Decision making games for teams: one ranking exercise with a reasoned key

Most decision making games have a team rank items and check them against an expert's answer key that nobody in the room can question. This kit is one original, fictional ranking exercise whose key follows from facts printed in the brief and on six private fact cards, with a score sheet that compares each person with the group, a debrief and a six-item workplace round. It runs in 60 minutes with groups of four to six.

60 minutes | 4–30 participants | Online and adaptable in person

Updated 2026-10-10

The outcome

By the end of 60 minutes each group has ranked twelve items alone and together, scored both against a reference it can trace to printed facts, named which facts reached the group, ranked six workplace requests with a written rule, and each person has written one habit for their next shared decision.

Before the session

- For trainers, team leads and facilitators who run teamwork or decision-making sessions with adults at work: 4–30 people in groups of four to six.
- Print per person: the scenario and items page and a score sheet. Per group: the six fact cards, cut apart, transfer sheets A and B, and an observer sheet for a seventh person. Keep the key back until step 4.
- Decide who gets which card with the table "Sharing the six cards". Each group gets all six cards. Do not tell the groups that the cards differ until the debrief.
- Accessibility: the scenario is fictional and nobody in it is hurt or in danger. Send the pages as plain text to anyone who asks, read the brief aloud, and offer the observer role to anyone who would rather not rank. Nobody has to move, and cameras are optional online.

Included in this kit

A facilitator run of show, participant worksheets with real tables, reference tables, debrief questions, adaptation notes and a follow-up plan. Use the editable Word copy to tailor examples and prompts before delivery.

Original material by Superglue. Timings are suggestions; adjust them to your participants. This resource has not been independently evaluated.

What is inside

- The scenario: a night in the boathouse
- The twelve items
- Fact cards
- Score sheet
- Observer sheet
- Transfer round: sheet A
- Transfer round: sheet B
- Filled example: one group's scores
- Facilitator section: run of show, reference tables, debrief and adaptations

The scenario: a night in the boathouse

Fictional. Your team of six spent a volunteer day counting birds on a small tidal island. A storm came in early. At 16:30 the warden radioed from the mainland: the causeway is under water, so you will spend the night in the old boathouse and the boat will collect you in the morning. Nobody is hurt and nobody is in danger. The boathouse has a door, benches and a battery lamp that lasts until about 23:00. The tap and the stream outside are not safe to drink from. One of you wrote down the warden's message:

Point	The warden's message
1. Contact	At 20:00 I will call you on the radio, channel 3. Answer so I know all six of you are inside. If you cannot, text me by 20:15. If I hear nothing, I have to send the lifeboat out in this storm.
2. Dry and warm	Stay dry first, then warm. It will be 3 °C tonight, and wet clothes are what make people cold.
3. Water	Drink only water from a sealed bottle, or treat the tap water: boil it, or use purification tablets as the packet says.
4. The morning	Set an alarm for 07:00 and be on the jetty at 07:30 sharp. I cannot wait: the tide turns. Take care on the path.
5. Small injuries	If someone slips on the rocks, clean and cover the cut.
6. Food	Food is the least of it. A light supper is enough.

The ranking rule: rank each item by the earliest numbered point in the warden's message that it can actually meet, using every fact you have. Within one point, follow the order in which the message, or a fact card, names the uses. An item that meets no point goes last. Rank the twelve items below from 1 (most useful) to 12, each number once: alone first, then as a group.

The twelve items

Everyone has the same facts about the items. Your fact card may add one more. Write your ranks on the score sheet, not here.

	Item	What everyone knows
A	Alarm clock	Wind-up alarm clock. Wound and set to the right time.
B	Camping stove	With a gas canister, a small pan and a box of matches.
C	Cereal bars	Twelve cereal bars: two each.
D	First aid kit	Plasters, bandages, cleansing wipes and gloves.
E	Foil blankets	Six foil blankets. Wrapped round a person, each keeps body heat in.
F	Handheld radio	The field centre's radio, set to channel 1. Battery: one bar.
G	Head torch	One head torch with fresh batteries.
H	Mobile phone	The only charged phone: 30%. No signal inside the boathouse.
I	Notebook and pencils	A notebook and two pencils.
J	Plastic sheet	Heavy sheet, 4 m by 3 m, a rope at each corner. Rain runs off it.
K	Sealed water	Two sealed 2-litre bottles of drinking water.
L	Purification tablets	20 tablets. Packet: one tablet per litre, wait 30 minutes to drink.

