ANALYSIS FOR DECISION MAKING:

Using Non – Quantitative Group Methods

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INTRODUCTION

Administrators need good information and good ideas. Sometimes an administrator has all the information and ideas needed. In other situations, substantial efforts may be required to gather the information or generate and evaluate the ideas.

Suppose:

'You believe the staff in your organization needs additional training and you have the funds to develop a training program. But you only have a general feel for the type of training needed and who needs what. How can you pinpoint the most important training needs in the organization?

'One of the departments in your organization has had an exceptionally high turnover rate for the past six months. The turnover is taking a toll in money and departmental effectiveness. Meetings with the department head have not provided a good understanding of why the turnover has gotten so high or what can be done to reduce it. How can you find out what you need to know to deal responsibly with this situation?

'Your staff has developed a new program idea which they think will attract a lot of client interest and participation.

You like the idea, but would like some assurance that community will respond positively before investing scarce resource. How should you proceed?

'The organization is undertaking a strategic planning effort. An important first step is to identify and develop some consensus about the key issues facing the organization as a first phase in the planning process.
How can this be done in an effective way?

'You have a staff meeting planned to develop a response to a problem of concern to the organization. You want to make the most effective use of the time and the ideas of the staff. How should you organize and run the meeting?

These are a few of the vary real situations which may face an organization – perhaps your own. You probably can identify many others situations which call for information, ideas, and some systematic thought to effectively resolve.

Purpose and Use of This Publication

The purpose of this publication is to provide a guide to several techniques which can be put to effective use in any organization. These methods can help:

1. Provide information directly relevant to decisions being made.
2. Offer organization members a chance to participate in meaningful and productive ways.
3. Help organize and set priorities among problems and their solutions.

Three techniques are presented here:

- Normal Technique
- Brainstorming
- Focus Group Interviews.

These are not the only methods which could have been included; many other decision aids are also available. These three were selected for several reasons. First, these techniques are potentially very useful in an administrative setting. As the example above indicates, there are many opportunities to put them to use.

Figure 1

WHY THESE TECHNIQUES?

Useful …… generate good ideas and information,
Easy to learn … a few hours and some practice,
Easy to Use.... Few special materials and not very obtrusive to the administrative process,
Add Life … can add energy to what has become routine and a little dull.

Second, these three techniques are relatively easy to and to use. One can learn the fundamentals in a few hours and become quite good after a few applications.

Third, just as they are easy to learn, so are they easy to use in an administrative setting. The special supplies needed are minimal and the appropriate technique frequently can be blended right in with other administrative activities without noticeable disruption.

Finally, used for the right purpose in the right way, these techniques can add life to what has become dull routine. For example, a weekly staff meeting or a monthly advisory committee meeting may be an ideal place to use the Nominal Group Technique or Brainstorming.

How you use this booklet is, of course, a matter of personal performance. For many users, however, I suggest that you initially go through the entire booklet, paying attention to the overview of each method and the potential uses for each. At this stage don't get too heavily into the details of individual method. While reading, note which methods you believe might be of use for you. Next, rank these potentially useful methods and then go back and read the description of individual methods in order of their importance, making notes and jotting down any ideas you have for adaptation or application to your organization. Then when you get ready to use a particular method, use the booklet along with your marginal notes as a planning guide.

One or more of the methods discussed here may be familiar to you. It may still be wise to look over the discussion for some new ideas or potential applications. I find that many of these techniques frequently are used in a very limiting way, missing much of the value which could be derived. Further, I personally find that some new and useful ideas pop into my head when I am reviewing material with which I am already familiar.

A Problem Solving Approach

The emphasis given throughout this publication is on the use of the six techniques discussed, not theory or background. Typically the techniques are used in a problem solving situation in which a decision must be made.

To help with the discussion of uses which accompanies each technique, it may be helpful to describe a problem solving approach. Steps in this approach will be referred to as the discussion unfolds.

The "textbook" method for analyzing a problem and making a dec1sion is that presented in Figure 2, of course it is not always necessary or even desirable to proceed in this comprehensive way. Nevertheless, most decision making does 1nvolve one or several of these steps, sometimes, but not always, in this order.

