



Problem-Solving Under Pressure

Relevant escape room scenario & project resource	This activity can be embedded in escape room scenarios involving crisis situations (e.g. system failure, emergency response, mission countdown, or risk management). It works particularly well as a time-critical phase where progress depends on fast, well-reasoned decisions rather than technical knowledge.
Target group & needs	Age: 15-25 years/29 years Group size: 4-6 participants per team Previous experience: No prior experience required Context: Youth work, entrepreneurship education, employability or life-skills workshops
Duration	60-70 minutes (incl. briefing, activity, and debriefing)
Target competence areas	• EntreComp: Coping with uncertainty, ambiguity and risk • DigComp: Information evaluation (basic); problem solving • Transversal: Critical thinking, adaptability, resilience
Objectives	By the end of the activity, participants will be able to: • Analyse incomplete or contradictory information under time pressure • Prioritise tasks and options when resources or time are limited



	• Make fast but reasoned decisions and justify their choices • Apply logical thinking in high-pressure situations • Reflect on decision-making processes and cognitive biases
Materials & equipment	• Printed decision cards or clue sheets (some incomplete or conflicting) • Countdown timer or visible clock • Locked box, envelope, or digital lock • Pens, paper, sticky notes • Optional: projector or shared screen for countdown
Useful resources	• Critical Thinking in Crisis Situations – Toolkit: The OECD toolkit presents practical strategies and scenarios for decision-making under pressure. It is highly relevant for designing puzzles where participants must prioritise tasks, make quick choices or deal with incomplete information (suitable for time-pressured escape room missions). • Decision-Making Under Pressure Explained (Psibook): This accessible online article explains the psychology of decision making under pressure, including how stress affects cognitive processes, common biases that arise in high-pressure situations, and strategies for maintaining clear thinking. It offers trainers a practical overview of cognitive dynamics that they can incorporate into escape room challenges to reinforce critical thinking and awareness under time constraints.



Setup	• Arrange the room so teams work independently without interference. • Prepare challenge packs containing clues, some of which are incomplete or contradictory. • Set a visible countdown timer to create pressure. • Clearly communicate that time will not be extended, even if the task is unfinished.
Step-by-step instructions	1. Briefing (10 minutes) Introduce the scenario: teams face a critical situation that must be resolved quickly. Explain that not all information will be complete or reliable. 2. Individual quick scan (5 minutes) Participants individually review the clues and note key information or risks. 3. Decision challenge (25-30 minutes) Teams must: - Identify relevant vs. irrelevant information - Prioritize tasks or options - Choose one final solution under time pressure Each decision leads to a code, clue, or consequence that advances the escape room. 4. Final decision moment (5 minutes) Teams must commit to their final choice before time runs out, unlocking the next stage or ending the challenge.



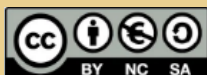
Debriefing questions	• How did time pressure influence your decisions? • What information did you ignore - and why? • Did your team change decisions during the process? • How can these skills be useful in entrepreneurship or real-life situations? • Did your team fall into any traps (first idea bias, rushing to consensus, ignoring minority opinions)?
Assessment & evaluation	The trainer evaluates: • Quality of reasoning behind decisions • Ability to prioritize under constraints • Engagement with incomplete information • Reflection during debriefing Assessment is qualitative and observation-based.
Variations & adaptation	• Lower pressure version: Extend time limits and reduce conflicting clues. • Digital version: Use online forms, digital locks, or timed quizzes. • Inclusive adaptation: Allow verbal explanations instead of written justification; provide visual supports and clear instructions.
Trainer tips	• Resist the urge to “rescue” teams too quickly - uncertainty is part of the learning. • Emphasise that good decisions are not always perfect decisions.



	• During debriefing, focus on reasoning rather than outcomes. • Avoid assigning formal roles - keep attention on decision-making processes.
References & further readings	• Decision Making Under Pressure (Behavioral Science Perspective): A downloadable research overview exploring how pressure alters decision behaviour, biases, and reasoning (good background for facilitators and debrief prompts). • Mastering Critical Decision-Making Under Pressure: A practical article outlining principles and structured approaches to make clear decisions in crises (useful for designing tasks where teams must act quickly with partial info).



Co-funded by
the European Union



Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Project code: 2023-2-LT02-KA220-YOU-000183156