

Survival Scenario Exercise

Description of a Group Dynamics Team Building Exercise

Overview - Group Survival Equipment Scenario Exercise



- A classic group communication and decision making exercise, with many variations.
- Works for a wide variety of ages and purposes, indoors or outdoors.
- There are two classic types of "paper & pencil" group survival scenarios (selecting equipment and selecting people). In each case:
 - Provide instructions & hand out materials
 - Set a time limit (~15-30 minutes)
 - Let the group go - answer questions, watch, & observe!
 - Debrief
- Scenario briefing (1 per group)
- List of items/people (1 per person)
- Expert list (number optional)

Summary

- A classic group communication & decision making exercise. People get intensely engaged because the "survival stakes" are high and none of the decisions are easy. Works for a wide variety of ages and purposes, indoors or outdoors.

Group Size

- 5-10

Time

- Total ~45-100 mins
- 5-10 minutes briefing
- 15-30 minutes exercise time
- 5-10 minutes scoring (for select equipment scenarios)
- 20-30 minutes debrief & discussion

Scenario Type 1: Choose Survival Equipment



Your plane crashed...your group needs to choose the 12 most useful items to survive...

Choose / rank **equipment** items in terms of their relative survival value:

- Participants choose/rank the items individually
- Discuss choices/rankings in small group and come to a group consensus
- Score answers against "expert" opinion
- Possible scenarios:
 - Lost at sea or island survival (shipwreck)
 - Desert (plane crash)
 - Space or Moon



Scenario Type 2: People Survival Scenario (Who will be saved?)

A nuclear bomb has been dropped...a radiation-free shelter is available, but can only take 6 people; choose who will survive...

Choose / rank **people** in terms of who will get to live or die in situations with limited survival resources:

- Participants role play characters (a bit like a Murder Mystery)
- Can lead to high emotions; people get intensely engaged,

Variations

- Appoint a time keeper in each group and encourage them to be the person who monitors the progress of the group towards achieving consensus within the time frame.
- To emphasise individual versus group decision making, split the session into three parts:
 - Individuals make their own selections first, on paper (5-10 minutes)
 - Groups (or sub-groups) then discuss and create a group decision
 - Compare individual and group performances, e.g.,:
- For equipment scenarios, group decisions are usually more accurate than individual answers, helping to illustrate the importance of collaborative group decision-making.
- For people scenarios, score individuals according to how close the group's decision was to their own selections of

particularly when choosing who will survive, and none of the decisions are easy.

- No right answers - any so-called "correct" answers are based on debatable values (e.g., ageism, sexism, racism)
- Highlights individual's dispositions, group processes and decision making
- Possible scenarios:
 - Nuclear war shelter
 - Oxygen dwindling (space, moon, mars)
 - Lifeboat / Sinking ship (sea)

who is to live and die (an indicator of each person's influence over the group).

Possible Debrief Questions

- How were decisions made?
- Who influenced the decisions and how?
- How could better decisions have been made?
- How was conflict managed?
- How did people feel about the decisions?
- How satisfied was each person with the decision (ask each participant to rate his / her satisfaction out of 10, then obtain a group average and compare / discuss with other groups' satisfaction levels)
- What have you learnt about the functioning of this group?
- How would you do the activity differently if you were asked to do it again?
- What situations at work/home/school do you think are like this exercise?