
Decision Making Process

Training Module

Enabling a group to create consensus and reach closure

This training module was developed by ICA colleagues Jim Troxel and Karen Snyder when they were part of Millennia Consulting, circa 2007, and was used in the DePaul University Facilitation Certificate Program.



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DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Doing something with the input you've brainstormed and organized.

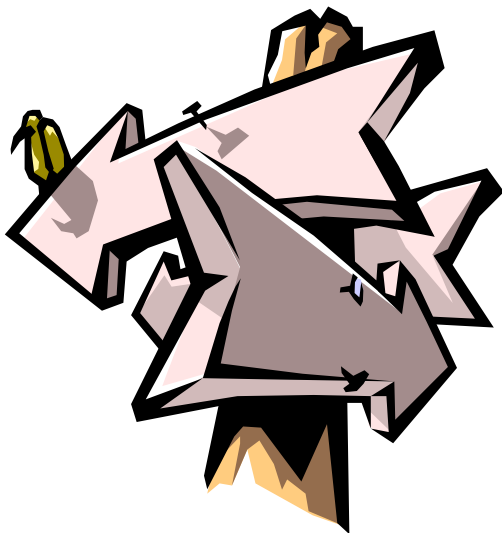
Having facilitated a group in workshop and affinity methods doesn't necessarily mean that your team has made any decisions. It might, but frequently it hasn't.

Included here are several ways you can guide your team in prioritizing, narrowing, ranking or voting on the best output from the workshop or affinity processes.

Sometimes these steps will be necessary, sometimes not. Nevertheless, gaining competency in the tools will enable you to guide your team to meaningful conclusions.

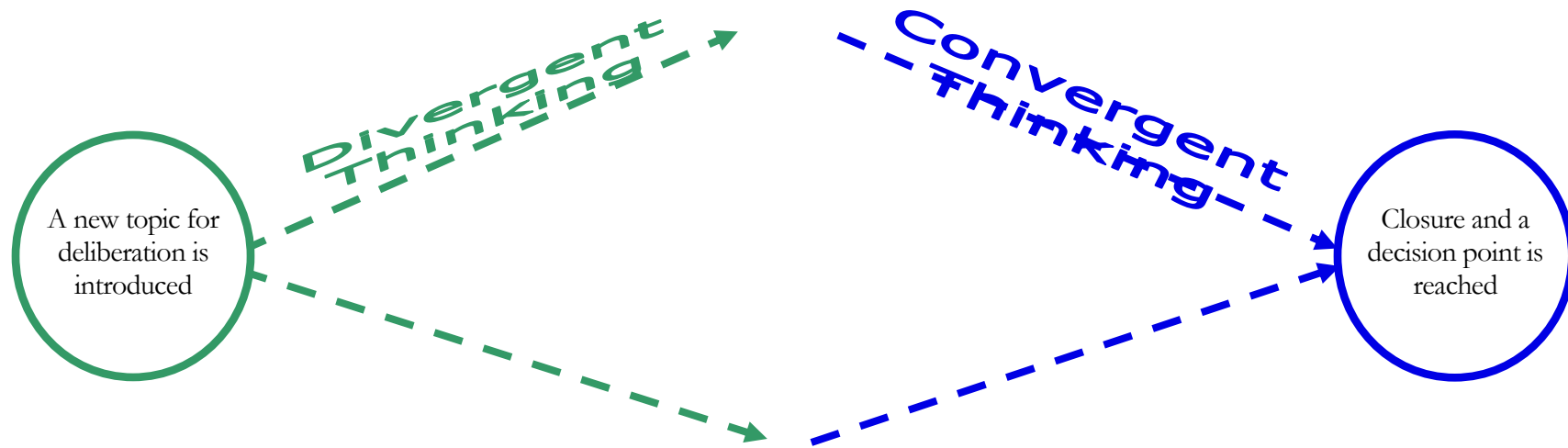
Learning Objectives

- To provide an overview of various tools for gathering, processing and evaluating a data input.
- To identify specific uses of these tools in the Team Process.
- To provide practice opportunities of these tools.



DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

A Classic Model



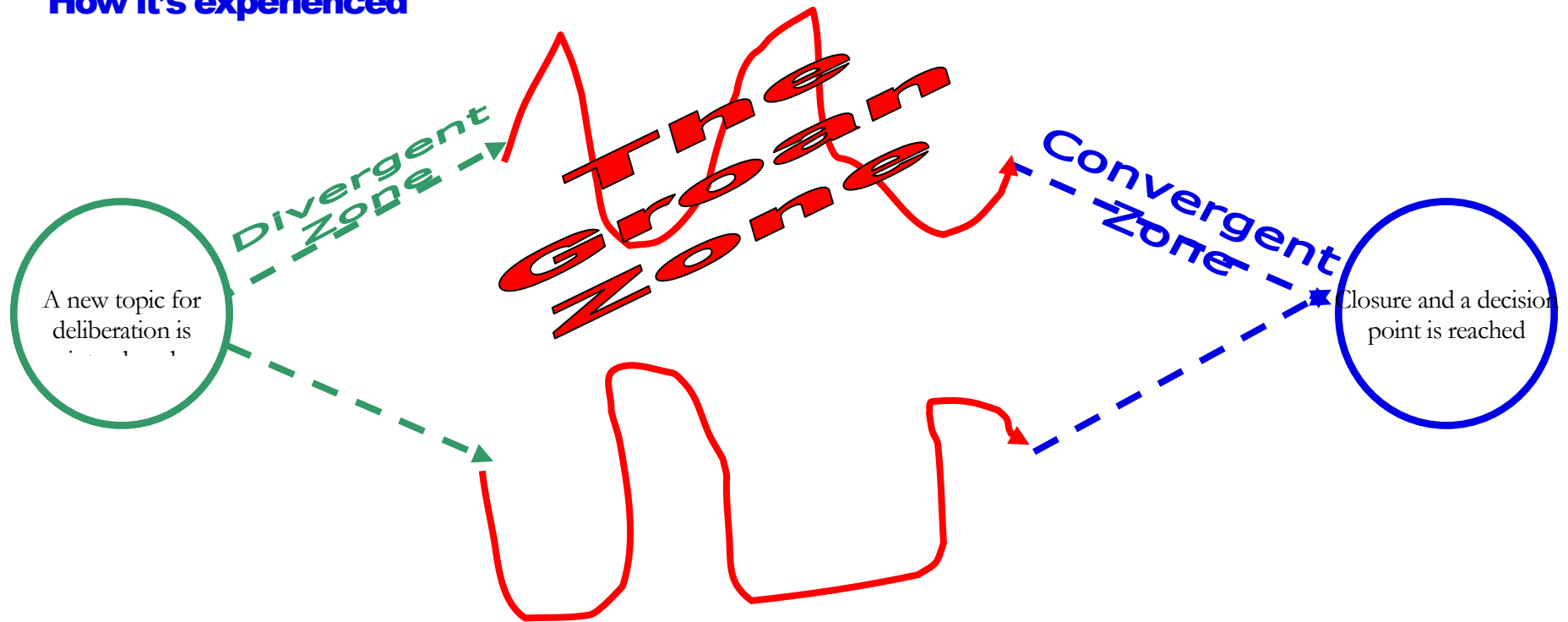
DIVERGENT THINKING

- Individual members need to express their own points of view
- Generate alternatives
- Free-for-all discussion
- Gathering diverse points of view
- Unpacking the logic of a problem
- Seeing multiple perspectives
- Appreciating differences

CONVERGENT THINKING

- Individual members want to narrow their differences and aim the discussion toward closure
- Evaluating alternatives
- Summarizing key points
- Sorting ideas into categories
- Arriving at a general conclusion
- Shared understanding
- Affirming agreements

