

How to Facilitate a Consensus Workshop

Note: We were first exposed to this process by www.ica-usa.org in their TOP (Technology of Participation) course. We encourage firms to attend this course or bring in a TOP Instructor to learn this and other facilitation processes in more detail.

Overview:

One of the greatest frustrations about the world of business is the wasted time spent in meetings that:

- 1) are poorly facilitated
- 2) lack a clear agenda
- 3) are dominated by the loud at the expense of the quiet
- 4) are lacking defined outcomes or accountability to the findings

A consensus workshop addresses these issues and makes the facilitator look like a hero.

Consensus Workshop Step-by-Step:

- 1) Setting the Rational and Experiential Aims
 - a. What tangible outcome do you want from the session?
 - b. How do you want people to feel during and following the workshop?
- 2) Designing Your Consensus Question
 - a. What are the key elements of . . . ?
 - b. What critical factors impact . . . ?
 - c. What key activities are important to our success?
- 3) Supplies
 - a. Sticky wall (Fabric, 2" masking tape, repositionable spray adhesive*)
 - b. ½ sheets of lightly colored paper
 - c. Scented markers
- 4) Step-by-Step
 - a. Small Group Process
 - i. Personal Brainstorming: Privately make a list of answers to the key question.
 - ii. Share your personal brainstorming within a small group. Discuss each person's answers to the question.
 - iii. Identify 3-5 submissions to be shared with the larger group.
 - iv. Write each of the 3-5 submissions on a ½ sheet (1 idea per sheet) using 3-5 words to encompass the idea.
 - b. Large Group Process
 - i. Each small group will place their submissions on the sticky wall.
 - ii. Review each submission. Ask for clarification on the submissions when appropriate (always refer to the creator of the submission for the concept they were trying to get across) and allow discussion to ensue.
 - iii. Sort submissions into broad themes. This generally results in 4-6 themes with a few outliers.
 - iv. Acknowledge the outliers, leaving them on the perimeter of the sticky wall.
 - v. Focus on the consensus themes. Place "chapter titles" on the top of each grouping of ideas that fit under a shared theme.

Consensus Output:

Sometimes the workshop is its own outcome and no further follow-up is needed. Other times the process lays a foundation for setting priorities for a planning session. At a minimum, you have led a powerful process that engages everyone and begins to explore and organize issues for further discussion.

*Note: Be sure to spray ahead of time to allow any fumes to dissipate prior to participants' arrival.

CONSENSUS WORKSHOP METHOD OVERVIEW

Workshop Question: Is a question to which the workshop content & product are a response.

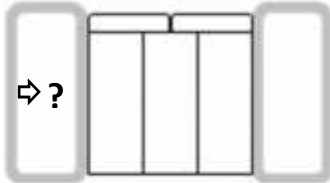
RATIONAL AIM

What the group needs to KNOW – the product or decision

EXPERIENTIAL AIM

How the group needs to BE different by the end of the workshop

CONTEXT

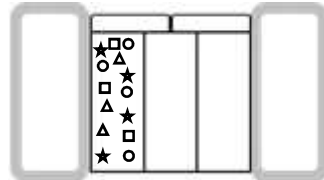


Set the Stage

1. State the purpose or aim of the workshop.
2. Clarify the workshop question.
3. Briefly outline the process and time frame.
4. Lead the group in talking about the topic for a few minutes using a short Focused Conversation.

3-10 Minutes

BRAINSTORM

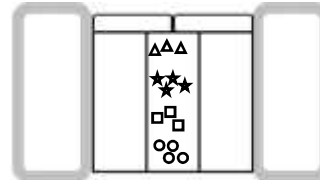


Generate New Ideas

1. Individually list answers to the workshop question.
2. Select important ideas and write on cards individually or in teams.
3. Pass up first round of cards.

5-15 Minutes

GROUP

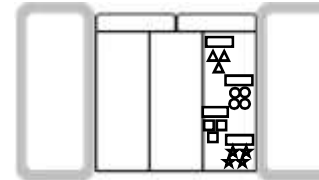


Form New Relationships

1. Form 4-6 pairs that clearly go together.
2. Ask for cards that are different and develop clusters.
3. Quickly give each cluster a 1-2 word tag.
4. Mark the remaining cards with tag and pass up.

7-20 Minutes

NAME

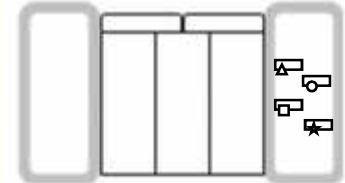


Discern the Consensus

1. Talk through the largest cluster first.
2. Give the cluster a 3-5 word name or title which answers the workshop question.
3. Repeat for the remaining clusters.

10-30 Minutes

RESOLVE



Confirm the Resolve

1. Focus the group on this consensus by reading all the title cards.
2. Discuss the significance of the consensus.
3. Create a chart or visual image to hold the consensus (optional).
4. Discuss the next steps and implications.

5-15 Minutes

These times represent from 30-90 minutes.