
Global Deadlines

(Contributed by Meg Einhorn)

Global Deadlines is a powerful tool for teaching conflict resolution skills.

It has been adapted from another exercise developed by the Stanley Foundation (Teachable Moments 1989), using it as an activity in dialogue and negotiation.

It is best employed when all the participants have had an opportunity to get to know one another and have previously worked together on listening skills. It is important to allow time for participants to evaluate the effects of this activity on them. It is recommended for groups or sub-groups of six to nine members. The instructions are as follows:

1. List all of the global deadlines on the board so they are easily read (some suggested deadlines are listed at the end of this exercise). Ask participants to look over the list and silently choose one global deadline that they feel is the most important and deserves immediate attention. In reviewing this list initially, be sure to point out that each issue has merit. (1-2 minutes)
2. Ask participants to mill around, looking for people with similar viewpoints. In other words, they should form clusters of people who are in agreement about which deadline should receive first priority. You may offer the option to anyone who find themselves alone at this point to either go solo or join a group with a second-best alternative. At this point, people are already beginning to view this as a competitive exercise. (2 minutes)
3. Have participants identify up to three compelling reasons why their deadline is the most important and most deserving of immediate attention. Be sure to emphasize that all group members should be prepared to defend their choice. (5 minutes)
4. Form a circle of chairs for the next phase of this exercise. If the numbers justify, have the group break into subgroups. Try to have as many different positions represented in each subgroup as possible, with proportional representation of each cluster. Give the instructions that:
 - ⇒ Each position is to be presented in an order determined by the group. One person per position should present the three compelling reasons as concisely as possible. Continue around the circle until all positions have been presented.
 - ⇒ In proceeding from one person to the next, it is each presenter's responsibility to restate the previously presented position to that person's satisfaction. This ground rule should be honored until all positions have been presented (the first presenter restates the last).
 - ⇒ After all positions have been laid out, it is the task of the group to reach consensus regarding the one global deadline that is the most important, deserving immediate attention. Consensus is interpreted here to mean that all group members find the decision acceptable; if one blocks agreements, this must be honored and respected. In conducting this phase of the discussion, all members are free to speak in any order. They are encouraged to retain the restating rule, making sure that people feel understood.

- ⇒ Discussion continues either until consensus is reached or time expires. 40-60 minutes are recommended for this effort to reach consensus, including time for initial presentations of positions. Additional time could be allocated, if group size warrants it.
- ⇒ After the discussion ends, ask each member to spend a few minutes evaluating the process: *Did I feel heard and understood? Were my ideas respected? How did the restating affect the process? What do I mean by consensus?*

Evaluation and Synthesis

Global Deadlines is a highly conflictive exercise that reflects the personal values and experiences of the participants. It is important that it be debriefed with sensitivity and respect. Typically, a few participants will become oppositional and dominate the discussion for a time. Often, some will fall silent, uncomfortable with the conflict. It is also common for some members to play a facilitative role, assisting the group in its search for underlying interests that exist in common. This results in a redefinition of the problem and often results in consensus.

We emphasize that consensus is not merely an outcome; it is a way of being. How people behave with one another, that is the process of their decision-making, is far more important in the long run than any short-term conclusions. "Global Deadlines" assimilates collaborative problem solving, integrative negotiation, mediation, and communication skills in one exercise.

Global deadlines change over time. One can generate one's own topical list.

Some issues / problems linked to global deadlines:

- Atomic power production
- Pollution
- Water distribution
- Food distribution
- Diseases
- Medical support in developing countries
- Extinction of certain species
- Economic debt
- Climate change
- Renewable sources of energy
- Religious conflict
- War
- Terrorism
- Demographic problems

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The Practice of Facilitation: Managing Group Process and Solving Problems
Harry Webne-Behrman Quorum Books Westport 1998

Global Deadlines – How it worked

Exercise done with a small group December 11 2006

Advanced Technical English Module 3

F2a, b Micro technical department

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Six students participated in this exercise done on Monday December 11 2006. First, we had a very brief introduction to group work and consensus finding. Students were asked to think for a few minutes on some of the most important and urgent deadlines to be considered. They came up with the following list:

- Atomic power production**
- Power production**
- Pollution**
- Water distribution**
- Food distribution**
- Diseases**
- Medical support in developing countries**
- Extinction of certain species**
- Economic debt**
- Meteorology and climate change**
- Renewable sources of energy**
- Religious conflict**
- War**
- Terrorism**
- Demographic problems**

Secondly, students started to form pairs for their choices.

- Pair 1) came up with pollution
- Pair 2) came up with water distribution
- Pair 3) came up with food distribution

Thirdly, the pairs were asked to give arguments for their choices.

- Pair 1) *pollution*
 - Argued that the plant ecosystem was unbalanced due to pollution
 - That we had more deaths due to pollution
 - There were far more natural catastrophes due to this fact
 - Not enough drinking water

- Pair 2) *water*
 - Argued that without water there was no life
 - Certain areas are in urgent need of water.
 - Human beings are made up of 80% of water

- Pair 3) *food distribution*
 - Food shortage in certain countries
 - Too much food bad eating habits in first world countries
 - Illness due to poor insufficient food

After the discussion, we evaluated the process together based on the following questions:

Did I feel heard?

Were my ideas respected?

How did the restating affect the process?

What do I mean by consensus?

On the whole students felt that their arguments were respected and each student had listened to the other one's viewpoint. They came to the conclusion that in fact *pollution* was the most urgent deadline.

They also thought that finding a consensus is always a give and take situation. In engineering you had to convince and also bring in results. In their field one could not live without an open mind and the willingness to collaborate is also essential. It was also interesting to observe the facilitating role everyone took. It was without doubt a group that functions well, and this was also pointed out.