



Tragedy of the Commons Task Force

Congratulations! You have been selected to participate in a thought experiment to analyze the effects of an economic concept. You will be given step-by-step instructions to follow and will be working in a group. You are expected to discuss what you have learned and will be briefed about what the concept is, the significance it holds, and what it tries to prove. *Do not read the “Why Did We Do This” section until the end of the activity.*

Steps:

1. All participants in a group (of up to 5) will start off with five starbursts.
2. At the center of the table, there are fifteen starbursts
3. For each round, participants will write down how many starbursts they want to take from the center of the table (a number that will be unknown to other participants).
 - a. Participants can choose to take however many starbursts they want, including none.
4. Participants will reveal the number of starbursts they have decided to take and grab the starbursts from the center of the table.
5. This process will continue until all groups have no starbursts left at the center of the table.
6. The first group to deplete all their resources (aka the starbursts) loses.

Why Did We Do This? Let's say 25 students sign-up for a camp with only one teacher and two assistant teachers. The common interest/goal is to learn from the instructors. However, each student wants individualized attention to maximize their experience. If one student decides to take the teacher's attention away for 5



minutes, another student takes the teacher's attention for 10 minutes. At some point, the teacher is unable to give any attention to the other students or teach them as a group. The teacher has no time to cover the necessary material and all students suffer in the long run. This explains the idea of tragedy of the commons, which is, "an economic problem in which every individual has an incentive to consume a resource at the expense of every other individual with no way to exclude anyone from consuming. It results in overconsumption, under investment, and ultimately depletion of the resource." Most participants tend to get caught up in a winner-takes-all mentality, which proves disadvantageous to everyone involved in the activity.