a part of Reflective Observation (RO) and Abstract Conceptualisation (AC) (Kolb, 1984). After the main part of the activity, the participants reflected on their experience and analysed their reflections, while the facilitator encouraged these stages. With this activity, the Active Experimentation (AE) was not facilitated, however, participants were given free time afterwards and were encouraged to continue getting to know the others better, engaging in free discussions and sharing ideas, learning about and from each other.

Before the activity, it was evident that participants spent their time in small groups with people they had known or stood alone waiting for the programme to start. When having the conversations during speed-friending, all the participants talked actively and always had more things to add, even after the time had run out. During the reflection, they were excited to share that they had learnt some interesting things, had a good laugh and got to know many new people in a short time, or even learnt some surprising facts about people they had known before. Overall, they claimed they felt more comfortable in the group. After the activity, the groups became a lot more mixed and new members could be seen interacting with the senior members actively. The discussions continued even during the informal programme. Some of the newcomers claimed that thanks to the speed-friending activity, they were much less shy to reach out and felt more comfortable in the group, even though they generally considered themselves introverted and shy at these types of events. Nevertheless, this activity also came with some drawbacks and challenges. Firstly, the accommodation provided the organisation with a smaller room than initially agreed due to internal issues. This influenced the flow slightly negatively since there was less space, the place was very noisy and hot, and could not be fully adapted as a café. That could have negatively influenced the experience. Moreover, the activity took longer than anticipated, and some of the participants suggested it could have been shorter, as they found speaking for so long in the evening exhausting.

The **storming** activity, Maze of Frustration, mostly engaged the educational and escapist realms of experience economy, although entertainment was also present in the beginning and at the end. Participants were actively involved in problem-solving, and the immersive nature of the challenge helped make the experience engaging and memorable. Having the "queen", "maze" and a "castle", even underlined escapism, taking the participants back to childhood because of the fairytale elements. The induced frustration and challenge created a unique experience which made it more impactful. The first three stages of Kolb's Learning Cycle were present in this activity. The Concrete Experience happened when the team actively attempted to guide the 'king' through the maze while

following the confining communication rules. During the debriefing, participants discussed their feelings, frustrations, and challenges, which was part of Reflective Observation. Lastly, the Abstract Conceptualisation occurred when the team analysed what went wrong, what could have been done differently, and how their communication strategy could have improved.

Before the activity, the participants seemed to be in a good mood from the energiser. When the activity started, they were immersed in the conversations and strategising, while small disagreements occurred when deciding the best strategy. Some participants seemed to be more dominant, however, everyone contributed in the planning phase and the conversation was flowing. During the activity, things went as planned at first, however, the initial strategy of having planned who says what exactly stopped working after the 'king' made a few unexpected steps. The tension in the group rose after a few misunderstandings and non-verbal communication, but after a short time, the team started to be more and more synced, and after all, the 'king' made it safely through the maze after a few tries. No big conflicts occurred and the team was collaborating very well, given the situation. After the activity, the debriefing and reflection took place. The participants shared their feelings and learning points. The 'king' gave his own unique insights and feelings, as he had not known what was going on until the rest of the team attempted to explain. Space was then provided for further discussions of feelings and alternative strategies and approaches to the solutions. During the reflection, the participants stated that they realised the importance of clear communication, empathy and team collaboration. It provided a strong experience as the conversations went on even later during the breaks.

The **norming** stage where participants collaborated on writing the code of conduct – did not inhibit as strong experiential characteristics but was rather an extension of the emotional impact of the previous phase. By transforming slight frustration into positive outcomes, it reinforced the experience from the maze. Nevertheless, the educational realm was present, as well as elements of the esthetic realm, since the participants are actively participating on creating their own rules with the possibility to choose the aesthetic themselves. The reflection and interaction supports the learning process. Writing the code of conduct was mostly part of the Abstract Conceptualisation, when the participants define specific rules to improve teamwork, in order to prepare themselves for future team activities with better team dynamics. During the activity, some of the participants suggested the rules, but it did not seem like everyone took an active part.

The activity focused on **performing** stage used all four realms of the experience economy. Mission (Im)possible was entertaining thanks to the nature of the tasks and dramatisation. The education realm was present thanks to learning and practising skills like video-making, and songwriting, as well as practising various soft skills. Aesthetics were used with the materials and immersive environment,

and that was also connected to the escapist characteristics, as the participants were immersed in the game and environment while actively participating in the fulfilment of the tasks.

Mission Impossible was mostly aiming to have characteristics of the Active Experimentation phase of the Experiential Learning Cycle, as the participants had knowledge from the previous phases and were able to use it in practice.

Before the activity, the participants had very little information about what was about to happen. Their expressions were neutral. Once they entered the room and saw the slides, a chatter started, but once the rules and tasks were clear, they were fully immersed in the activity motivated to fulfil the tasks as quickly as possible. After the activity, they were motivated to contribute to the discussion about what happened during their experience. They talked much more with their team members as now they felt a sense of achievement. Most participants claimed they were positively surprised about the activity, enjoyed the course of it, and got to know new people better.

The last stage, **adjourning**, mainly inhibited the aesthetic and entertainment realms, as the participants were passive, watching the videos and pictures, looking back on the day and reflecting, therefore, reflective observation was present.

### 3.5.2 Start, Stop, Continue

The first feedback session was organised at the end of FGE Days, on Sunday, before the participants left. The framework Start, Stop, Continue was used, which is a commonly used tool that facilitates a constructive feedback session. It helps participants look back on what they have experienced, and share what they felt like was missing in the team building process and should be included next time (Start); what they think was unnecessary or what they think wasted time (Stop); as well as what was good and should be kept next time (Continue) (Miles, 2023).

