

Time:

Minimum 45 minutes

Goal or purpose:

- To practise making decisions in a group.
- To prepare people to face crisis situations and to get them into the frame of mind in which they will think quickly under stress, focus on key issues, learn to ignore minor ones and to reach action-decisions.

Preparation/materials:

A series of scenario's relevant to the group and actions they may be preparing for, or taking part in.

If using the exercise to practice consensus-decision making, have small copies of the [consensus flowchart](#), or the same flowchart drawn up on flip chart paper.

How it's done/facilitator's notes:

As a group, talk through the decision-making process that will be used. For example, if using consensus decision-making, talk through the consensus flow chart, talk about the facilitator's role, and give some tips on reaching consensus. Make sure that everyone is clear on the process that will be used.

Split the group into smaller groups, of no more than eight people. Give each group a scenario, for example:

Your group is acting as 'peacekeepers' on a march, when a participant in the action faints. What do you do?

With the first scenario, give the groups several minutes to make a decision, but reduce the time for later – perhaps more urgent - scenarios. When the time is up, invite the groups to reflect on what they have experienced.

- Did you manage to make a decision?
- How did you make your decision?
- What helped or hindered the process?

Spokes councils

A next step is to run the exercise as a spokes council. Identify several small groups that act as 'affinity groups' during the exercise. Give them a new scenario, and ask each group to choose a spokesperson for their group. Once each 'affinity group' has come to a decision the different spokespersons meet together and come to a decision about what to do. After they reach a level of consensus, each spokesperson returns to their affinity group, and consults them about the proposal. The group can make recommendations or changes, and then all the spokespersons meet again to come to a final decision that will - hopefully - be a decision that everyone in all of the different affinity groups can live with.

After the exercise, debrief the process. Was everyone happy with the decision? Did the process work? What challenges or problems could there be, and what could the groups do to overcome them?

- Doing too many quick decision exercises - especially right before an action takes place - can establish a mind-set of emergency, raise tension, and cause people to panic. Quick decision exercises should be tempered with other training experiences to prevent this perspective of imminent danger.
- When reflecting on each of the roleplays, encourage the group to reflect primarily on the process or experience of making a decision, not the final decision they came to.
- If there is enough time available, starting the exercise with a broader discussion by brainstorming around the headings 'What makes a good decision' and 'What makes a bad decision'. Introducing the broader principles of good decision-making can help to get a group in the right frame of mind for the scenarios.

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