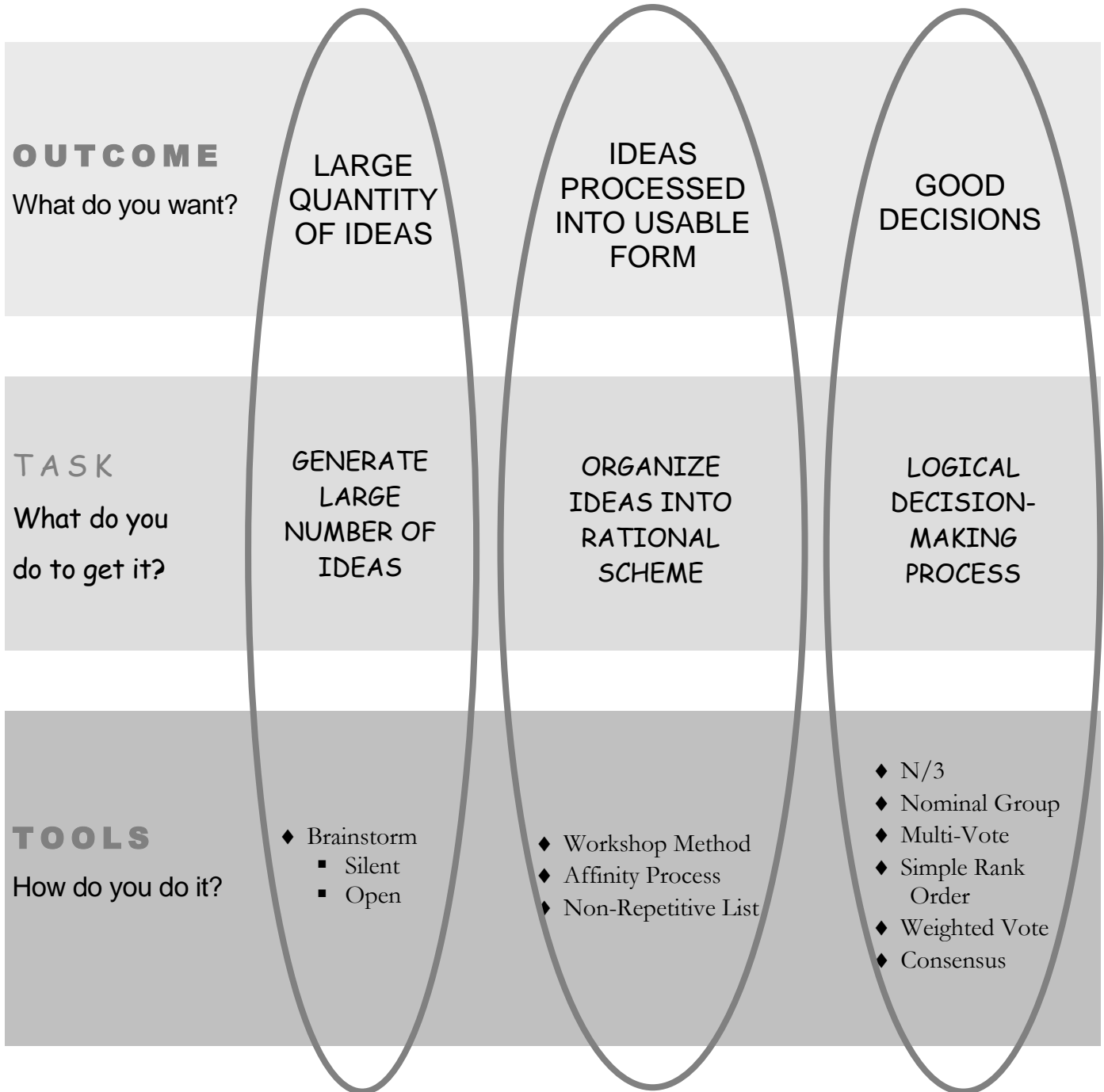
How it's experienced



Sam Kaner and his colleagues at “Community at Work” developed “The Groan Zone” insight. This model is used as a diagnostic tool, a road map, or a teaching tool to show groups, with a shared language and shared points of reference of their experience, that decision-making does not always follow an easy and simple path. It helps to validate and legitimize the hidden aspects of everyday life in groups.

Tools For Moving

From Divergence  To Convergence



Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a tool to quickly generate lots of data.