To facilitate this activity, the participants were introduced to the aim and process of the activity. They were divided into 3 smaller groups. Each group then had time to discuss the team building and write each idea for each category on a separate Post-it note. Once all the groups were done, they shared their ideas with the group and the Post-it notes were attached on a flipchart according to the categories. The participants were then given more space to discuss and share, including confirmation questions from the facilitator. After this activity, the event ended.

The main findings from the '**Start**' part of the analysis showed some specific suggestions for future events like this. Firstly, the participants would prefer more free time during the day for relaxation and their own activities. They claimed that the schedule was relatively packed. A designated time for playing board games would also be appreciated. The participants would also like to implement a

Kahoot-quiz evening. Another implementation could be announcing winners of some funny awards, like the Biggest Party Lion, Sleeping Beauty, and others. Others claimed they would prefer more competitive games and activities. An important note was also emphasising the ecological aspect of the event more, and reminding people to recycle and be more sustainable.

The '**Stop**' category mostly included the logistics and size of the premises. Moreover, it mentioned that the speed-friending activity was too long, and some groups would not like it to be repeated at all at another event. The fact that the programme was a little too full was mentioned again.

When analysing the '**Continue**' part, all the groups mentioned they would like to continue the tradition of FGE Days, combining fun and education. They enjoyed Saturday's free evening, which they used for organising a karaoke. They appreciated the time for team meetings and highlighted the fact that even the leaders and the chairman took part. The interactive rule for making the group silent, called Coca-shhh, was also highlighted as something that should be kept.

	START	CONTINUE	STOP
<b>FGE Days October 2024</b>	Funny rewards on Sundays (e.g. best karaoke singer, biggest party lion,...)	Workshops	Speed friending
	Dixit reflection	Mission Impossible	2 different buildings for programme and accommodation
	More emphasis on ecology during coffee breaks	Karaoke	Programme that is too long
	Waste bags	Time for team meetings	Hotel Zátoka
	More free time	Involving members of board of directors	Programme that is too long
	Time and space for playing board games	FGE Days as a tradition	
	Kahoot Quiz	Coca-shhhhh rule	
	More competitive games		
	Human Bingo game		

Table 1. Findings from Start-Stop-Continue translated into English

### 3.5.3 Feedback from the Organisation Members 5 Months Later

Out of the 30 members who were invited to voluntarily provide feedback, only a few responded, which limits how representative the results are. However, the responses that were collected were consistent and detailed enough to offer valuable insight into the long-term benefits of the team building. Both Matus Jarolin (FGE chairman) and Natalia Lasova (vice-president) agreed that the event significantly helped new members integrate and feel a sense of belonging. Jarolin appreciated the logical structure, the balance of entertainment and education, and noted that the event set a strong foundation for future team building. Lasova highlighted the importance of face-to-face interactions, especially in periods of rapid recruitment, and observed that the team building had a lasting impact on team dynamics and motivation. Both also pointed out Mission Impossible as one of the most successful parts of the programme.

Diana Papulakova (marketing team member) and one respondent who preferred to stay anonymous (a freshly joined member) confirmed that the team building helped strengthen trust and connections across and within teams. While most of the feedback was positive, there were some critical notes about the length of the speed-friending activity and the packed schedule, which left little time to rest. Despite the lower number of responses, the overall feedback suggests that the team building was effective in supporting team development and strengthening the organisation's internal community. Moreover, the variety of respondents covered the founder, a team leader, a member who has been in the organisation for over a year, as well as a member who joined the organisation just before FGE Days.

The fact that the author of the thesis was both organising the event and was a member of FGE may have raised concerns regarding potential bias. The presence of the author could have influenced participants' behaviour, possibly affecting their authenticity during the activity and providing feedback. However, the FGE team is generally very open about giving and receiving feedback, as it is viewed as something that improves us professionally and personally, rather than a critique. That was also supported by the fact that the team had an internal training about giving feedback shortly before FGE Days by a business coach and a former manager.

## **4 Discussion**

This chapter evaluates the extent to which the thesis objectives were achieved, presents insights from observations and participant feedback, and proposes possible improvements. It also reflects on personal and professional development gained throughout the process.

### **4.1 Fulfilment of Thesis Objectives**

The first objective of the thesis was to create an activity plan for a three-day team building, grounded in the principles of experience economy and experiential learning. This objective was met by integrating Pine and Gilmore's Four Realms of Experience with Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle and Tuckman's Five Stages of Team Development. These models shaped the structure and nature of the activities. In addition, a SCORE analysis was done based on previous knowledge and information from the commissioning organisation. This helped understand their situation better, based on which, specific goals were created to assess the event's success. The activity plan reflected the application of these frameworks and models, fulfilling the first objective.

Based on this plan, the team-building event was organised, which led to fulfilling the second objective. That was to execute the team building according to the plan on 4 - 6 October 2024 while documenting observations and insights during the activities to identify areas of enhancement. The event was executed according to the plan in the given dates, without any major issues arising or changing the plan significantly. Although minor changes were necessary due to participant requests and unforeseen external factors, the flexible design ensured that the overall structure and objectives remained the same. Observations and facilitator notes collected throughout the event provided valuable insight for later evaluation.

