

## Decision-Making & Communication Module

**Purpose:** Participants will explore how interdependent decisions are made and communicated. Consequences of those decisions can be complex and require reflection by the individuals and the groups that make them.

*Time required: 1 - 1.5 hours*

**Note to facilitators:** This activity centers around a role-playing activity that requires participants to make a choice that will impact themselves and others. The activity requires the following materials for in-person delivery:

- Briefing summaries for each of the three countries
- Six cards (three containing the word “Attack” and three containing the word “Defend”)
- A projector to display the decision-making matrix
- A whiteboard and marker for scoring purposes

If the activity takes place in a virtual format (video conference), the facilitator can share their screen to display the decision-making matrix and to update the points.

### Overview:

1. Divide participants into 3 groups, each representing one of the nations in this activity. Read and discuss the briefing summaries. (10 minutes)
2. Two (or more) silent decision-making rounds. Groups discuss and make their decisions without discussing with other groups. (10 minutes)
3. Larger group discussion about initial outcomes. (5-10 minutes)
4. Two (or more) talking (between nations) decision-making rounds (10-15 mins)
5. Debrief about the activity; discussion of decision-making, communication & ethical leadership (10-15 minutes)

### Facilitator’s plan:

1. Divide students evenly into countries: Canada, Britain, and France. Pass each group member a briefing sheet.
2. Give each nation group two cards or instruct one group representative to write two papers: one with “ATTACK”, the other with “DEFEND”.
3. Display the “Decision-Making Matrix” (see below) on the classroom or computer screen (share their screen if the activity is taking place on via video conference) and have the participants discuss in their respective nation groups which option is in the best interest of their assigned country. Alternatively, facilitators may choose not to reveal the points system until after the first discussion round to see how/if this impacts the groups’ decisions.

4. In rounds 1 & 2, two countries at a time, (follow the schedule on the scorecard), each group will simultaneously reveal their best option without consultation with the other nation. The facilitator records the outcomes for each country on the scorecard. Repeat without consulting allies one more time and record the outcome.
5. In rounds 3 & 4, allow the nations to speak to each other before they reveal their choice. They may arrive at verbal agreements and respect them, but they retain the option to betray each other.
6. Award points for outcomes (see explanation of decision-making matrix). Declare a winner on points, but use this as a springboard to have a deeper discussion on the challenges of decision-making and the importance of communication.

## Briefing Sheet 1



Role: You are one of a team of officers in the Canadian military serving in the Somme (a region in eastern France) in April 1917 under the command of Major-General Arthur Currie.

Context: There have been preparations to take the heavily fortified, German-held Vimy Ridge. By taking the elevated land and punching a hole in German defences, the Allies hope to initiate a breakthrough offensive in order to hasten the end of this very costly and terrible war.

Here are the considerations that you **MUST** factor into your decision:

- Previous Allied attempts to capture this ridge produced over 150,000 combined French & British casualties.
- This could be the first time all four Canadian Divisions, 15,000 soldiers in all, would fight together in WWI.
- Your commanders are looking for a military victory to promote the war effort at home which is divided over the issue of conscription.
- You have a well-rehearsed, innovative battle plan that requires precise timing and discipline to execute.
- Any defeat will lead to your immediate demotion and removal from leadership.
- Rumours are widespread that the British use Canadians recklessly as “shock troops” and “cannon fodder”, putting “Colonials” (Canadians, Newfoundlanders, Australians, etc.) at great risk, while saving the glory for themselves.

Decision: Do you order your platoon to **attack** and execute the Vimy battle plan **OR defend** the current position in the trench and prepare as best you can for the inevitable German counter attack?

## Briefing Sheet 2



Role: You are one of a team of officers in the British military serving in the Somme (a region in eastern France) in April 1917 under the command of Lt.-General Julian Byng.

Context: There have been preparations to take the heavily fortified, German-held Vimy Ridge. By taking the elevated land and punching a hole in German defences, the Allies hope to initiate a breakthrough offensive in order to hasten the end of this very costly and terrible war.

Here are the considerations that you **MUST** factor into your decision:

- Previous Allied attempts to capture this ridge produced over 150,000 combined French & British casualties.
- Due to previous defeats, you are now forced to rely on voluntary fighting forces from the Empire (including Canada) to win.
- Any defeat will lead to your immediate demotion and removal from leadership.
- The British have assumed a leadership role on the Western Front because of France's heavy casualty rate.
- The Allies have already initiated extensive mining and tunneling operations, investing enormous effort, including a twenty-day bombardment of the German positions, in preparation for the attack.
- Even if the attack is successful, heavy loss of life is expected.

Decision: Do you order your platoon to **attack** and execute the Vimy battle plan *OR* **defend** the current position in the trench and prepare as best you can for the inevitable German counter attack?

