



YOU PART

Engage. Connect. Empower

MAGIC GROWTH

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MAGIC GROWTH

FACTS

Age of participants: 12+

Number of participants: 6-20

Duration: 25-60 minutes

GOALS

This simple activity, in which participants work together to place a folding tape measure or stick on the ground to represent economic growth, opens up the debate about our dependence on economic growth and the need for cooperation and collective action to free ourselves from this dependence in an interesting and light-hearted way.

The Magic Growth activity aims to:

- illustrate the absurdity of limitless economic growth
- help the participants experience the importance of collaboration and communication to solve problems
- help participants realise the need for collective action to end our dependence on economic growth.

TOPICS

The activity can be used as an introductory part before discussions/methods on economic topics, especially to reflect on economic growth. Growth is natural - the problem arises when there are no limits. The idea that economic growth can continue at its current rate is incompatible with a good life for all on this planet.

The activity can also be used as an ice-breaker/energiser without the economic context. In such setting, the activity can be done in about 20 minutes without discussion and shorter reflection.

MATERIALS

A long thin stick/rod (be careful, the object must be light-weighted), a folding ruler is ideal, thus referred to as "the object".

PREPARATIONS

Participants stand in two rows facing each other, very close together in each row. The rows are the length of two outstretched arms. Each participant extends one hand in front of them with the index finger extended and the other fingers hidden. The arrangement of the hands and fingers should resemble the structure of a zipper.

INSTRUCTIONS

Step 1 – Activity

1. The object is placed on the participants' fingertips.
2. The participants' task is to first jointly lift the object to approximately head height and then jointly place it on the ground under two conditions:
 - a. The object must rest freely on the fingers, it must not be held.
 - b. The fingers of each participant must touch the stick at all times. If one of them loses contact, the group has to start all over again.

Step 2 – Reflection

Ask first about the emotions and be careful that no one feels hurt, especially if you have noticed that there were some strong emotions in the group during the activity:

- *“What was it like for you? How did you feel during the activity?”*

Then ask how the activity went in order to analyse the course of the activity:

- *“What was particularly challenging about trying to put the object on the ground?”*
- *“What strategy did you choose? How did you manage to put the object down?”*

The next part of the reflection should address the concepts of cooperation and communication, which are essential for completing the task:

- *“Were there any roles that emerged in your group?”*
- *“Could the group succeed without good cooperation of all participants?”*
- *“Why did you follow the rules of the activity (or not)? What were the consequences if you didn’t follow the rules?”*
- *“How could it work better next time?”*

Step 3 – Discussion

Now continue the discussion and present a parallel to economic growth. At the beginning of the activity, the object that represents economic growth, moved higher and higher instead of gradually decreasing, despite people trying to lower it. It could only be brought to the ground through good cooperation, communication and trust. People and the object symbolise the interdependence of an economic system in which companies, governments and other players cannot do what they want – they are under pressure to grow. Even if someone drops out of the game (e.g., because they no longer want to participate or lose contact with the stick), the object still goes up.

During the activity, the object seemed to rise higher and higher by itself – as if it were natural for it and for us. It took several attempts, everyone's involvement and coordination to achieve the goal. The same applies to economic growth: growth is essential for the current economic system to continue to function and for us to avoid a crisis. However, continued growth is putting increasing pressure on nature, the climate and people, so that we are now faced with both a climate crisis and growing inequalities.

In contrast, the aim of *degrowth* – the new economic model – is to end our dependence on growth while reducing material production and consumption in a controlled and gradual manner. In this regard, further questions can be asked:

- *“What are some of the challenges you have had to overcome in carrying out the activity, and what challenges will you still have to face in promoting degrowth?”*
- *“Conversely, what strategies or actions could the degrowth movement rely on? What should happen at the individual level? What should happen at the collective level (neighborhood, community, society, etc.)?”*

ADDITIONAL INFORMATIONS FOR FACILITATORS

Variations for the Magic Growth:

- If you would like to increase the difficulty, you can add a rule that participants are not allowed to speak.
- For larger groups (about 20 participants and more), smaller groups can be formed and the activity can be done in parallel or several times, or some participants can remain as observers. The role of the observer is to make notes about the process. It might be useful for observers to note some points to focus on, for example: What emotions did the participants show? Try to observe if the group has any strategy or if the strategy changes. Have you noticed that certain roles have emerged in the group? If you choose to have several observers, each of them can focus on different aspects, e.g. strategy, emotions. During the activity, tensions can arise among the participants, especially as the object goes higher and higher. It is important to be aware of this and then to reflect on the feelings and group dynamics.



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