The third objective involved gathering participant feedback, specifically by using the Start-Stop-Continue method to evaluate the effectiveness of the activities. This was achieved at the end of the team building, and provided essential feedback regarding parts that could be added if the event is repeated in the future, parts that should be retained, as well as suggestions on what to avoid in the future. Furthermore, some members from the organisation were interviewed 5 months later. Although this was initially not the plan, it provided essential insights into the long-term effects and significance of the team building.

### **4.2 Participant Feedback and Observation Outcomes**

The feedback gathered from participants by the organisation confirmed that the event was received positively. The participants stated that it helped them get to know new members, strengthen their bonds, as well as learn some new skills. The most highlighted was the experiential aspect including

the education and entertainment. Most of the participants stated the team building elevated their knowledge of the Five Stages of Team Development significantly. Furthermore, the feedback revealed key points of improvement, which involved making the programme less packed providing more free time during the day for individually planned activities, as well as considering to change the programme on Friday evening to make it less exhausting.

The successful part of this event was the fact that it was executed without major issues. It was helpful that everyone including the leaders took part in the activities which broke the ice and helped with easing the communication. The experience aspect was also relatively high, which was also affirmed in the positive feedback and enthusiasm of the participants even after the teambuilding. Furthermore, all the positive feedback, especially from the newly joined members, highlighted that it significantly helped them feel part of the organisation and get to know the other members, which consequently made their work easier.

One area of improvement repeatedly mentioned was the pace of the programme. While the activities were engaging, some participants expressed the need for more unstructured time to reflect or engage in informal bonding. Friday evening's activity was specifically described as tiring, suggesting a need for lighter content on the first evening.

### **4.3 Improvement Suggestions**

Even though the event was a success overall, there are several improvements which would enhance it further. Incorporating more free time would support individual creativity and allow participants time for self-realisation. Selecting a more suitable venue could improve comfort and overall experience. A more participant-focused needs analysis during the planning phase would help tailor goals more accurately.

Regarding the specific activities and based on the observations of the facilitator and the reflections of the group after each stage, further improvements could be made. Firstly, the forming activity (Speed-Friending) should be organised in a bigger space or outside, providing enough space for privacy, while making it easy for the participants to hear the facilitator. The activity should take no longer than 30-45 minutes. In order to make it shorter, participants could only mark some hours on the clock agreed in advance (e.g. 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 10).

The storming activity (Maze of Frustration) could be improved by making the maze slightly more challenging next time, however, it is also hard to estimate the team's ability to collaborate before the activity actually happens. Another crucial point is to communicate the rules more clearly and think of possible misunderstandings (e.g. 'to the left' in Slovak is one word, but sounds like two words).

The norming stage could be improved by designating more time for this activity and perhaps facilitating a longer discussion between the participants. Another way to enhance the characteristics of this stage would be adding an extra activity which showcases the importance of rules even more.

The performing stage (Mission Impossible) brought a challenge when one of the participant refused to take part in the activity without openly communicating it, which could have negatively influenced their whole team. Luckily, it was communicated and solved relatively fast. To make sure to prevent situations like this from arising in the future, the nature of the activity should be communicated better in advance. On the other hand, not too much information should be revealed to keep the element of surprise and a more intense experience. It could help encourage the participants prior, to communicate if they feel uncomfortable and reminded that the participation is voluntary. Another challenge was a very time-consuming preparation which led to a slight problem with keeping the times set. This could be solved by having more facilitators to divide the tasks for the preparation to be less time-consuming. Despite the challenges, the activity was evaluated positively and with excitement of the participants. The positives highlighted were the range of activities and variety of tasks, so everyone could find something they enjoyed in Mission Impossible.

As a reaction to the feedback and reflections, the event could be improved by reassessing the length of the activities, planning them with more free time included, as well as making a more detailed prior research about the participants' needs and wishes. This way, a more double-sided communication would have been achieved, resulting in better satisfaction on the side of the participants. It should also be highlighted more, that the participants can ask further about the programme, however, with the warning that if too much detail is revealed, the subsequential experience aspect of the event may be influenced negatively.

#### **4.4 Implications and Applications**

This thesis can be used to guide similar events in the future. Since the main goal of the event was to test a general structure for experiential team building, it can easily be replicated in different settings, with the activities adjusted to fit the needs and character of specific target groups. Feedback collected during this pilot can provide a base for refining the format to enhance participant experience.

The event can also be used more intentionally to strengthen a specific skill or provide a particular experience, and does not necessarily need to be delivered in its full length. Individual activities may serve as inspiration for others in the organisation to use during their own projects and daily work.

Beyond Future Generation Europe, this work can also inspire others in the field to think differently about team building or help those who seek alternatives to conventional team building. This

approach is particularly relevant for the hospitality and NGO sectors, where team cohesion, communication, and soft skill development are crucial. The programme also presents a substance-free alternative to traditional team building, offering meaningful and engaging experiences without reliance on alcohol.

These results can be implemented if an event similar to this is organised in the future. Since the event was made to test a general structure of the team building, it can be repeated in the future on various settings, changing the activities based on the needs and character of the target group. The feedback can be implemented to further elevate the experience aspect of the team building, making it smoother and the participants more satisfied. This event can, furthermore, be used when aiming to strengthen a specific skill or provide a specific experience, and does not have to be executed in its full length.

Based on this team building, a handbook has been drafted (Appendix 2) with detailed explanations of the activities, an introduction to the stages of team development, and useful tips for facilitators. It will be shared with the organisation, to ensure knowledge transfer and encourage future facilitators to adapt and reuse the methods, promoting sustainability through shared learning, helping the idea go beyond this thesis and become a tool that others can build on.

