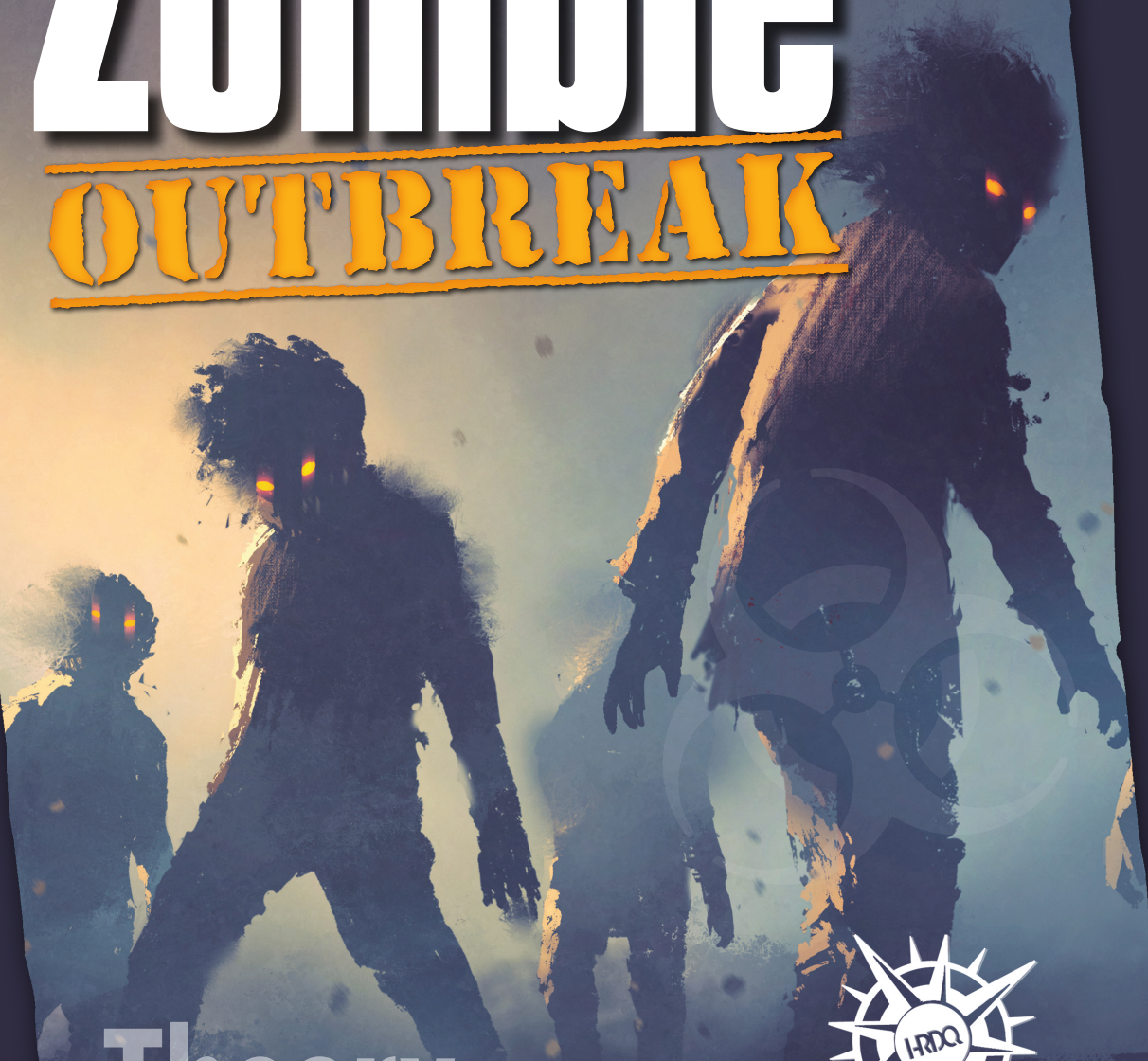


# Zombie

## OUTBREAK



Theory  
Background



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# ZOMBIE OUTBREAK

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# Theory Background

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## ACHIEVING TEAM SYNERGY

Perhaps one of the most useful purposes of survival simulations is their ability to demonstrate the concept of synergy in a convincing way. *Syn* means together. The *energy* generated through collective thought and discussion can exceed the energy generated by one person working alone. *Synergy* is the combining of one element with another to achieve a greater total impact than the mere sum of the parts. Through the process of discussion, people can release their creative energies and achieve a significantly greater result. Authors of survival simulations define synergy differently. Sometimes it is defined as producing a team score that is lower (better) than the average individual score in the team. We define synergy as achieving a team score that is lower than the best (lowest) single individual score on the team. In other words, to achieve a synergistic result, the team must incorporate the best thinking of its best resource and, through discussion, go beyond that best resource. While this may be harder to achieve in an exercise such as this, we believe it is a more accurate way of describing synergy. Why would a team want simply to do better than the average of its members? Why not aim for exceeding the best efforts of its most knowledgeable member?

A study conducted at Umea University in Sweden confirmed the concept of team synergy. In its analysis of 387 students in 104 teams, it found that 69.23% of teams scored higher on assignments than the highest scoring individual team member, and 93.26% of teams scored higher than the average score of its team members. (Akdamir and Kirmani, 2008).

Refer to Figure 1: A Model of Team Synergy. The top of the pyramid represents the individual expertise, experience, knowledge, and skills that individuals in a team possess. The way in which the team taps into its individual resources is the key to building synergy. Participants will learn about this after the simulation, when they compare individual scores to their team score to see if their team achieved synergy.

The second point of the triangle, problem solving, reflects the use of an organized system for approaching problems and developing solutions. If the team has a shared frame of reference for problem solving, the chances of reaching synergy are increased. We provide a five-step problem-solving model on page 8 of the Participant Guide for participants to use in their teams to maximize their problem-solving skills.

The final point of the triangle represents the skillful use of interpersonal skills during a discussion. The potential for a synergistic outcome is increased if the team possesses the interpersonal skills necessary to communicate their ideas effectively. Information for conducting effective team discussions is presented in Team Decision Making.

