

# Group Survival 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.
- Consensus can be hard to reach, however, set the aim for all participants to at least partially agree to each ranking on their final list.
- Encourage groups to complete the task without the use of voting, trading in or averaging.
- Watch for participants avoiding conflict or changing their minds simply to come to agreement. Highlight these kinds of behaviors in the debrief.
- An important outcome of this exercise can be learning that sometimes a bit of give and take is necessary in order to move forwards to a solution.
- Watch for over emphasis by some participants on needing 100% accurate answers. Steer the group towards the aim of the exercise that is **heightening awareness of communication and decision making processes**, rather than over-emphasis on 'getting the answers exactly right'. Display of this need is a point of observation and one worthy of debrief.
- 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, make notes, watch & observe!
  - Debrief

## 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)



## 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, 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:
  - Plane crash survivors
  - Nuclear war shelter
  - Oxygen dwindling (space, moon, mars)
  - Lifeboat / Sinking ship (sea)



## Variations

- Appoint a timekeeper 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 emphasize 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 who is to live and die (an indicator of each person's influence over the group).
- **Reflection/Debrief Questions**
  - How were decisions made?
  - Who influenced the decisions and how?
  - How could better decisions have been made?
  - Did people listen to each other? if not why not?
  - What roles did group members adopt?
  - How was conflict managed?
  - What kinds of behavior helped or hindered the group?
  - 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 learned 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?