The next step could be researching the impact this activity has on teams and individuals through structured research. It could also be valuable to adapt and test the product with different types of teams in different settings and contexts, in order to measure its actual effectiveness.

#### **4.5 Personal and Professional Development**

The process of writing the thesis brought many personal and professional realisations. One of the most valuable lessons I learned was how much I still have to learn. Even though I approached this project with enthusiasm and confidence in my facilitation skills, the experience revealed the complexity behind creating something truly meaningful and impactful. This humbled me and encouraged me to be more curious, ask more questions, and seek guidance when needed.

Professionally, this thesis helped me deepen my understanding of experiential learning and the experience economy, and showed me how these theories can be practically applied to design a structured and engaging team building. I learned how to align activities with team development models, plan for flexibility, and evaluate outcomes effectively. Moreover, the project allowed me to develop and test my own methodology, which created the foundation for future facilitation work I now feel confident to pursue.

The experience also had a strong impact on my functioning at Future Generation Europe. I was able to apply what I learned directly into practice. The implementation of the team building has opened many doors for me, I was given the opportunity to participate in a training for youth workers specialising on creating programmes using non-formal education, got the chance to facilitate many more projects and activities, and also got the opportunity to help create a methodology for internal processes within the organisation.

On a personal level, I also encountered some challenges that taught me important lessons about myself. I underestimated the workload and overcommitted myself to several projects at the same time. This taught me a hard but necessary lesson about the importance of time management and self-care. I came to understand how crucial it is to prioritise rest and personal well-being as something I had not paid enough attention to before.

Despite the intensity, this process was deeply fulfilling. Working on this thesis allowed me to connect my academic interests with practical application, and it gave me a clearer direction for the future. I genuinely enjoyed the creative process of designing meaningful experiences for others and realised that this is something I want to continue developing in my professional path.

Ultimately, I see this thesis not as a finished product, but as something to be built upon, adapted, and improved through continued practice, feedback, and learning. I look forward to exploring where it might lead next.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – FGE Days Infopack





## TIME TOGETHER

One of the main aims of the event is to get to know each other, that is why we would like to ask you to **stay around the whole group**. :) We have many new members, let's use this great opportunity to get to know each other better, and make sure everyone feels good. On **FRIDAY**, some of the members from the **board of directors** are joining us, don't miss the chance to **network**.

During FGE Days, we want to keep **MINIMUM ALCOHOL POLICY**. Alcohol will not be prohibited, but we would appreciate if FGE Days did not turn into a Great Gatsby party.

**Photoshooting on Sunday!** Take a picture for the **FGE website** if you haven't already. The photographer, Stano Duraj, will take your beautiful pictures.

Check these pictures out for the dresscode ideas:  
<https://futuregenerationeurope.eu/projektaci/>



 **LUJZA**

## TEAM BUILDING

The **team-building activities** will be lead by Lujza. She will appreciate any **feedback** - what you **liked**, as well as what could be **improved**. It will be very helpful for writing her thesis, since this event is a part of it.

Lujza will be happy to answer any questions you may have. :))



# PROGRAMME



The majority of the programme will be focused on **team building**. If you have any **questions** regarding the programme, feel free to drop a text to **Lujza**.

## FRIDAY

17:00  
-  
18:45

**OPTIONAL:**  
**1on1 talks workshop**  
Conference room - Ivan Košalko /Hotel Zátoka/

**Before  
19:15**

**ARRIVALS**

19:30

**OPENING  
+ ELECTIONS**

20:45

**FORMING**

**Networking and ice-  
breakers**  
Conference room



# SATURDAY

**8:00 - 9:30**

## BREAKFAST

**9:30 - 10:30**

**PrinciplesYou  
assessments**

**10:30**



**STORMING**  
Team activities  
Conference room



**13:15 - 15:00**

## LUNCH BREAK

**14:00 - 15:00**

**Photoshooting**

**15:00 - 15:45**



**NORMING**  
Team activities  
Conference room

**16:00 - 18:00**

**PERFORMING**  
Mission Impossible  
Conference room



**18:00 - 19:00**

## DINNER

**19:00**



**ADJOURNING**  
Team activities  
Conference room

# SUNDAY

8:00 - 9:30

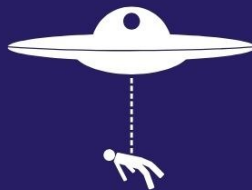
BREAKFAST

9:30 - 11:00

**Evaluation  
Feedback  
Start, Stop, Continue**

After  
11:00

DEPARTURES



## SAFE-ZONE COORDINATOR

If you're not feeling well and would like to talk, Sandra is here for you. Reach out to her with anything, it will only stay between you.



 **SANDRA**

# 5 STAGES OF TEAM DEVELOPMENT

**Bruce Tuckman (1965)**



## 1. FORMING

Members meet and begin to identify with the group



## 3. NORMING

The team begins to settle, rules are set



## 5. ADJOURNING

Team reflects on success, and celebrates achievements

## 2. STORMING

Conflicts may arise, team roles start to shape



## 4. PERFORMING

Team works effectively towards the goals, following the rules set





## HOW TO GET TO THE EVENT?

For coordinating the logistics, a Google chat thread will be created. **We will add you there.**

Since this time we are relatively close to Bratislava (Senec), and most people with cars will already be in Senec the day before the event, we recommend taking a train from BA to Senec. We can pick you up at the station.

Please tell us about your situation in the questionnaire - it is likely that someone will go by car. We will inform you in the group chat. Another option is taking a train.