Steps for Brainstorming

1. Write a clear “focus question” on flip chart paper so it is visible to everyone. Review the focus question to make sure everyone understands the issue. e.g., “What are some ways to improve the health of employees at our facility?” Stay focused on this topic; take no tangents. Agree on the focus question.
2. Explain the rules of brainstorming (below).
3. Give people a few minutes of **silent** thinking time. Ask them to jot down their ideas on paper.
4. Go around the table and have each person say **one** (not all) of his or her ideas. Write the ideas on flip chart paper so that all can see. One person speaks at a time. When someone is out of ideas, they should simply say, “pass.” Continue until everyone passes. Going around ensures that you don’t drown out that quiet, brilliant mumbler in the back of the room.
5. Once all ideas are up, go over the list:
 - ❑ To provide an opportunity for last minute ideas
 - ❑ To ask if clarification is needed from the originator of any idea
 - ❑ To combine or eliminate similar ideas – but only if the originators agree

Purpose of Brainstorming:

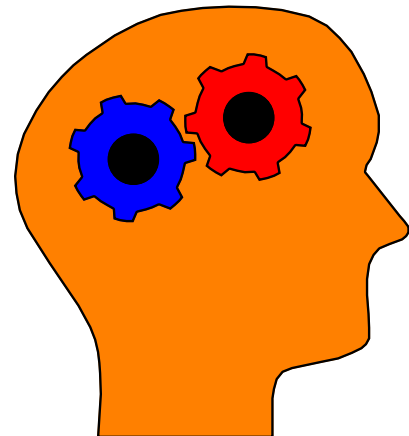
To quickly generate a lot of ideas, issues, problems, solutions

Use When:

- You need to identify problem areas, possible causes of problems, potential solutions
- You need to involve everyone in a project
- You need to generate excitement and energy

Materials Needed:

Flip chart, marker, masking tape



“Rules” for Brainstorming

- Defer Judgment. There are no criticisms, comments or discussions while the list is being compiled! Judgment or interpretation of ideas is deferred to the evaluation time after the idea-finding ends.
- Quantity of ideas is the goal. The more ideas to choose from, the better the chance of great ones emerging.
- No idea is too wild! Adopt a “try anything” attitude; don’t worry about looking foolish/silly. Freewheeling is welcomed, and all ideas are worthwhile and encouraged.
- Build (“Piggyback/hitchhike”) on other’s ideas; all ideas don’t have to be original. Synergy is when one plus one equals thirty-nine!
- Push yourself when you seem to run out of ideas – the best ideas often emerge last.

**USE BRAINSTORMING
WHEN**

- ✓ There is a need to collect many ideas from individuals affected by an issue, to generate multiple alternatives, or to search out all possible solutions.
- ✓ Team members each have input to a particular question or issue.
- Be visual. Sketch ideas to help people understand them if necessary. Be imaginal.
- Criticism, judgment, or interpretation of ideas is deferred to the evaluation time after idea-finding ends.

Variation: Silent Brainstorming

1. Write the focus question so it is visible to everyone and clarify, without discussion, if needed. (Circulate the focus question prior to the brainstorming session if possible, so participants can reflect on the issue.)
2. Agree on the focus question.
3. Individuals silently write responses to the focus question. Each response is printed in large letters on a separate post-it note.
4. All post-it notes are then displayed publicly on a flipchart, wall, or table.
5. Post-it notes can then be reviewed silently or read aloud.
6. Clarify and discuss each idea or any that are unclear. Statements may be combined, edited, or removed only if the originator agrees.
7. Add any additional ideas stimulated by reviewing the list.

BLOCKS TO SUCCESSFUL BRAINSTORMING

- ✓ The subject is controversial.
- ✓ There is a strong hierarchy.
- ✓ Participants might hesitate to respond publicly.
- ✓ There are language barriers within the group.

USE SILENT BRAINSTORMING WHEN:

- ✓ Beginning brainstorming before defining the issue.
- ✓ Not agreeing on the focus question before beginning to brainstorm.
- ✓ Criticizing or judging ideas offered during brainstorming.
- ✓ Evaluating ideas before completing the idea-finding.
- ✓ Holding back to avoid appearing "foolish or silly."
- ✓ Sticking to acceptable or traditional ideas.