Fact cards

Cut along the lines. Give each person in a group one card, or two in a group of four or five (see “Sharing the six cards”). Each card holds one true fact that the others do not have. Keep your card in your hand: you may read it aloud.

Card	Your private fact
Card 1	At 17:00 you tried the radio. The knob on top changes the channel. On channel 3 you heard the warden talking to the boat crew.
Card 2	You walked to the end of the jetty at 17:15. The phone showed one bar of signal there. The warden’s number is saved in it.
Card 3	Rain comes through the roof over the back half of the boathouse, where the benches are.
Card 4	You picked up the gas canister for the stove. It is empty, and nobody has a spare.
Card 5	Sunrise tomorrow is at 07:51. The path to the jetty will still be dark at 07:20, and it crosses wet rocks.
Card 6	A notice on the boathouse wall says: after you treat any injury, write down the time, what happened and what you did, and give the note to the warden.

Score sheet

One per person. Write your ranks, then the group's, then the reference ranks when they are read out. A difference has no plus or minus sign: rank 3 against reference 7 is 4. Add each difference column. 0 is the reference order; 72 is the largest possible total.

Name or group: _____ Card number: _____

Item	My rank	Group rank	Reference rank	My difference	Group difference
A. Alarm clock					
B. Camping stove					
C. Cereal bars					
D. First aid kit					
E. Foil blankets					
F. Handheld radio					
G. Head torch					
H. Mobile phone					
I. Notebook and pencils					
J. Plastic sheet					
K. Sealed water					
L. Purification tablets					
Total difference					

Team box, one per group. Individual totals, one per person:

_____

Team average (add the individual totals, divide by the number of people):

_____

Best individual total, and the group total:

_____

Group total minus team average (minus: the group did better), and members the group did better than:

_____

Observer sheet

For a seventh person in a group, or anyone who prefers not to rank. Watch the group ranking. Write down what you see and hear, not opinions about people. Share it in the debrief.

Fact card	Read out at minute	What changed after it
Card 1		
Card 2		
Card 3		
Card 4		
Card 5		
Card 6		

Each time a rank changed: was it a fact, the rule, a vote, or a confident voice?

_____

_____

Who spoke most, and who least? Did anyone stay silent who held a card?

_____

_____

One moment the group could learn from

_____

_____

Transfer round: sheet A

Fictional. Monday 19 October 2026. Your learning team runs a one-day course on Thursday 22 October. Agree the order in which to handle six requests, from 1 (first) to 6. The team lead's rule: 1. Anything without which Thursday's course cannot run; the earlier deadline first. 2. Anything that someone outside the team needs from us today. 3. Anything that has to happen on a fixed date later this week. 4. Everything else, oldest request first.

Request	Facts on sheet A
R1. Reply to a manager about November places	Asked on Friday 16 October: "No rush, any time in the next two weeks."
R2. Book a room for the December course	–
R3. Order a projector for Thursday	The room has no projector on Thursdays and the course uses slides. Request by Wednesday 21 October, 17:00.
R4. Send the workbook files to the print room	–
R5. Send the venue the dietary list	Needed by 15:00 today to order Thursday's lunch. If late, the venue serves its standard menu.
R6. Update the slides with new policy figures	–

Transfer round: sheet B

Fictional. The same six requests with the facts that sheet A does not have. Give A to half the group and B to the other half. Write the group's order here.

Request	Facts on sheet B	Group	Ref.	Diff.
R1. Reply to a manager about November places	–			
R2. Book a room for the December course	December rooms open for booking on Wednesday 21 October at 09:00.			
R3. Order a projector for Thursday	–			
R4. Send the workbook files to the print room	Files needed by Tuesday 20 October, 12:00, for Thursday. The course cannot run without workbooks.			
R5. Send the venue the dietary list	–			
R6. Update the slides with new policy figures	The figures apply from 1 November; Thursday uses the current ones. Asked on Tuesday 13 October.			
Total (largest possible: 18)				

Filled example: one group’s scores

A fictional group of five. Person 1 held cards 1 and 6; persons 2 to 5 held cards 2, 3, 4 and 5. Each column shows one person’s ranks, then the group’s. The bottom row is each total difference from the reference. The group total (10) is lower than every individual total, because five of the six cards were read out. It was not 0: card 6 was never read out, and the group moved the first aid kit up without checking the message.

