Eponaquest Level 3

Team Exercise Connection in Action (Skillbuilding)
Instructions & script

Purpose:

In this exercise for building skills with a horse, the aim is to help a team work together effectively and alternate roles based on the principle of "Consensual Leadership": the person who is in the best position and feels most confident to take on a certain role steps into that role and is given the space to do so.

The exercise emphasises awareness of both what is going well in the collaboration and team dynamics, and what the areas of attention are for this team in order to function more effectively as a team. Team members learn more about consciously and unconsciously attuning their position, energy and body language, and about non-verbal communication.

During the exercise, the team has the opportunity to change its approach in order to work towards greater effectiveness. By doing this in practice with the horse, team members will begin to see the analogy with their collaborative dynamics at work, and they can then translate the changes back into that context.

Several variations are possible, which you can use either separately or as a progression over multiple sessions.

In order to do this exercise as a team, team members must at minimum already have practised setting boundaries and the energy fields exercise individually, as well as 'Embodying Intention' with a horse. It is preferable that participants have also practised Leadership in Relationship, because then they can apply those skills as well.

Structure:

In this exercise, you work with the team as a whole if the team is no larger than 7 people, or otherwise with subgroups by dividing the team into 2 groups.

1. You choose the horse that will be worked with. The horse must be experienced with being loose-lunged, and comfortable with several people around him or her. If you do not know whether your horse can handle this, it is important to practise this with your horses and a number of experienced horse colleagues, so that the horses can become accustomed to a group.
2. Safety rules:
   a. The participants must remain standing on their feet.
   b. There must be several 'boundary setters' in the group, at least 1 per 3 people, which are passed on to one another if necessary.
   c. Participants may not place themselves between the horse and the fence.
   d. Participants may not trap the horse between themselves and the fence, or trap the horse in a corner.
   e. If you say STOP, the participants immediately stop what they are doing and give the horse as much space as possible.
   f. The horse can indicate that it no longer wants to continue, and this is respected. As the facilitator, you must therefore pay very close attention to the horse's signals!
3. Ground rules: The horse may not be held or touched. This exercise is about achieving synergy in group body language.

4. Participants may always ask you for help during the session.
5. In Team Skill-Building sessions, your role is to coach proactively on the degree to which the team attunes to one another and effectively achieves its goal. It is important to leave it to the "3x rule" whether you offer a direct tip or instruction, or whether you work more by asking questions.

Materials Needed:

For the facilitator:
• Clipboard
• Script
• Pen and paper for notes
• Boundary device
• Optional: poles and cones to place in the arena as an 'obstacle course'

For clients:
• Pen and paper or notebook for notes

Depending on the variation and/or the size of the lunging area:
• Boundary device: 1 per 3 people
• Lunging whips: 1 per 3 people

SCRIPT

Step 1: Introductory Group Body Scan

Be prepared to make notes for yourself on the participants' answers to the steps of the body scan process.

Make sure the group of participants is standing outside the fence of the area with the horse, with their backs to the horse and their faces turned towards you. Invite them to make sure they are standing far enough apart from one another to be able to concentrate well on the body scan.

Then you say:

1. Close your eyes, scan calmly through your body at your own pace, and observe which feelings or sensations you feel in your body.
2. If you feel several sensations, start observing which one is the most prominent.
3. Once you have found the feeling, sensation or awareness that is asking for the most attention, breathe oxygen and awareness into it, allow it to become as large as it needs to be in order to be fully present, and ask it what information it has for you.
4. As soon as you have the answer, open your eyes. In this way, you can see whether everyone is ready. Wait calmly until the last person has opened their eyes.
5. Ask team members one by one to name which feeling is most prominent and what the information is. Write this down!
6. Then ask the team to close their eyes again and check whether the feeling has changed. If it has, they are ready and can open their eyes again.
7. If the feeling has not changed or has become stronger, they may again breathe oxygen and awareness into the feeling, and ask it for another piece of information. They continue repeating this until it decreases.
8. Wait until everyone has opened their eyes again and then have them briefly share the additional information. Write this down!

Step 2: Setting an Intention

Variation 1 ~ "Embodying Intention with a Group" – Eponaquest exercise

Making a plan:
Now ask the group to turn around towards the horse.

1. Instruct the group:

We have an intention for the exercise with this horse today, and that is for all of you to choose a position in the centre of the arena, and from there to have the horse walk circles around you. Your task as a team is first to have the horse walk calmly for two circles, then trot for two circles, and then return to walk for two circles. After that, you have the horse change direction, and you do the same thing in the other direction.

The idea is that you decide among yourselves who takes on which task, for example getting the horse moving, asking the horse to trot, asking the horse to return to walk, and who turns the horse around. It is then important that the other team members make sure this one team member can carry out the task well, for example by passing the whip on in time, or by staying behind them and getting out of the way when they turn the horse.

When choosing your role, it is important that everyone stays WITHIN THEIR COMFORT ZONE and that this is respected by the rest of the team. If you believe that a certain team member is very suited to take on a certain role, then offer them that suggestion, but do not put pressure on them. Remember that passing the whip on in time is part of your tasks!