### >>>> QUESTIONNAIRE <<<<

The programme itself starts at 19:30. However, you have the option to come earlier for a training by Ivan Kosalko on conducting development 1 on 1 interviews at 5:00 - 7:00 p.m. If you want to participate in this as well, you can let us know in the logistics questionnaire.

We will coordinate departures on Sunday ad hoc. We will share the cars or take you to the train station.



#### Venue FGE DAYS

Hotel Zátoka  
+ Hotel Relax  
Senec  
WEB





## ACCOMMODATION & FOOD

### FRIDAY

- We're starting later in the evening, dinner won't be served, please grab a bite before. :)

### SATURDAY

- Breakfast buffet
- LUNCH and DINNER at Hotel Zatoka

### NEDELA

- Breakfast buffet

Water, coffee and refreshments will be available for the whole duration of the event.



We provide hotel accommodation for all participants. The rooms are for 2 - 3 persons, we tried to combine people so that they know each other or fit each other (Matúš's magic matchmaking). The rooms are equipped in a standard way. For HOTEL RELAX, the directions will be explained in the group chat.

Don't forget to have your ID ready at check-in. The organizers will be waiting for you at the reception to direct you further. Check-in is from 14:00.

On Sunday, check-out is before 10:00.

## CONFERENCE ROOMS



We have a conference room booked for the entire event. We are also allowed to use it in the evenings/at night. It is located at Hotel Zatoka.



## **Appendix 2 – Team-Building Handbook Draft**

Dear facilitator, team leader, HR professional, manager, or just someone who has been "voluntold" to run the next team building!

You are holding a team-building handbook. However, do not expect just a regular list of activities. This handbook offers a full weekend programme designed to walk you and your participants through the Five Stages of Team Development by Bruce Tuckmann (1965), while also integrating elements of experiential and non-formal learning. It contains a description of activities, materials needed, estimated duration, as well as environment adjustment tips. Whether you want to follow the full weekend plan or use the activities individually to break the ice or provide an entertaining way for the colleagues to connect, it is entirely up to you.

The activities are structured to reflect the five stages of team development: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. Since a real team might not experience all these stages during just three days (in fact, it is very rare!), this simulation introduces the model in a hands-on way. It allows participants to notice group dynamics and reflect on them, preparing them to handle these stages with a better perspective in real-life teamwork, especially when facing challenges.

It is also important to note that in reality, teams rarely move through these stages in a neat, linear way (oh, if only it were that simple). Teams might revisit earlier stages or find themselves stuck in the storming phase longer than anticipated. This handbook is not a magic formula (sorry to disappoint!), but rather a practical, flexible framework.

I hope this guide brings you structure, inspiration, and ideally a few laughs along the way.

Here's to a great team building!

Lujza Cepková – the creator of this handbook

## **FIVE STAGES OF TEAM DEVELOPMENT**

It is one of the most famous theories of the development of team dynamics. It was published in 1965 by Bruce Tuckman – an American researcher and psychologist. Based on his theory, a group evolved through different stages – forming, storming, norming, performing, and later in 1977, a fifth stage – adjourning, was added.

### **FORMING**

This is the initial stage, where the team comes together and starts to get acquainted. People are polite, and there may be a sense of uncertainty about roles and how the group will work together. Team members tend to be cautious and may rely heavily on the leader for direction. At this stage, the focus is on orientation and establishing ground rules. Activities during this stage will be focused on ice-breaking activities, name games and the team getting to know each other.

If organising a weekend-long team building, there should also be space for sharing the participants' expectations and wishes. It is also a good idea to communicate all the organisational matters regarding the accommodation, food, logistics etc.

#### **Name Games**

Name games are fun, interactive activities designed to help people learn and remember each other's names, especially in new groups. They often involve movements, repetition or creative associations to help participants remember names better in a short time.

#### **Name and a Fun Fact**

No specific materials needed.

Duration: up to 15 minutes

Environment: a room big enough to create a circle, or outside

The participants stand in a circle. The facilitator starts by saying their name and a fun fact, e.g. "My name is Lujza and I've studied in 4 countries". The participants go one by one, sharing fun facts.

#### **Name Toss**

Materials: 2 - 3 small, soft balls or something else that the participants can throw safely, stickers and markers to write names (optional)

Duration: 15 - 20 minutes

Environment: a room big enough to create a circle, or outside

The first part of the game starts with each participant saying their own name and tossing the ball to someone else. The next person then does the same – says their own name and throws the ball to another person. The facilitator should make sure everyone has said their names – this can be checked by telling the participants to squat or sit down on the floor the next time they say their name and toss the ball. The game ends when everyone is sitting down.

In the next round, everyone stands up again, but this time, they have to say the name of the person they're throwing the ball to. They should be encouraged to go faster and faster. From one point, the participants are asked to remember the person they throw the ball to. After everyone has caught a ball at least once, the participants are asked to repeat it in the same sequence. After some time, a second and optionally a third ball is added, while the participants try to repeat the sequence.

After this activity, the participants can be asked whether there is someone in the group who wants to try a challenge and say all the names. If yes, the participant can come in the middle and repeat the names of the people in the circle one by one. This provides for a nice revision of all the names.

Especially in the case of big groups, the participants can receive white stickers for writing their names and sticking them on their T-shirts to help others recall their name.