Item	Ref.	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	Group
A. Alarm clock	7	7	9	8	9	9	8
B. Camping stove	12	5	5	12	7	2	11
C. Cereal bars	11	12	10	7	11	11	10
D. First aid kit	9	8	7	6	5	10	7
E. Foil blankets	4	3	4	2	2	4	5
F. Handheld radio	1	1	11	5	4	3	1
G. Head torch	8	9	8	10	10	8	9
H. Mobile phone	2	10	1	9	8	7	2
I. Notebook and pencils	10	11	12	11	12	12	12
J. Plastic sheet	3	4	3	3	1	5	3
K. Sealed water	5	2	2	1	3	1	4
L. Purification tablets	6	6	6	4	6	6	6
Total difference from the reference	–	24	28	30	30	28	10

Facilitator run of show

1 Open and set the task | 4 minutes

Two minutes: say, “This is a ranking exercise. You will rank twelve items alone, then as a group, and we will compare both with a reference ranking. The reference is not anyone’s opinion: every rank follows from facts in your papers and a rule printed on the scenario page.” Two minutes: say that the setting is invented and that nobody in it is hurt or in danger. Anyone can take the observer role instead of ranking, and anyone can pass in the debrief.

2 Read the brief and rank alone | 10 minutes

Hand out the scenario page, the item list and a score sheet to each person, and one fact card to each person from the group’s set. Say, “Your fact card is yours. Read it, but do not show it to anyone yet.” Three minutes: everyone reads in silence; offer to read the brief aloud. Seven minutes: each person writes a rank from 1 to 12 in the column “My rank”, in pen, without talking. Each rank is used once. Call the time at five minutes and at one minute.

3 Rank as a group | 15 minutes

Say, “Now agree one ranking as a group and write it in the column ‘Group rank’. Do not average your sheets. You may read your card aloud, but keep it in your hand. If you are stuck on one item for two minutes, you may vote on that item; note that you voted.” Do not prompt the groups to share their cards. The observer, if there is

one, fills in the observer sheet. Call the time at ten minutes and five minutes. At 15 minutes every group must have twelve group ranks, even if some are guesses.

4 Reveal the reference ranking and score | 8 minutes

Four minutes: read the reference ranking from 1 to 12 with the reason for each rank, from the table “The reference ranking and why”. Say, “Each reason points to a sentence in your papers. If you think a rank does not follow, show me the sentence; I may have missed something.” Four minutes: each person writes the reference rank, works out the difference for each item without plus or minus signs, and adds the column. The group does the same for its own ranks and fills in the team box: each person’s total, the team average, the best individual total and the group total.

5 Debrief: how did the group decide? | 10 minutes

Three minutes: ask each group to say its group total and its team average, and write them up. Do not rank the groups. Ask, “Who had a fact card that nobody else had?” and let people find out that all six cards were different. Seven minutes: work through the debrief questions. Start with the card that reached the group latest, or never: “When did you read it out, and what happened next?” Then ask what made the group change a rank: a fact, the rule, a vote or a confident voice. Use the observer’s notes where there are any.

6 Transfer round: six workplace requests | 10 minutes

One minute: give each group one transfer sheet A and one sheet B; half the group reads A, half reads B. Say, “Same idea, a work setting. Before anyone gives a rank, each of you reads out the facts on your sheet.” Six minutes: the group agrees one order for the six requests with the team lead’s rule. Three minutes: read the reference order with the reasons from the table “Transfer round: reference order”, and the group adds up its differences. The largest possible total is 18.

7 Write one habit and close | 3 minutes

Two minutes: each person writes, on the back of the score sheet, one habit for the next time their own team ranks or chooses something, for example “Ask everyone for facts before anyone gives a view” or “Write the rule down before we rank.” One minute: anyone who wants to reads theirs aloud or posts it in the chat. Passing is fine. Collect the cards.

Reference tables

The reference ranking and why

For the facilitator. Read it out in step 4. Each rank follows from the warden’s message, a fact card and the ranking rule on the scenario page. If a participant shows you a sentence that supports a different rank, accept it and adjust their score.