Non-Repetitive List

Steps for Constructing a Non-Repetitive List

1. Begin with silent brainstorming.
2. Build the non-repetitive list by going around the circle and getting one idea from each person in turn until all suggestions are recorded on the flipchart. Individuals are asked to determine the similarity of their ideas to previously stated ones and not to give a suggestion that has already been listed by someone else. In this way the list becomes non-repetitive.

DEFINITION

The non-repetitive list is a tool used to collect ideas generated from silent brainstorming, without duplication.

Variation

Sometimes knowing the similarity of ideas within the group at this stage is helpful, especially if decision-making is to follow.

Vary step 2 as follows:

- 2a. Build the non-repetitive list by going around the circle and getting one idea from each person in turn until all suggestions are recorded on the flipchart.
- 2b. Individuals are asked to indicate, by a show of hands, if they also had privately listed any ideas on the list.
- 2c. Put a check mark for each person who raised their hand. Ideas or options most frequently thought of have more check marks.

WHEN TO USE A NON REPETITIVE LIST

- ✓ Many people need to have input into building a list
- ✓ Eliminating duplicate ideas is desirable
- ✓ There is little conflict associated with the topic so participants will be more likely to see the commonality between ideas and less likely to own the particular words used to state the idea

N/3 Technique

Purpose

Use the N/3 technique to narrow a list of brainstormed ideas to the most important items.

Individuals choose their top ideas, placing equal weight on each item. The number of “top ideas” they are asked to select is 1/3 the number of total initial items. When the votes are tallied, a rank order can then be established based on the number of votes. This is different from the Simple Rank Order technique, where individuals rank their top choices.

The N/3 technique produces a list of ideas with the most important items indicated by a greater number and the less important items with a smaller number.

Process

1. Assign a letter to each brainstormed idea. If there are more than 26 ideas, use double letters and then triple letters, if necessary (i.e., A-Z, then AA-ZZ, then AAA-ZZZ).
2. Divide the total number of ideas generated by 3 to determine the number of votes each member should use. For example: If there are 24 ideas, each person gets 8 votes.
3. Group members vote to select the most important ideas/issues. Each vote must go to a separate idea. Participants cannot weight their choices by placing two votes for one item. Read each letter; ask members to raise their hands if they voted for it.
4. Construct another flipchart with top choices, and decide if you want to narrow the list of items again. This will reduce the distraction of looking at all the ideas generated and trying to focus on the top ideas.

M A T E R I A L S

- ✓ Flipchart
- ✓ Markers
- ✓ Masking tape
- ✓ “Post-it” notes (optional)
- ✓ List of items

N O T E

Another option is to give each participant one small post-it note or dot for each vote. Ask participants to cast votes by placing notes or dots on the flipchart next to their top choices.

Nominal Group Technique

Steps For Using the Technique

1. Develop a list of options/ideas/solutions through silent brainstorming.
2. Generate a non-repetitive list.
3. Clarify and discuss ideas on the list. Statements may be combined, edited, or removed from the list only if the originator agrees.
4. Prioritize the options/ideas/solutions.
 - a. Give each item on the list a letter.
 - b. Have each individual rank all items on the list according to their preference. Their top preference gets a point value equal to the total number of ideas on the list. Their least preferred item is given a point value of 1.
 - c. The point value for each item is collected from each individual and written by that item letter on a flipchart template. (An example is on the next page.)
 - d. The point value is totaled for each item. The item with the highest point total is the group's top selection. The second highest point total is the group's second highest option or second favorite idea.
 - e. Following this, review priorities and discuss individual reactions to the group's selection.

DEFINITION

The nominal group technique is a structured way to prioritize a list of options/ideas.

USE THE NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE WHEN

- ✓ All or some of the group members are new to each other.
- ✓ When the issue is highly controversial.
- ✓ When the group is stuck in disagreement.

Nominal Group Technique Template

Draw this template on a flipchart

Write one team member's name and ratings in each column

List the items down the side	Team Members								Total <i>Add across</i>
A									
B									
C									
D									
E									
F									
G									

Top priority = 7 points

Second priority = 6 points, etc.