### **Speed Friending**

Materials: papers, pens, bell, timer, plenty of spots for pairs to sit and talk

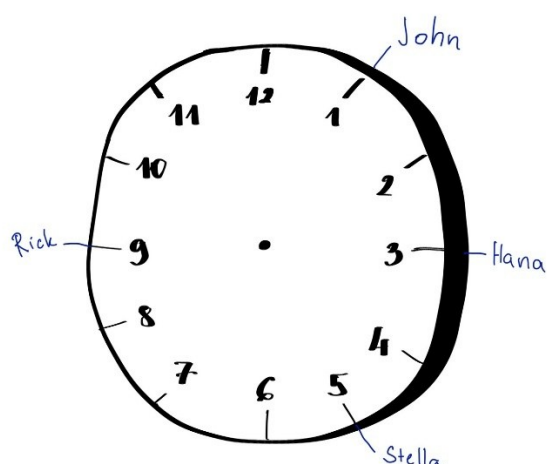
Environment: café-like, relaxing music

Duration: 30-60 minutes

Activity:

The participants are all in one big room or outside. Each of them receives a paper and a pen, and the only instruction they receive in the beginning is that they should draw a circle with 12 numbers inside, looking like a clock.

The next task is to arrange a “date” (in more formal groups, it can be called a “meeting”) for each of the full hours. The facilitator should emphasise that once someone arranges a date for, let's say, 2 o'clock, both of the people have to write one another's name to the hour of 2 (e.g. Sarah writes “Oscar” next to 2, and Oscar then writes “Sarah”).



Once all the hours are filled and everyone has a date for each of the hours, the participants get to know the rest of the rules. The facilitator will shout out time (e.g. "It's 6 o'clock!"), and the participants have to find the dates they arranged for this hour. The hours are not called in chronological order to make it less predictable. Once everyone is in pairs, they get a topic to talk about. Participants have 2 minutes to talk about the given topic (1 minute each). When the 2 minutes run out, the facilitator rings a bell, which is a sign that the participants should finish their discussions and move on to another date.

In case that the time is short, it is possible to speed the game up by only telling the participants to mark certain hours on the clock (e.g. 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 10), and only find dates for these times. However, it is **important to say that right in the beginning** to avoid confusion.

Topics:

3:00 – When was the last time you had a good laugh? Why?

1:00 – Share a tip for a great book/film.

6:00 – What makes you happy?

9:00 – What makes you sad?

7:00 – What was a problem you encountered and how did you solve it?

12:00 – What is your happy place? Why?

5:00 – What makes you angry and why?

10:00 – What is your spirit animal?

4:00 – What did you want to become as a kid?

11:00 – What is your hobby?

8:00 – What was a moment when you were really afraid?

2:00 – If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?

### **Reflection:**

Reflection is crucial for the participants to share their feelings and new knowledge, which allows for deeper learning. The option to share their thoughts and feelings makes the participants feel heard and moves them closer to each other. Reflection also fosters a deeper understanding of situations and enhances problem-solving abilities. Furthermore, the reflection helps the facilitator to grasp the group dynamic and adjust activities accordingly, e.g. add more ice-breaking activities if the group is still shy.

After the main activity finishes, the facilitator should invite the participants for a short reflection. The participants have an opportunity to share how they felt during the activity, or possibly, what they have learnt. The reflection questions could include:

What was something surprising you have learnt about another person?

Did you feel comfortable or nervous while meeting new people?

Do you now feel more confident to reach out to the people in this group than before?

What was enjoyable about meeting new people?

After Speed Friending, no more formal programme is planned for the evening. However, participants should be encouraged to spend time with the group and continue in the discussions that they have started. It is nice to remind them to try and talk to people they have not spent much time with yet. Thanks to Speed Friending they should be less shy to reach out.

### **STORMING**

The storming stage is characterised by conflict and disagreements. As team members begin to form and express their opinions, tensions can arise over leadership, decision-making, and individual roles.

This stage can be challenging, but it is also crucial, since here, teams start to clarify their goals, values, and working methods. It is important to address these conflicts constructively to move forward. (Tuckman, 1965).

The team-building activities during this stage are focused on inducing uncomfortable situations, bringing tension, heated discussions and exchange of opinions. Conflicts and tension are completely natural in this stage. Although it is a controlled environment and not a real-life situation, it may be a good idea for the facilitator to be prepared for stronger emotions arising and conflict handling. At this stage, group reflection and debriefing are extremely crucial, since unresolved issues can escalate and obstruct the team's ability to move forward.

In case this is the first activity of the day, it should start with an energiser and a thematic intro into the storming stage. It will also help the participants get to know other participants better, as the forming stage the day before was relatively short.

### **Snowball Fight**

Materials: papers, pens

Environment: empty space

Duration: 15 minutes

Activity:

Each participant takes a paper and a pen. They are asked to put the paper in a landscape orientation. Their task will be to fold it in half, and then again in half. When they open it up, they should have the paper divided into 4 parts. Afterwards, they are asked to write the name of their **favourite snack** into the upper left corner, but not show it to anybody else. When done, they should write the name of their **spirit animal** into the upper right corner. Thirdly, **the reason why they are in** the organisation goes into the bottom left square. Lastly, they draw their **favourite meme** into the bottom right corner. The categories can naturally be changed or adapted.



Once everyone is done, they are instructed to crumple their paper into a ball and have a snowball fight. After a few moments, the facilitator stops the fight and each person should pick one snowball. They open it and try to find an author of the paper. In case someone took their own paper, there is another round of snowball fight.

When looking for the author of the paper, the participants walk around the room and interview people in order to find the answers needed to identify the author. Once they find an author of the paper, the **author stands on the right** and the **interviewer stands on the left**. This way, one or several circles should be formed.

