

Ito: A Game of Individual Differences and Collaboration for the Business Management Classroom

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Abstract. This paper presents the application and adaptation of the commercially available card game “ito” for use in business and management education. We focus on the use and potential impact of this cooperative game as a tool to enable students to experience and explore management concepts such as collaboration, individual differences, and values. In this in-class 15-30-minute exercise, gameplay represents the different opinions that will arise among individuals in the workplace who hold different views on what is most valuable or ‘correct.’

Keywords: experiential exercise, collaboration, individual differences.

1. Introduction

Ito is a cooperative, team-based, commercially available board game to ‘String your thoughts together!’¹ Each team member assigns a numerical importance value to the given theme. However, the values individuals choose are secret, and everyone must seek to understand their intentions by listening to theme-based clues. This asks the question – Do you and your friends, or in this case, your co-workers or peers, see eye to eye in how you view the world? Within your group, and related to a chosen theme on your cards, you link number cards in your hand to hint at a related and shared category by arranging cards on the table in numerical order.

In business and management education, physical board or card games offer students an immersive, hands-on experience (Lebrón, Swab, & Bruns, 2024; Mercer, Tomczyk, Swab, & Harris, 2023). While Ito was designed to provide a light card game experience for players, it can also be a powerful and accessible tool for exploring and engaging with the complex realities of organizations and life. In this card game, you must work with others to find a common thought

1. This is a commercially available game designed by Mitsuru Nakamura and published by Arcane Wonders and Arclight Games: <https://www.arcanewonders.com/product/ito/>

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process, but with (1) having a difference in values and opinions, and (2) without all the information needed to make the most educated answer.

2. Theoretical Framework

Ito's gameplay draws on the core tenets of constructivism, which are integral to transformative learning (Fosnot, 2013). This is because the activity provides an opportunity for students to construct their own understanding of individual differences and decision-making processes. With low but interactive stakes, this allows for real-time reflection on their respective choices and consequences during gameplay, as well as in group discussions upon finishing each round (Reilly, 2018; Wraae, Tigerstedt, & Walmsley, 2021). Such methods promote a greater engagement with and understanding of the class material (Bruner, 1990; Lebrón et al., 2024; Swab, Sherlock, Mercer, & Harris, 2023).

The game highlights the importance of collaboration, which can be challenging given individual differences in opinions and values. The game lends itself to discussing individual differences (such as psychological or biological traits [Chamorro-Premuzic, 2016]), which are measurable, vary across individuals, portray temporal and situational stability, and finally, can predict attitudes, decisions, behaviors, and outcomes (Antonakis, 2011). Individual differences impact a variety of individual aspects, such as motivation (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2002) and values. Values are viewed as concepts one holds important to varying degrees (Schwartz, 2012). Values serve as standards and criteria, ordered by importance, that guide actions and behavior (Arieli, Sagiv, & Roccas, 2020; Schwartz, 1992).

Getting beyond differences, the game and proposed exercise teach the importance of communication and collaboration for success. Gazley (2017, p. 1) describes collaboration as the "dynamic relationships involving coordinated activity based on mutual goals." Productive collaboration leads to the accomplishment of collective tasks, the resolution of mutual problems, or the pursuit of mutually beneficial goals. Among organizational researchers, collaboration is most often used to refer to the interactive practices needed among a variety of stakeholders (McClellan, 2023). According to a Harvard Business Review article (Nidumolu, Ellison, Whalen, & Billman, 2014), collaboration is one of the difficult yet essential practices a company needs to sustain, thereby making it an important lesson to teach and apply in business courses.

3. Learning Objectives

The game can be played at any point in the semester and in a variety of classes, including any that need to understand the value of collaboration. This could be in