Rank	Item	Why it ranks here	Rests on
1	F. Handheld radio	Answers the 20:00 call. Card 1 shows that the channel can be changed to 3.	Point 1, card 1
2	H. Mobile phone	Sends the text by 20:15 from the end of the jetty if the radio fails. The radio comes first in the message.	Point 1, card 2
3	J. Plastic sheet	Keeps people out of the rain that comes through the roof. The message says dry first.	Point 2, card 3
4	E. Foil blankets	Keeps body heat in. The message says warm after dry.	Point 2

Rank	Item	Why it ranks here	Rests on
5	K. Sealed water	Safe to drink as it is. The message names a sealed bottle first.	Point 3
6	L. Purification tablets	Makes the tap water safe after 30 minutes. Named after boiling, and the stove cannot boil.	Point 3, card 4
7	A. Alarm clock	Wakes everyone at 07:00. The phone could do it too, but the phone already ranks under point 1.	Point 4
8	G. Head torch	Lights the dark, wet path to the jetty at 07:20. The battery lamp in the boathouse covers the evening.	Point 4, card 5
9	D. First aid kit	Cleans and covers a cut. Nobody is hurt now, so it comes under point 5, not earlier.	Point 5
10	I. Notebook and pencils	Records an injury after it has been treated, as the notice asks.	Point 5, card 6
11	C. Cereal bars	A light supper. The message puts food last.	Point 6
12	B. Camping stove	The canister is empty, so the stove meets no point.	Card 4

Sharing the six cards

Every group gets all six cards. Groups of four to six rank; a seventh person observes. With seven people, run one group of six and one observer rather than two small groups.

Group size	Who holds which card
4 people	Person 1: cards 1 and 4. Person 2: cards 2 and 5. Person 3: card 3. Person 4: card 6.
5 people	Person 1: cards 1 and 6. Persons 2 to 5: cards 2, 3, 4 and 5, one each.
6 people	One card each.
7 people	Six people rank with one card each. The seventh person observes, with the observer sheet.

How to score

Lower is closer to the reference. 0 is the reference order; 72 is the largest possible total for twelve items, and 18 for the six transfer requests.

Step	What to do	Example from Person 1
1. Difference per item	The gap between two ranks, without a plus or minus sign.	Mobile phone: my rank 10, reference 2, difference 8.
2. Individual total	Add the twelve differences in “My difference”.	Person 1: 24.
3. Group total	Add the twelve differences in “Group difference”. Everyone in a group has the same group total.	Group: 10.
4. Team average	Add the individual totals and divide by the number of people who ranked.	140 ÷ 5 = 28.0.
5. Compare	Group total minus team average, the best individual total, and how many members the group did better than.	-18.0; best individual 24; better than 5 of 5.

Filled example: team box

The team box for the same fictional group.

Line	Our group
Individual totals	Person 1 24, Person 2 28, Person 3 30, Person 4 30, Person 5 28
Team average of the individual totals	140 ÷ 5 = 28.0
Best individual total	24 (Person 1, who held two cards)
Group total	10
Group compared with the team average	-18.0: the group was 18.0 points closer to the reference
Members the group did better than	5 of 5
What the group noticed in the debrief	Cards 1 to 5 were read out in the first six minutes. Card 6 was never read out, so the notebook went to 12th. The group moved the first aid kit above point 5 after one person said “safety first”; nobody checked the message.

Transfer round: reference order

For the facilitator. The order follows from the team lead’s rule on sheet A and the facts split across sheets A and B. Monday 19 October 2026, course on Thursday 22 October; all fictional.

Request	What it is	Rank	Why
R4	Send the workbook files to the print room	1	Rule 1: the course cannot run without workbooks. Deadline Tuesday 12:00, the earlier of the two rule-1 deadlines.
R3	Order a projector for Thursday	2	Rule 1: the course uses slides and the room has no projector. Deadline Wednesday 17:00.
R5	Send the venue the dietary list	3	Rule 2: the venue needs it today. The course can run without it: a late list means the standard menu.
R2	Book a room for the December course	4	Rule 3: a fixed date later this week, Wednesday 09:00.
R6	Update the slides with new policy figures	5	Rule 4: not needed for Thursday. Asked on Tuesday 13 October, the older of the two rule-4 requests.
R1	Reply to a manager about November places	6	Rule 4: asked on Friday 16 October, so after R6.