In case of extra time or a quieter group, participants can be invited to introduce the author of their paper to the group based on the info from the paper.

## Maze of Frustration

This activity, as the name suggests, is slightly different than the usual funny and entertaining activities. Since we want to simulate the storming phase when team usually gets into a conflict where there is tension and exchange of opinions, we have to get the participants into an uncomfortable situation. Maze of frustration tests the ability of the team to communicate, strategise, and handle unexpected situations. During this activity, natural leader(s) may expose. As it is a challenging activity, debriefing is crucial. The safe-zone coordinator does not actively participate in this activity, ready to help and step in if needed.

Materials: masking tape, blindfold, papers and markers to indicate start and finish

Environment: a room with chairs forming a large circle/semi-circle around a maze taped on the floor

Duration: 60-120 minutes (it is important to be as flexible with the time as possible, as the process should not be interrupted)

Activity:

In the beginning, the group is sitting in the room together. They do not have any hints about what is going to happen, apart from the name of the activity. Their task is to pick a “queen” (or a king). Without knowing anything more about the role, either someone volunteers or the group picks one person. (After being picked, they should be made aware that this activity will involve blindfolds and the facilitators make sure the person is okay with it and has no health conditions preventing them from taking part). This person then has to leave the room. Here is where the safe-zone coordinator, (who has already been acquainted with the activity before) steps in and keeps company to the “queen”, making sure they do not hear what goes on in the room with the rest of the group. The “queen” is told at this point that it may take some time before they are allowed back to the room.

The other participants in the room are acquainted with the rules. A maze is made with the masking tape in the middle of the room (it is best to test it before without the participants to forego errors with the size of the maze, not enough tape, etc.). The participants have time to make a strategy on how to get their “queen” from the “start” to the “castle” without stepping on the tape, only staying in the designated area. The main trick, however, is that they can only speak 1 word at a time per person, and have to go in the order they are sitting (e.g. Person 1: “Make”, P.2: “one”, P.3 “step”, P.4: “forward”, ...). Once everyone says a word, the first person goes again, etc. If someone breaks a rule or the “queen” steps outside of the maze, the “queen” has to go to the beginning of the maze.

The guiding team has any time they need to prepare for the activity. After they announce they are ready, they are not allowed to discuss any longer and have to speak one person at a time. The “queen” is called into the room, positioned on the “start”, and the game starts.

The game usually does not go as initially planned by the group, and unexpected moments arise. For this reason, sufficient time margin is needed. It is supposed to take slightly uncomfortably long. After the “queen” successfully gets through the maze, everybody cheers and the blindfold is removed. Immediately after this, the debriefing follows.

### **Reflection and Debriefing:**

Now there is space to ask “How did you feel?”. It is important that the “queen” shares, too.

Other questions could include:

If you could do this activity again, what would you have done differently?

What could other possible strategies be?

What did the queen need?

What problems did you not see coming?

If there were conflicts, the facilitator should ensure they are addressed, and any tension has been released and communicated. Safe space should be created for team members to express opinions and concerns. Facilitator should ensure everyone feels heard and has a chance to speak.

## **NORMING**

Once the conflicts of the storming stage are resolved, the team moves onto the next stage, which is norming. Team members start to develop a sense of cohesion, trust, and collaboration. Roles become clearer, and there is more open communication and cooperation. At this point, the group is better able to focus on achieving its goals, and the team becomes more productive. The members realise the goals can be achieved better if they accept the viewpoints of others. (Tuckman, 1965).

### **Writing a Code of Conduct**

Materials: flipchart, markers

Environment: safe space

Duration: 10 minutes

After debriefing of maze of frustration, the facilitator invites the team to write **a code of conduct** together. As most probably, during the debriefing, the team has realised that some rules should be agreed upon to better handle such unexpected situations, the whole group agrees on team rules. These can include ways of handling conflicts, communication, etc. Everyone should be encouraged to contribute their ideas. The team rules should be written out and kept in a visible place, ready for the team to come back to it if needed.

Facilitating questions may include:

How do we want to communicate with each other?

How will we handle conflicts?

What are our main common values?

What will help us achieve our goals?

How will you celebrate success?

### **Catapult**

In case that the team completes the maze of frustration fast, leaving a huge time gap, another activity can be performed. This is an extra one for added flexibility, and there is no need to complete it for fulfilling the process of team development. Nevertheless, it can only reinforce the norming stage, when the team can test what they have learnt so far and see whether there is perhaps anything extra to add to the team code of conduct.

Materials: ping-pong ball, available materials and stationery, for example: tape, piece of string, markers, pencils, papers, newspaper...

Environment: in case of favourable weather, the team can move outside for a change

Duration: 30 minutes

**Activity:**

30 people are divided into 5 groups. For random dividing, a short activity can be used, e.g. each person draws a colourful piece of paper. Based on the colour, they have to make a group of people with the same colour of the paper.

Each team receives an equal number of the materials and is not allowed to use anything else. Everyone is briefed that once they are given a signal, they should start building a catapult with the materials provided. They will have 15 minutes. After this time, they have to use whatever they have built, and catapult a ping-pong ball. The team whose catapult managed to shoot the ball furthest wins.

Apart from reinforcing the norming stage, during this activity, the team roles become clearer. It can also serve as a small introduction into the next stage.

**Debriefing questions:**

Did you feel like you had a specific role in the team?

Has your team picked a leader?

If yes, how did you decide about the leader?

