

Surviving Through Teamwork: *A Group Survival Exercise*®

by

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- Introduction:** This exercise is designed to get teams to think about and obtain general agreement on the steps to successful completion of a project. Teams that use this model have been more successful on both accomplishing tasks and building cohesion than those that do not. Display the definitions of the steps while the participants complete the exercise.
- Situation:** You have volunteered and been selected to join a work group that has been given the assignment over the next two months of developing a critical new marketing plan for your organization. This plan will result in a significant expenditure of money for your organization and if successful could have significant impact on the bottom line. All of the members of the team already know each other with many having served previously together on similar task forces.
- Assignment 1:** Individually rank the ten steps on the accompanying form in the order that you think will lead to successful completion of the task. Under column A, place the number 1 by the step that occurs first, the number 2 by the step that ought to occur second, and so on to number 10.
- Assignment 2:** With your task force members by consensus rank the ten steps in the order that you collectively think will lead to successful completion of the task. Your task force should avoid conflict reduction strategies such as voting and averaging the individual rankings. Enter the task force's ranking in column B.
- Assignment 3:** Consult the expert ranking at the end of the exercise and determine the accuracy of both sets of rankings by computing and recording the absolute difference (ignore plus and minus signs) between expert and individual ranking and between expert and task force ranking for each step in columns D and E, respectively, and by totaling both columns.
- Assignment 4:** Collect all the total individual difference scores at the bottom of column D and find an average for the team using the Task Force Work Sheet.
- Assignment 5:** With your team compare both the task force's and individual difference scores. Is the task force's difference score lower than the average individual difference score? If not, why not? Are any of the individual difference scores below the task force's difference score? If yes, why?

Individual and Task Force's Ranking Work Sheet

Steps to Task Accomplishment	(A) Your Individual Ranking	(B) The Task Force's Ranking	(C) Expert Ranking	(D) Absolute Difference Between Expert and Individual Ranking	(E) Absolute Difference Between Expert and Task Force's Ranking
Goal Pressure					
Work Facilitation ¹					
Time Emphasis					
Upward Communication & Participation					
Control of Details					
Recognition					
Making Goals Clear & Important					
Delegation					
Obtaining & Giving Feedback					
Orderly Work Planning & Problem Solving					
Total					

¹ Definition: Ensuring individuals have the skills and resources required.

Task Force Work Sheet

Individuals	Individual Diff. Score
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	
11.	
12.	
13.	
14.	
15.	
Total	
# of Individuals	
Average Individual Difference (Total / # of Individuals)	

Key & Reasons²

1. Making Goals Clear and Important

If the task force does not know what it is to do and why it is important from the beginning, the task force should be dissolved.

2. Upward Communication & Participation

All members must feel free from the start to both contribute their ideas and to object. Otherwise, the task force is a team in name only.

3. Orderly Work Planning & Problem Solving

Planning and problem solving in the early part of a task will decrease frustration and save the team countless hours and other resources when done early.

4. Work Facilitation

(Ensuring individuals have the skills and resources required.)

Ensuring that all members of the team have the skills and resources required to accomplish the task will also decrease frustration and save the team countless hours and other resources when done early.

5. Obtaining and Giving Feedback

As the task gets underway, the use of intermediate feedback, especially of a positive nature, is frequently overlooked (See Yes, But . . . : The Top 40 Killer Phrases and How You Can Fight Them in reference list.). Asking before blasting can prevent disintegration and keep the team highly motivated.

6. Time Emphasis

In a competitive environment where speed to market is a deciding factor regarding product and organizational success, an emphasis on meeting deadlines is needed, but only after sufficient knowledge is available to set realistic goals or when a problem is evident.

7. Control of Details

Similarly, in a competitive world where quality is key (if you do not provide it, your competitor will) and where quality is a matter of details (the devil is in the details), exercising control of details is essential, but only when quality is slipping. This is not an excuse for anyone to be ignorant of details that impact them.

8. Goal Pressure

The use of goal pressure is effective only when used after all the prior steps have been accomplished and when used surgically.

9. Delegation

When to delegate is a tricky issue. Delegating before setting clear goals, planning for their accomplishment, establishing deadlines, and obtaining knowledge of critical details can lead to disaster.

10. Recognition for Good Performance

Recognizing individuals and teams for good performance is one of the best ways to keep a high level of motivation. What is reinforced tends to be repeated and what is not reinforced tends not to be repeated. Waiting for outstanding performance while failing to reinforce good performance is one way to ensure that outstanding performance does not occur.

The sequence of steps as put forth in this exercise represents an ideal for tackling the initial assignment for a task force or autonomous team in which its members are already familiar with each other. A team of strangers will need to go through a socialization process before it tackles an assignment. This exercise could be part of that socialization process. Effective mature teams will usually stay within this model, but will go back to prior steps or jump forward as suggested by progress on the task.

² This key is based upon the Managerial Task Cycle® developed by Clark L. Wilson, professor emeritus, University of Bridgeport and Chairman of The Clark Wilson Group. It has also been supported by an expert panel and research.

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Steps to Task Accomplishment	Definitions
Goal Pressure	Expressing dissatisfaction with progress and on occasion, punishing people for mistakes.
Work Facilitation	Being sure that employees have the skills, equipment, time and other resources needed to perform.
Time Emphasis	Ensuring employees know when things are due and meet deadlines.
Upward Communication & Participation	Soliciting and using employees' ideas and suggestions.
Control of Details	Staying on top of details.
Recognition for Good Performance	Acknowledging and recognizing accomplishment of important and difficult goals.
Making Goals Clear & Important	Communicating what and why things are to be accomplished.
Delegation	Allowing the employees to make decisions about how the goals are to be accomplished.
Obtaining & Giving Feedback	Seeking and providing information on progress being made.
Orderly Work Planning & Problem Solving	Increasing effectiveness by keeping the task organized and systematic.