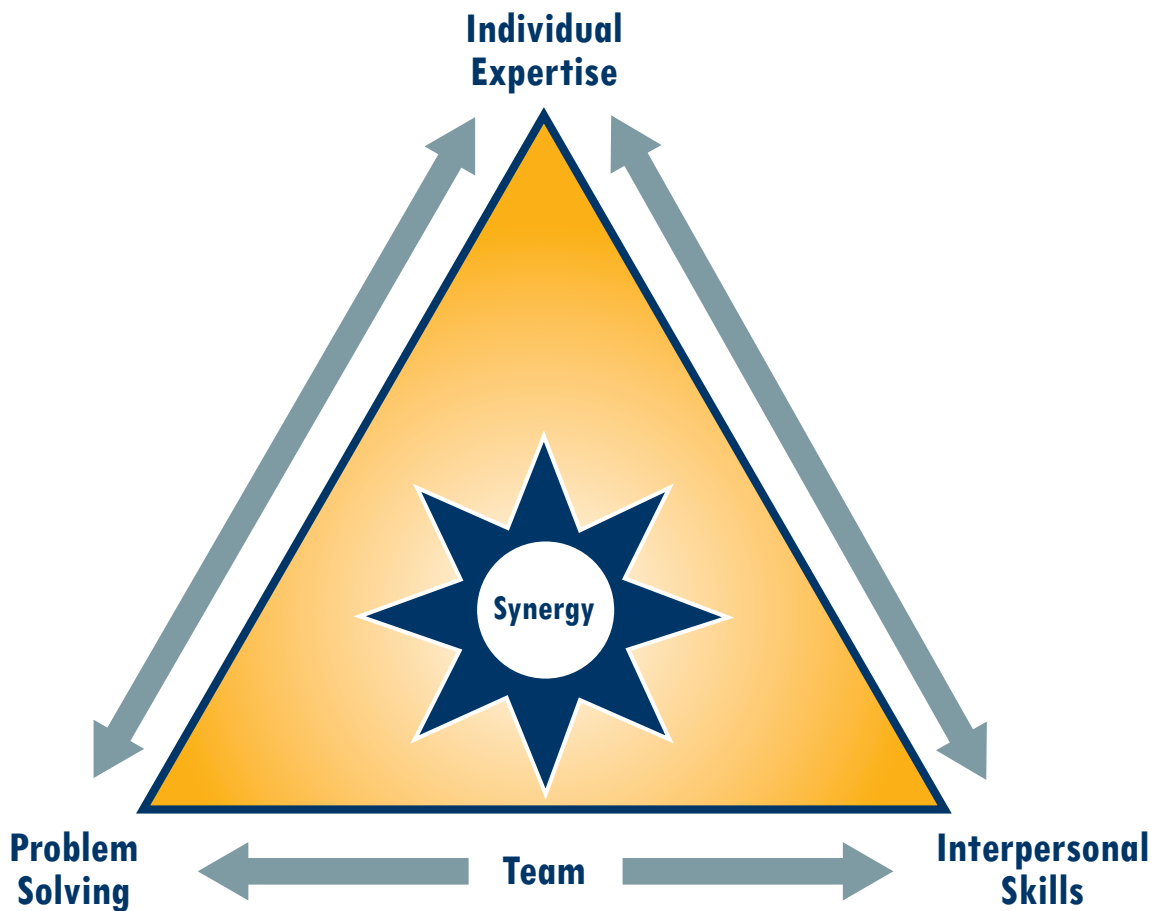


Figure 1. A Model of Team Synergy

## TEAM DECISION MAKING

Many situations call for decisions to be made by teams rather than by individuals acting on their own, and there are good reasons for this. Most studies show that teams make better decisions (i.e., have more successful outcomes) than individuals do. One important study (Blinder and Morgan, 2000) found that not only do teams make better decisions, they were no slower in reaching those decisions than individuals were. One of the main objectives of this simulation is to improve participants' team decision making skills.

### Conducting Effective Discussions

Effective discussions are a prerequisite to making effective decisions as a team. The purpose of this information is to provide teams with strategies and behaviors to make the most effective decisions possible together. However, effective team decisions are dependent on a crucial condition: They are most successful when team members feel free to express diverse opinions, even when those viewpoints differ from the leader or dominant personality in the team (Charness and Sutter, 2012). And the opposite is true—when teams operate with an aggressive or competitive approach to the discussion, that can lead to misrepresenting information, resulting in less successful decisions (Branson, Steele, and Sung, 2010). Keeping in mind that diversity of opinions often leads to better decisions **and** can fuel conflict and misunderstandings, it's critical to follow certain behaviors for constructive discussions in order to maximize the effectiveness of team decisions. These behaviors are active listening, respectful communication, and agreeable disagreement. Another way to support constructive discussions is to follow a set problem-solving process.

### Reaching Consensus

Consensus is a particular method of team decision making that takes into account the knowledge and perspectives of individual team members. In the simulation, we describe three primary conditions that are necessary to reach consensus. A study published in the *Academy of Management Journal* reported that teams who used team decision making reported a higher level of satisfaction and greater acceptance of the team's decision than participants who engaged in other methods of decision making. (Schweiger, Sandberg, and Ragan, 1986).

Other types of team decision making have significant drawbacks: When a majority vote is used, up to half the members may be unhappy with the decision. They may feel their concerns have been ignored, which can lead to discontent if not outright conflict. On the other hand, a unanimous vote may be impossible to achieve, especially in a reasonable time frame.

## LEARN MORE

Prepare your team for high-stress decision making with *Zombie Outbreak*. This engaging simulation challenges participants to collaborate and make critical decisions under pressure, fostering essential skills like consensus decision making, problem solving, communication, and conflict resolution. Equip your team with the tools they need to thrive in any situation.



**LEARN MORE**

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*Please note that there are restrictions to accessing some of the links below.*

Akdemir, Fahri and Farooq Ahmad Kirmani. "Synergy: A Synthetic Study on Teams." Master's thesis, Umea University, 2008.

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