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Aging and immortality: the search for longevity



Box 12.1 Activity: Brainstorm

Participants should imagine that someone offers them the gift of eternal life, but gives them only half an hour to decide whether or not to accept it.

In pairs participants should decide on the questions they would want answered before they accepted this gift.

The questions should then be collected and possible answers and responses to these answers brainstormed.

(This exercise will have more 'bite' if it is assumed that those to whom the gift of eternal life has been given cannot commit suicide.)

A poll on whether people would or wouldn't accept the gift might be taken before and after this exercise.



Box 12.3 Activity: Small group work

Every government has departments devoted to consideration of the impact of a new development on their area of remit.¹² Each of these departments will be headed by someone whose task it is to brief the head of government on this impact.

These 'areas of remit' will include: education, health, finance, social services; infrastructure (transport, towns and cities), security, international relations, culture, business. . .

Participants should be divided into groups, each group with one of these areas of remit. Each group should appoint one of their number as head.

The task is to discuss the possible impact of significantly increasing longevity (to an average of 150 years) on their area. The group head should report their findings to the group as a whole.

This exercise could be done over time: each group, for example, might have one week in which to prepare their report.



Box 12.4 Activity: Creative writing

Imagine you are the Prime Minister of the UK, the American President or the head of state of some other nation, and that you are faced with deciding what to do with a new technique that will significantly extend lifespan. Imagine the thought processes you might go through.



Box 12.5 Activity: Brainstorm

Do a group brainstorm and come up with a list of:

- (i) the practical problems that might be generated by increasing longevity;
- (ii) suggested solutions to these problems.

Participants can be as inventive and creative as they like.

**Box 12.6 Activity: Paired discussion**

Do you think you would remain interested and engaged in life even if you lived for 1,000 years?

Having decided what you think (and why) find someone who believes the opposite.

Each participant should then make the case *against* themselves.

**Box 12.7 Activity: group discussion**

It is because we know we will die at about 80 that we are motivated to achieve the things we achieve. A significantly increased lifespan would drain us of motivation.

Participants should be allocated a side for which to argue irrespective of their actual views.

**Box 12.8 Activity: Group discussion**

Look at Figure 12.2. Ask participants to consider whether a group of ‘immortals’ would have reason to produce such a statue.



Figure 12.2
Michelangelo's David.
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**Box 12.9 Activity: Essay writing**

Write a short essay (500 words) on:

Would immortality be the end of nobility?

**Box 12.11 Activity: Personal reflection**

Do you think that humans and post-humans could live together under the same laws? Would they extend to each other the same rights and responsibilities, and the same moral consideration?

**Box 12.12 Activity: analysing arguments**

de Grey's first argument is another argument from analogy. Working in pairs set out the argument logic-book style and evaluate it as weak or strong. You can read about arguments from analogy in Box 11.5.

**Box 12.13 Activity: Small group discussion**

If curing the diseases of aging were to make us immortal this would be a good reason to deny that we have a moral obligation to cure disease.

Divide participants into groups of four to discuss this question. Each group should then feed back their conclusion to the group as a whole. The whole group might then debate the question.