Multi-Vote

Steps For Multi-Voting

1. Develop a List
 - a. Develop a non-repetitive list of workable options, solutions, and ideas. This can be done with a formal brainstorming session, the discussion method, etc.
 - b. Number each item on the list.
2. Develop the Criteria for Selection
 - a. Quickly brainstorm a list of values that could be used for selection, e.g., quick, cheap, easy to do, requires the least amount of change, etc.
 - b. As a group, reach consensus on the 3-4 values you will use for multi-voting.
3. Multi-Vote to Narrow the List
 - a. Review each idea, option, or potential solution on the group's list.
 - b. Determine the number of ideas/options/solutions each person can select by taking one-third (1/3) of the total solutions on your list.
 - c. Using the criteria decided on earlier as a guide, each person selects the ideas/options/solutions that they feel best meet the criteria.
 - d. Each person puts a hash mark (///) next to each idea/option/solution they selected. (This is the number identified in #2 above.)
 - e. The ideas/options/solutions most favored by the group will have the most hash marks.
Note: If the number selected is still too large to be workable, the group may repeat steps #2 - #5 again.

DEFINITION

The multi-vote is a structured technique for evaluating and selecting several ideas simultaneously.

**USE THE MULTI - VOTE
TECHNIQUE WHEN**

- ✓ The group has lots of ideas/options and needs to narrow the possibilities.
- ✓ The group needs to select several ideas or options simultaneously.

Multi-Vote Template

Draw this template on a flipchart

Write one selection criteria and ratings in each column

List the items down the side	Criteria								Total <i>Add across</i>
A									
B									
C									
D									
E									
F									
G									

Top priority = 7 points

Second priority = 6 points, etc.

Weighted Vote

Steps for using the technique:

1. Develop a list of workable options, solutions, and ideas. This can be done with a formal brainstorming session, by the discussion method, etc.
2. Number each item on the list.
3. Each individual selects their top three (3) options, solutions and assigns point value as follows:

Top preference = 5

Middle preference = 3

Least preferred = 1

4. The point value for each item is collected from each individual and written by that item number on the original brainstorm list.
5. The point value is totaled for each item. The item with the highest point total is the group's top selection. The second highest point total is the group's second highest option or second favorite solution
6. Following this review of priority, discuss individual reactions to the group's selection to validate the top solution or option.

DEFINITION

The weighted vote is a structured technique for decision-making with a group.

USE THE WEIGHTED VOTE TECHNIQUE WHEN

- ✓ A clear preference or choice from among a few options is needed.
- ✓ The group needs to know the top three preferences.

Spend Your Dots

What: Spend Your Dots allows a team to prioritize ideas by revealing members' level of support for various options.

Why: For the team to reach consensus, you need to help members set priorities. This process allows the team to set priorities in a fair and non-threatening manner.

Process:

1. Depending on the number of ideas that need to be prioritized, each team member receives the same number of self-stick dots.
2. Team members use their dots to prioritize.
 - a. For equal distribution, each member puts each of his or her dots on the idea. A member can put only one dot on each name card.
 - b. For weighted distribution, each member puts each of his or her dots on the idea for one or more ideas. A member can put anywhere from one to the total number of dots on a particular idea.
3. After all dots have been applied, the ideas with the most dots are the top-priority items.

**USE THE SPEND YOUR DOTS
TECHNIQUE WHEN:**

This method is a variation of N/3, Nominal Group, Multi-Vote, and Weighted Vote techniques. Instead of having each person "call out" their votes, team members use dots and place them alongside or within the template being used.



Consensus

Consensus is . . .

... finding a proposal acceptable enough that all members can support it.

Consensus is not . . .

... a unanimous vote - it may not be everyone's first priority.

Consensus is . . .

... finding a proposal which no member opposes.

Consensus is not . . .

... a majority vote. In a majority vote, only people in the majority get something they are happy with. Persons in the minority may get something they are unhappy with and don't want at all.

Consensus is . . .

... particularly suitable for smaller groups that share a common goal and for groups where a high degree of cohesiveness is important.

Consensus is not . . .

... watered down or least common denominator thinking.

Consensus is . . .

... an opportunity for each person to grasp that they are responsible for the group and its consensus even though they may disagree with it.