Did you create a plan before building?

**PERFORMING**

In the performing stage, the team is highly effective and works efficiently towards its objectives, following the rules set. Members are fully engaged, and communication flows freely. There is a strong sense of unity, and the team can solve problems, make decisions, and complete tasks with minimal friction. This is the stage where teams achieve peak performance. (Tuckman, 1965).

In our case, this stage will bring a big team challenge where team roles should be defined and the team has a set of tasks to complete. Now there is space for using the knowledge gained during the prior stages.

## Mission Impossible

### Materials:

Pre-made plan of participants' distribution into teams. Example here:

T1	T2	T3	T4	T5
Project A team leader	Project B team leader	Project C team leader	Leader of the organisation	HR manager
Project B new member	Project C new member	Project A new member	Project B new member	Project A new member
Project C experienced member	Project A experienced member	Project B experienced member	Project C experienced member	Project C experienced member
HR experienced team member	HR new team member	HR new team member	Project A experienced member	Project B experienced member
Project B experienced member	Project C experienced member	Project A experienced member	Project C new member	Project A experienced member

Presentation:

- Slide 1: "This is Mission Impossible"
- Slide 2: "Under your chair"
- Slide 3: Timer with 90 minutes

Tote bags (e.g. with the company's logo) and stuff each team receives:

- Colourful marker determining the colour of the team (placed on the top of the tote bag)
- List of tasks
- Papers and pens
- Envelope with a raccoon picture contains: 10 euros
- Envelope with a cat picture contains: poll question
- Envelope with a mascot: 6 origami papers
- Envelope with ???: objects for "teleshopping"

Papers with names – 1 paper = 1 name, highlighted with the colour of the corresponding team (see list of teams). People have been assigned to teams before in order to ensure teams are mixed of new people and more experienced people, as well as people from different working teams, in order to create as various teams as possible, ensuring gender balance.

Secret agent costume: black clothes, sunglasses, hat

### **Preparation (in advance):**

At least 30 minutes should be set aside before the activity. During this time, nobody is allowed in the room. Meanwhile, the facilitator(s) prepare the room.

1. Inform the participants well in advance, that they should step in the room exactly at 14:00 (or other agreed upon time). Alternatively, lock the doors.
2. Make sure the envelopes are correctly filled and placed in the tote bags together with the other materials. Place the colourful markers on top of each tote bag and place them on the floor.
3. Ensure no participants have dropped out. If yes, check the numbers in each team and if needed, rearrange the lists.
4. Prepare the room: chairs in theatre-style seating, with the exact number of chairs equal to the number of the participants.
5. Tape each paper with a name and highlighted colour to the underside of the chairs.
6. Wear the “secret agent” attire.
7. Dim the lights or close the curtains, so only a bit of light is in the room.
8. Put on the presentation up and prepare the music, so everything is ready once the participants step in the room.

### **The activity:**

1. Once the participants step in, they see the presentation with the text: “This is Mission Impossible.”
2. No words are spoken by the facilitator(s), they should only be standing without movement in front of the presentation.
3. When everyone sits on the chairs, the presentation is moved to the next slide with “Under your chair”.
4. Now presentation moves to the next slide, which starts the 90-minute timer and the music starts, to create a sense of urgency and tension.
5. Everybody looks under their chair and finds a name. They should figure out there are different colours and should divide into teams.
6. After this, they see the bags and take the correct one.
7. The facilitator should ensure that the participants have understood and distributed into the groups correctly. In case of problems, facilitator can guide the participants by pointing at the bags etc. They can shake their head “yes” and “no”, but should not speak unless absolutely necessary, to keep the tension and mysterious atmosphere.
8. Each team finds the instructions which explain all the other necessary steps.
9. During the activity, the facilitator keeps an eye on the time, and occasionally updates the group by sending a picture of the timer into the group chat.
10. During the activity, the facilitator receives the materials from the completed tasks, like videos, pictures, written materials etc. During this time, they can start sorting it and preparing for the evening, when everything will be presented.
11. The points for each task should be written into a sheet for a faster evaluation.

Once the time runs out, the teams should be back in the room for a short debriefing. The presentation can change the title from “Mission Impossible” to “Mission Possible” and the participants can be told that thanks to sticking as a team, they made the impossible possible. Afterwards, a long free time for dinner and rest follows.

Meanwhile, the facilitator counts the points, prepares the materials for presentation and makes the prizes ready. It is encouraged that all the teams are rewarded, not only the ones with the most points. Each team can be a winner of a different “category”. This way, all the efforts will be rewarded, since the main goal of the activity was to have fun and work together as a team. The categories may be as follows, however, it is important to find something personal and unique for each team:

- The team with the highest number of points
- The team with the most people interviewed
- The fastest team
- The slowest team (“most detail-oriented”)
- The team with the most original video
- Etc.

## **ADJOURNING**

Adjourning happens when the team’s work is completed, and the team disbands. In this stage, members reflect on their achievements, celebrate successes, and say their goodbyes. This phase can bring feelings of loss, especially in high-performing teams that have built strong relationships. (Tuckman, 1965).

Since the actual team is not drifting apart after this team building, there should not be strong feelings of loss. However, this stage provides a great opportunity for a well-deserved celebration, which reinforces the morale and cohesion of the group. The team reflects on the team building and the knowledge gained, as well as shares how it may be used when working on the company’s projects. Furthermore, it is a great idea for to present the photos and videos made during Mission Impossible. The participants should also choose a way to celebrate their successes. Therefore, a free evening is left at their “disposal”.