

## *Gridlock*

### **Sample Goals:**

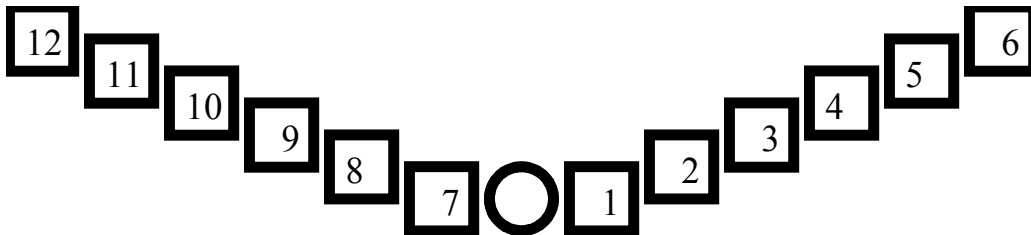
- To assess the leadership capabilities within a team/group
- To assess a team/system's functioning
- To practice teaming skills
- To assess a team/group's decision-making process
- To develop group problem-solving skills

### **Materials/Equipment:**

- (1) or (2) sets of squares depending on the size of the group (one "set" equals 12 squares and one circle for the middle piece)
- (1) or (2) circles (one circle per set of 12 squares)

### **Set-up:**

Arrange the squares on the floor going out in a 30 degree angle from both sides of the center circle. (see diagram below) There should be about 2 feet of space between each square. You need the same amount of squares on each side of the circle.



### **Sample Framing:**

Announce that there are two roles in this exercise – “workers” and “leaders”. Whomever wants to be a worker needs to stand on one of the open squares (workstations) facing in toward the center circle. Those who want to be leaders should stay put. Let the entire group know that you are the customer and for this exercise, you prefer not to have to talk to the entire organization, so you will go off with the leaders and explain to them what you want. (In some cases, you may want to have certain people take the *leadership* role for the exercise.)

### **Process/Guidelines:**

Pull the “leaders” aside where the rest of the group can't hear you and explain the following:

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**Process/Guidelines:**

“I am looking to establish a long-term relationship with a preferred vendor for my organization and have narrowed my list to your organization and two others. I have set up a task that I want each vendor to complete to see who will best serve my needs. The task is for you to get all your people on one side of the line to exchange places with the people on the other side so that person 1 ends up in person 12’s spot and person 6 ends up in person 7’s spot and so on. Your ability to do this will show me that you’re processes aren’t people dependent and your people are cross-trained so that you’re not at risk if you lose someone. I am also interested in repeatability and continuous improvement so that after you get the task done once, I would like to see if you can do it again and again and get the cycle time down each time.”

Explain to the leaders the criteria for completing the task:

- People must stay facing the same direction throughout the exercise
- When people are not moving to another spot, they must remain on a square (at their workstation) and there is no sharing squares
- There are 2 legal moves:
  - a person can move forward into an open spot directly in front of him/her
  - a person can move around another person onto an open square, if that person they are going around *is facing him or her*
- Illegal moves include:
  - any movement backwards
  - moving around someone facing the same way as you
  - moving around more than one person

Let the leaders know that they have 30 minutes total, which includes any planning time, and that you will be watching their efforts to ensure they follow your criteria. Answer any final questions then let them know the clock is ticking.

Solution: Most groups figure it out through trial and error. If they can’t, you can tell them the principle to follow is that whenever two people from *opposite lines* are facing each other and there is an empty space between them, the person who is furthest from the center space should move forward into that open spot (i.e., if the choice is between someone moving away from the center circle or someone moving toward it, the one moving toward it moves into the open spot.)

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**Safety Issues:** NA

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**Things to Look For/Debrief Questions:**

- If you have a large group (over 20) set up 2 lines and let 2 teams work through it (e.g. with 23 people, have 2 teams of ten with the other 3 being the leaders. Let the leaders decide how they want to split up the leader duties. If you have less than 20 participants, keep adding squares to each side of the one line until there are only 1-3 people left to be leaders.
- How long do the leaders spend planning/figuring it out on their own vs. taking the challenge to the team? (Most people can't figure it out in their heads and just need to take it to the team and let them figure it out through trial and error.)
- As the group begins the task, watch closely to ensure they follow the requirements (guidelines) you gave them. If they make any illegal moves, say "gridlock" and tell them they must start again from the beginning.
- How much of the background information you gave them as the customer do they pass along to the team? (Do they give them the *why* along with *what* needs to be done)
- If you have two lines going, make both start over if one line makes a mistake (gets at system integration).
- If there are 2 teams working through the exercise, one inevitably gets done before the other. What happens after the one team finishes- - do they offer to help the other team? Does the other team ask for help?
- What happens when people make mistakes as they try to figure it out? How do the leaders treat that moment? How do their colleagues react? To what degree are they willing to try things out, take risks and make mistakes? Are they overly hesitant?
- Oftentimes, the leaders do not fully explain what they need to do and more importantly, why - this often leads to an interesting debrief.