2. Now give the team a moment to discuss who does what. Your role as facilitator here is to answer questions.
3. Once they have worked this out, ask 1 person to explain what the plan is and who does what.
4. Once that person has explained this, ask: "Is this description of your plan correct for everyone? Are there any additions?" and give the other team members the opportunity to respond.
5. Then have each person briefly state out loud what his or her role is. Ask who starts with a whip and who passes it on.
6. Please note: in the planning phase, you do NOT give instruction, response or feedback on HOW this team wants to approach the exercise. Not even if you think the approach is impossible! In practice, it has become clear that there is an enormous diversity of ways in which a team can get a horse moving, including ways that we as instructors cannot yet see. And the goal of the exercise is not necessarily perfect execution, but above all to allow the team to find an answer in practice to what is not working well.
7. Let the team briefly practise the sequence and roles with you as the horse. You often have very little time for this, so in some cases you may choose to skip it. However, you must always do this if you notice uncertainty among several team members about their roles or collaboration.

Variation 2 - "Connection in Action without Assignment" — developed in other approaches, but carried out in the Eponaquest way

In this variation, the team may decide for themselves how they get the horse moving and have the horse walk circles.

In this variation, the horse may NOT trot or canter, because this makes coordinating the group more difficult.

Here too, the team first makes a plan together and divides the roles. From there, you go through steps 2 through 5 above.

PLEASE NOTE: If you want to use this variation, it is important to offer it BEFORE you have done Variation 1 with the same group. Otherwise the group is already accustomed to doing it in the way of Variation 1, and this limits creativity.

Variation 3 - "Connection in Action with Obstacles"

This is an additional level of difficulty for teams that have successfully completed Variation 1 and/or Variation 2.

As with Variation 2, the team makes its own plan and the horse may not speed up. However, you set up an obstacle course in advance with poles and cones. Explain to the group where the starting point is and where they need to have the horse stop, for example in a square made of 4 poles. Let the team make a plan and divide the roles. From there, you go through steps 2 through 5 above.

Variation 4 – "Relationship in Action"

Have the team as a group take the horse along in the manner of "Connection in Movement/Leadership through Relationship" if they have already been able to practise this exercise individually. In doing so, they must continue to connect and attune to one another and to the horse. Let the team make a plan and divide the roles. From there, you go through steps 2 through 5 above.

Continuation for all variations:

Now you will attune the plan with the participants and the horse through a body scan. Instruct the group:

1. Close your eyes. Visualise that you are carrying out the plan together with the horse, and that you are taking on your agreed role within that.
2. Allow this intention to drop into your body and notice where it is activated or where it lands.
3. Bring your attention and your breath to the place in your body, and focus your attention and breathing on that place.
4. Ask this part of your body what needs to be activated in you personally in order to engage with the intention of the exercise with this team and this horse. When you have an answer, open your eyes.
5. When everyone has opened their eyes, have each person name where the intention was activated and what the advice from their body was. Write this down!
6. Then say: "Let's see whether the horse has any suggestions about this."
7. Now instruct the group to make contact with the horse with their eyes closed, and silently send the intention to the horse and ask the horse what it needs from the individual participant in order to do the exercise together with the team.
8. When everyone has opened their eyes, have each person name what the horse needs from him or her. Write this down!

Step 3: Exercise with the Horse

Before you open the gate to the arena with the horse, remind the team of the following points:

- The client may ask you for help or suggestions at any time when needed.
- Remind them of the safety rules:
    - remain standing on your feet
    - do not place yourself between the horse and the fence

- do not block the horse in a corner
- the centre is the safest place
- "If I say STOP, immediately stop what you are doing and take at least 1 metre distance from the horse."

Now let the team enter the arena to engage in the interaction with the horse.

This is an exercise for building skill. From this point onwards, you may therefore give the participants some instruction, certainly if they have little horse experience and, for example, are unconsciously blocking the horse with their position. However, make sure these are instructions for the execution of THEIR plan, and that you do not turn it into a different plan! Always ask the team whether they would like a tip from you before you give one.

When individuals ask for help, or you notice that the exercise gets stuck, it is best first to ask coaching questions about the goal and the execution of actions that may help break the impasse BEFORE you give instruction.

- "What were you trying to do?" / "What was your intention with that movement?" / "Why are you moving away from the horse at this moment?" / "What was your intention?" etc.
- "What needed to be activated in you personally during the body scan?" / "What did the horse need from you?" Remind the client of this if they have forgotten.
- Sometimes they have already achieved the goal well, and they are looking for something more. In that case, you may ask: "Does the exercise feel complete?" / "Would you like to try something else?"
- If you notice that the team achieves the goal very quickly and easily, you can build in an additional difficulty factor. For example, have them make the horse speed up together at an exact point, for example at a specific cone, or have the horse stop at an exact point, for example between 2 poles.
- End as soon as the team has achieved a success, not before. So always end positively and then do not make it one level more difficult. In teamwork too, "perfect" is the greatest enemy of "good enough"!
- Beware of the temptation to turn this into a lesson in horse training. These exercises are about the client's inner process of being able to apply the skill in daily life, not about teaching the horse something or making the horse move better!
- When the exercise feels complete for the client, you can suggest that the client comes outside the ring with the horse to round off, and suggest that they thank the horse first.

Step 4: Round Up

This is a SKILL-BUILDING exercise. You therefore round it off with the skill-building questions. Each team member has the opportunity to answer the following questions, while considering both the overall team dynamic and his or her own role.

1. What went well? / What was successful?
2. What challenges did you encounter?
3. How did you approach these? / How did you overcome them? / What could you experiment with?
4. What are you taking with you / what have you learned about your collaboration and your role in it?

Give the team the opportunity to discuss this further among themselves.
After closing the exercise and evaluation, it is always nice to give the team the opportunity to take a group photo with the horse!