Filled example: transfer round

The same fictional group’s transfer round.

Request	Group rank	Reference	Difference
R1. Reply to a manager about November places	6	6	0

Request	Group rank	Reference	Difference
R2. Book a room for the December course	5	4	1
R3. Order a projector for Thursday	1	2	1
R4. Send the workbook files to the print room	2	1	1
R5. Send the venue the dietary list	3	3	0
R6. Update the slides with new policy figures	4	5	1
Total difference (largest possible: 18)			4

Debrief and next steps

Questions for reflection

- Which fact card reached your group last, or never, and what happened once it was read out?
- When a rank changed in your group, what changed it: a fact, the rule, a vote, or a confident voice?
- Did the group do better than its best member? What would the group have needed to do to use that person’s ranking?
- In your own team, where does a fact sit with one person, and how could it reach the group before a decision is made?

Adapt the session

- For a small group of four or five, run one group and share the cards as in “Sharing the six cards”. With three people, each person holds two cards; the scoring works the same way.
- For a 40-minute version, keep the opening (4 minutes), the individual ranking (10), a 12-minute group ranking, scoring (8) and a 6-minute debrief on the first two questions. Leave out the transfer round, and send its sheets as a follow-up.
- Online, send the scenario and the item list to everyone, and each fact card by private chat. Use breakout rooms of four to six with one shared table for the group ranking, and an individual copy of the score sheet. Cameras are optional; the debrief works in the chat.
- For quiet participants, or anyone who would rather not rank, offer the observer role. Ask groups to start the ranking with one minute in which each person reads their card or says “pass”. A person can also post their card in the group chat instead of reading it aloud.
- If the storm setting does not suit your group, run only the transfer round and extend it: 3 minutes alone, 8 minutes as a group, 4 minutes scoring. To write your own items, keep the same pattern: a numbered message, a ranking rule, and one private fact per card that moves one item.

After the session

Within one working day, send each person their habit from the close and the team box results, without names next to individual totals. At the next team meeting where a choice is made, ask the group to read out the facts each person holds before anyone gives a view, and to write the rule for the choice down first. After two or three such meetings, ask the team in five minutes whether the habit changed anything they could point to, such as a fact that came out earlier than it would have.

Questions people ask

What are good decision making games for teams at work?

Short exercises in which a team decides something with a clear right answer and then checks it, so that the team can see how it decided and not only what. A ranking exercise works well because every person ranks alone first, so the group's result can be compared with each member's. This kit is one such exercise, with a fictional storm-bound night in a boathouse, plus a six-item workplace round to carry the lesson back to work.

Where does the answer key come from?

From the papers. The warden's message lists six points in order, the ranking rule says how to use them, and each fact card adds one fact that moves one item. The table "The reference ranking and why" shows the sentence behind every rank. There is no outside expert key, so a participant who finds a sentence that supports a different rank can show it, and you can adjust the score.

Do groups always do better than individuals?

No, and the kit does not claim it. The exercise is built so that pooling the six fact cards helps, because each card changes one item. Whether a group gains depends on whether the cards are read out and used. A group may do better than its own average while one member still does better than the group. The debrief is about how that happened.

Is this a copy of the classic survival ranking exercises?

No. The scenario, the items, the fact cards, the rule and the key are original to this kit, and nobody in the story is hurt or in danger. The private fact cards borrow the idea of a "hidden profile" from group research by Garold Stasser and William Titus (1985), in which members hold different information; the kit's materials are its own.

How is this different from the problem solving activities and the prioritization matrix?

The problem solving activities kit takes a team through a real problem: facts, causes, options and a test. The prioritization matrix sorts real options by impact and effort. This kit is a practice game with a known answer, so the team can see how it shares facts and settles disagreements before it uses those tools on real work.

What is included in the free and editable files?

The open PDF has the scenario, the twelve items, the six fact cards, the score sheet with a team box, the observer sheet, the two transfer sheets, three filled examples, the 60-minute plan, the reference rankings with reasons and the debrief. Subscribers also receive the editable Word file, an Excel workbook that calculates every difference, total, team average and best individual for a group, scores the transfer round for four groups and summarises a room, and a CSV of the session plan.

Use and sharing

Free to use and adapt in your own training sessions, including paid client work. Do not resell or redistribute the unmodified download as a standalone product. Share the resource page instead.