Threat Capacity. At various times throughout the cold war, the United States and the Soviet Union were belligerent, each asserting superiority and threatening to annihilate the other. Is threat an effective way to resolve social dilemmas? An early investigation by Deutsch and Krauss (1960) addressed this issue. Participants were asked to imagine that they were in charge of a trucking company. One person was chosen to head a company called Acme and the other to head a company called Bolt. Their task was to transport merchandise to a destination. For each of 20 trips, they received 60 cents minus expenses. Expenses were calculated at 1 cent per second, so if a trip took 35 seconds to complete, the participant would receive 25 cents (60 \( - 35 \)). If the trip took longer than 60 seconds, the participant would lose money.

Figure 9.9 shows that the quickest route to the specified destination was a one-lane road in the middle. However, this road was so narrow that it could be used by only one truck at a time. Consequently, the participants had to either cooperate or use the much longer alternate route, which cost them 10 cents on each trip. Three experimental conditions were created. In one condition, neither company could control the road’s access. In another condition, known as the unilateral-threat condition, one of the companies was given the power to block the other’s access to the road. In a third condition, both companies had roadblocks, so both possessed the capacity to thwart the other from quickly reaching its destination.

**FIGURE 9.9**
The Acme–Bolt Trucking Game

Playing the role of a trucking company executive, participants earn points by driving their truck from a starting point to their destination as quickly as possible. The quickest route is the one-lane road in the middle, but only one truck can pass on the road at any time. To maximize their profits, each company must cooperate with the other. In some versions of the study, some of the participants were given gates they could use to block the other company’s progress on the one-lane road.

Source: Deutsch and Krauss (1960).