

Summing Up Social Dilemmas Activity

(30-40 minutes)

Materials you will need

- Printed copies of the “Summing Up Posters”
- Small stickers or post-it notes in three different colors
- Tape

Instructions

1. Prior to class, tape the 10 “summing up posters” (from [summing_up_posters.pdf](#)) to the wall around the classroom.
2. On the board (or projected on the screen) identify the 3 colors of the stickers or post-its each with a social dilemma. For instance, it might be:

Red = Externalities
Blue = Coordination Trap
Green = Commitment Problem

3. Divide the class into groups of 4-8 students each. Give each individual a bunch of each color of sticker or post-it. (6 or so of each color.)
4. Have them walk around the room, as a group, looking at the posters. Each poster has a simple claim on it. Tell them that their job is to decide whether each claim is best understood as an instance of an externalities problem, a coordination trap, or a commitment problem. They should deliberate with their group, but they do not need to reach consensus. Each person can make his or her own decision.
5. Once they’ve decided what they think, they should put the relevant sticker on the poster and move on to the next one. Give them 20-30 minutes.
6. Once all groups have finished, choose a few posters (at least one of each kind of problem) where there is considerable diversity of opinion. *There is always lots of disagreement, so this shouldn't be a problem.* Ask someone who gave each answer to explain why they put that. Allow them to talk about it a bit and see whether they change their minds.

In the course of this debrief, it is very important to circle back to the defining characteristics of each of the problems. For instance, for a coordination trap, it is important to push them to think about whether, in the scenario they think is a coordination trap, they can describe the scenario as a simple game with more than one equilibrium. When you do so, you will see lights of understanding go on for a bunch of students. (The home security sign poster is particularly effective for this.)