USE CONSENSUS WHEN

The decision-making of the group is best served by:

- ✓ Achieving agreement on a common goal.
- ✓ Trust and respect between the members during deliberations.
- ✓ A commitment by members to clarify issues, listen to each other and seek alternatives if impasses are encountered.
- ✓ When issues need agreement of the entire group and which decisions may best not be made by other means.

Steps for Arriving at Decisions Using Consensus

In the general public, consensus means general agreement, like when a decision is announced after an election. Here, a consensus is TAKEN. In facilitated group deliberations, however, a consensus is MADE. That is, it is decided upon and announced by a member of the group that is reviewing options. This person may or may not agree with his or her announcement. The statement of the consensus relates to what the group wants at this time, as objectively understood as possible by the person making the consensus.

1. Identify the issue under consideration. Review any useful background information.
2. It may be necessary (and even desirable) for the group – before proceeding – to discuss (and decide) the criteria which they will use to evaluate and make their decision.
3. The various options should be listed on a flip chart and discussed. The “pros” and “cons” of each option should be stated.
4. At some point, one person in the groups needs to take the first stab at “stating the consensus” – what they believe they have heard and understand is what the group needs (and is in their best interest). This person proposes a course of action or a resolution to the matter at hand. This may not be what that individual person wants, but rather is what that person has heard the group wants.
5. Take time for discussion of the proposed consensus during which time everyone needs to be willing to express their opinions and actively listen and be open to all other comments. The facilitator asks the group such questions as:
 - Does everyone understand what is being proposed?
 - What questions do you have about this proposed course of action?
 - Does anyone feel that they cannot live with this decision? Why?
 - Do you object so strongly that you would block consensus?
6. It might become appropriate to poll the group. Begin by having the first person restate the consensus they are making.¹ Then ask such questions of the group as:
 - How many members favor the proposed consensus? How many are opposed?
 - Would any member block the consensus? If yes, then that person is asked to restate what they believe the consensus of the group to be. Again, this is not their stating what their own wishes are, but rather, what they believe they have heard to be the will of the group.
7. If needed, repeat the similar conversation as in step 5. Again, it may be necessary to poll the group.

¹ On the last page of this handout is another way to take such a poll, called the “Fist to Five” technique.

Decision-Making Techniques

8. The facilitator takes notes of flipchart for easy tracking of the conversation (the proposed options, pros and cons of each, the statement of consensus and editing of the statement).
9. Avoid the temptation of trying to reduce conflict in the group. If the issue is important to everyone, there will be conflict and differences. Keep the conversation focused on the objective plane as much as possible. As the conversation continues, and tension mounts, harken back to the criteria through which the group outlined (step 2) at the beginning as a basis for objectively making the consensus. Also, avoid the temptation of allowing someone who is passionate to simply “give in”. Consensus should not be decision-making by wearing others down. If anyone displays exasperation or frustration, ask them directly about the points below (9).
10. Consensus is reached when everyone in the group can say:
 - I believe that I understand everyone’s viewpoints.
 - I believe that my position has been heard by the group.
 - I will support the group's decision, whether I am in full agreement or not, because it was arrived at openly and fairly.
11. Repeat steps 4-9 until consensus is reached.
12. If an impasse is reached:
 - Request that more information be gathered and presented to the group.
 - Request that the person(s) blocking consensus take responsibility for bringing a new proposal to the group and decide the date, time and place for the meeting.

FIST TO FIVE

This is a simple way to quickly assess how members of a group stand with respect to a proposal or draft decision.

Restate the proposal or draft decision under consideration, and then ask everyone to indicate their level of support for the idea with their hands:

- A fist means they feel the idea is not good and want to block it
- Putting up one or more fingers indicates various levels of support:
 - One finger says, “I don’t like this idea but I won’t block it”
 - Two means “I don’t agree but it may work”
 - Three means “I’m neutral and it may work”
 - Four means “This is a good idea and will work”
 - A full hand raised signifies “It’s a great idea and I’ll be one of the leaders”.

The “Fist to Five” indicator provides the opportunity for further discussion. After a show of support, if 75% percent or more are NOT in agreement, there is no sufficient consensus. Those not in agreement suggest what it would take to move to a higher level of support and everyone works together to expand the common ground.