## Briefing Sheet 3



Role: You are one of a team of officers in the French Military serving in the Somme (a region in eastern France) in April 1917 under the command of General Robert Nivelle.

Context: There have been preparations to take the heavily fortified, German-held Vimy Ridge. By taking the elevated land and punching a hole in German defences, the Allies hope to initiate a breakthrough offensive in order to hasten the end of this very costly and terrible war.












Here are the considerations that you **MUST** factor into your decision:

- Previous Allied attempts to capture this ridge produced over 150,000 combined French & British casualties. Up to this point in the war, French losses have been far heavier than those suffered by the British and their colonial allies.
- The eastern portion of France has been devastated by years of trench warfare, heavy artillery shelling and German occupation that included use of French citizens as enslaved labourers.
- Your commanders are desperate to report a victory to improve eroding morale and to bolster recruitment for the French army.
- Any defeat will lead to your immediate demotion and removal from leadership, as had happened to French Commanding General Joffre in 1916 after Verdun.
- Another decisive defeat and your army will dissolve and French resistance will collapse.
- There are even doubts as to whether or not most of the rank-and-file in the trenches will obey their commanders if an ambitious attack is undertaken.

Decision: Do you order your platoon to **attack** and improvise a battle plan to support your allies' offensive **OR defend** the current position behind the front line and prepare for the inevitable German counter attack?

## Decision-Making Matrix for the Battle of Vimy Ridge

(To be displayed on a screen. Outcomes are dependent on both nations' simultaneous decisions)

UK DECISION  FRA DECISION #  (alternate) CDN DECISION 	<b>ATTACK</b> 	<b>DEFEND</b> 
<b>ATTACK</b>   	Victory @ significant loss of life (+2)  Victory @ significant loss of life (+2)	Live to fight another day @ virtually no loss of life (+3)  Defeat with massive loss of life (-5)
<b>DEFEND</b>   	Defeat with massive loss of life (-5)  Live to fight another day @ virtually no loss of life (+3)	Defeat @ low loss of life but imprisoned (-1)  Defeat @ low loss of life but imprisoned (-1)

**Explanation of the matrix (there are three possible outcomes for the decision taken by each country)**

**1. You decide to attack, and your ally also decides to attack.**

*The outcome is VICTORY! However, there is significant loss of life.*

Points allotted to each team: +2

**2. You decide to defend, and your ally decides to attack (or vice versa). You “LIVE TO FIGHT ANOTHER DAY!” with virtually no loss of life. However, no progress is made in the war. The unsupported attacking side is routed.**

Points allotted to the defending side: +3

Points allotted to the attacking side: -5

**3. You decide to defend and your ally decides to defend.**

*The outcome is DEFEAT with low loss of life. However, you are taken prisoner by the enemy.*

Points allotted to each team: -1

**Schedule & Scorecard**

(Number of silent and talking rounds can vary depending on time & numbers)



NATIONS	CANADIAN PTS	BRITISH PTS	FRENCH PTS
CANADA & BRITAIN (Silent)			None
BRITAIN & FRANCE (Silent)	None		
CANADA & FRANCE (Silent)		None	



NATIONS	CANADIAN PTS	BRITISH PTS	FRENCH PTS
CANADA & BRITAIN (Silent)			None



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<b>BRITAIN &amp; FRANCE (Silent)</b>	<b>None</b>		
<b>CANADA &amp; FRANCE (Silent)</b>		<b>None</b>	

## FULL GROUP DISCUSSION



<b>CANADA &amp; BRITAIN (Talking)</b>			<b>None</b>
<b>BRITAIN &amp; FRANCE (Talking)</b>	<b>None</b>		
<b>CANADA &amp; FRANCE (Talking)</b>		<b>None</b>	

<b>CANADA &amp; BRITAIN (Talking)</b>			<b>None</b>
<b>BRITAIN &amp; FRANCE (Talking)</b>	<b>None</b>		
<b>CANADA &amp; FRANCE (Talking)</b>		<b>None</b>	

<b>TOTALS:</b>			
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## Discussion Questions

***Allow the students the opportunity to describe their experiences and learning from the activity. If prodding is required, here are some possible questions with which to stimulate discussion:***

Questions related directly to the activity:

- Did the opportunity to communicate with other nations help or hinder your decision making?
- Was there a “best option” to choose in this simulation? Is there a winning strategy?
- How did trust influence your choice?
- Did you find it easy or difficult to align interests with other countries? Why or why not?

Questions of a more universal, theoretical nature related to this activity:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of consensus-based decision-making?
- Do integrity and the ability to listen have any role to play in critical decision-making?
- Should individual or collective interests be prioritized in decision-making
- Which is more important: victory or the preservation of life?
- Are “victory” and “defeat” easy to define?

# ATTACK

# DEFEND