

Effectual Meal

Instructions: 3 hours

This hands-on exercise is used to distinguish the differences between causal and effectual logic. Causal logic implies selecting recipes from an expert source (such as a cookbook), shopping for the necessary ingredients and following pre-arranged instructions. Effectual logic, by contrast, involves opening the refrigerator and cupboards to explore “what do have to work with” and creatively exploring “what we do with it”.

1. The exercise needs to be run in a facility where teams can cook and serve. In institutional environments, for safety and regulatory reasons, it may be necessary to work with a professional cook (co-creation partner).
2. With the available means (equipment and raw material), teams are assigned the task of creating a dish (appetizer, main course, dessert) within a set time limit. The challenge is to create something extraordinary relying only on the ingredients and equipment available.
3. Teams are to survey what ingredients are available, discuss what they want to prepare, and lay claim to what they need to create their dish. No more ingredients will be provided so where more than one team desires a particular ingredient the matter is resolved either through negotiation and/or by adapting the menu choice. The cook cannot be consulted as to which ingredients work well together but is responsible for normal seasoning (salt & pepper) and preparation (where required). Where professional cooking staff is used, participants must follow the lead and advice of the chef. Teams can provide labor as space provides. All relevant regulations for working in a kitchen must be strictly observed.

4. If possible, dietary restrictions should be determined in advance. Where a dish is created that does not meet all the restrictions, the ingredients must be disclosed and an alternative dish offered for those with the dietary restriction(s).
5. Videotaping the experience is useful both to illustrate the principles of effectual logic and provide a debriefing to participants.
6. I do not strictly rule out the “phone a friend” lifeline (recipe and advice). Nothing should hinder the ability of participants to push the creative envelope.

Variations on the theme ...

- Effectual coffee – teams are to prepare one salty and one sweet dish; while organizers prepare coffee and tea and lay out cups and saucers
- Effectual dinner or lunch – three teams randomly assigned to prepare an appetizer, main course and dessert
- Effectual drinks – teams are to develop a “signature drink” from available raw inputs and that is not a knock off from an established cocktail guide

Aside from being a lot of fun, the exercise encourages team building, creating novelty, and handling surprise by exploring how to make something memorable from a fixed set of inputs.

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