Figure 2

RATIONAL MODEL OF PROBLEM SOLVING

Step 1 — **DEFINE PROBLEM**

Step 2 — **DETERMINE GOALS**

Step 3 — **GENERAL ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES**

Step 4 — **EVALUATE ALTERNATIVES**

Step 5 — **CHOOSE / IMPLEMENT**

Step 6 — **EVALUATE**

Figure 3

STEPS IN THE NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE

Step 1 — **Preparation for session and assembly of group**

Step 2 — **Introduce the subject and purpose to the group**

Step 3 — **Silent idea generation by all participants**

Step 4 — **Round Robin recording of ideas from group members**

Step 5 — **Group clarification and discussion of each item**

Step 6 — **Individual listing of top 5 items on 3 * 5 cards and ranking of these items**

Step 7 — **Recording of individual rankings on flip chart and tabulation of group rankings**

Step 8 — **Discussion of group ranking**

Step 9 — **Repeat steps 6 – 8 if desired**

<u>NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE</u>

The NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE (NGT) is one of the most versatile methods available for focusing the thinking of a group of people on a situation or problem. It is a means to work with a group of people who have interest and knowledge in some program or issue.

Background and Rationale

The NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE was developed in the late 1960's as a means to involve disadvantaged citizens in developing community action programs. The developers of the technique were looking for a way to involve program clients in planning and decision making. But without abdicating the responsib1lity of program officials and staff. Since its initial development for social programs, the NGT has been used in many types of settings: corporate, not-for-profit, governmental.

The rationale for the NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE includes two key points.

First, it gives all members of a group an equal opportunity to have an input rather than running the risk of some people being squeezed out by group process. It virtually forces everyone in the group to contribute. Second, the NGT process results in a decision about priorities. The most important or useful ideas are identified and ranked as the principal product of the NGT. There is multiple input which is moved toward a consensus.

Uses

The most common uses of the NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE are to identify and prioritize problems and/or possible responses to problems. For example, a governmental agency could use the NGT to:

- Find out the problems and concerns experienced by its clients and/or

- Solicit from these clients new program ideas which might alleviate one or more problems.

Or you could use the NGT to structure a staff meeting planned to work on a problem, or a training seminar with choice available about what is to be covered and receive emphasis, or a variety of other situations.
Often the NGT is used as a means to structure a single meeting. It is also possible, however, to string several NGT sessions together in response to different phases in the decision process. Using the NGT, a group could develop a better understanding of the problem(s) being found, then in a new session identify and assess the importance of goals and still later generate and evaluate program or policy ideas. The same group might be involved in each of these stages or a different group could be used in each stage.

Planning for a NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE

Use in preparing for a NGT session, several points need to be considered. The technique allows considerable variation in group size And composition however, these should be given careful consideration to assure that your purpose is effectively served. From a process point of view, a 1 to 10 person group is ideal. However, 5 to 50 or more can be accommodated if your organizational needs call for it. If more than 15 or so are involved, the larger group can be broken down into smaller groups and the small group results consolidated. Group composition, of course, depends on purpose. It might be made up of clients, staff members, or others.

The amount of **time** required for a single NGT session ranges from around 1112 to 3 hours.

The **physical setting** for an NGT session can be almost any place away from distractions where individuals can write and flip chart sheets can be taped to the wall. If a large group is to be brought together, the location needs to be suitable for breakout groups of 7 to 10 each.

The **materials** required to conduct a session includes flip chart(s) (at least 1 for each group), markers, masking tape, writing paper, pencils, and 3 x 5 cards.

Conducting a NGT Session

The NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE is made up of a series of small, distinct steps as presented in Figure 3.

Step 1. Preparation. Like any activity, the quality of an NGT session will be improved by thorough preparation.

Preparation includes organizational matters like arranging a meeting room, getting the necessary supplies, and contacting participants, as well as substantive matters like determining the focus and scope of the session and the composition of the group.

Step 2. Introduce subject and purpose. The most 1mportant first step is to clearly present the problem/issue which is being addressed and the purpose of the session. Ideally, the central focus of the session can be expressed in a single question and this question written so that it is in front of the group throughout the process. It can be written on a flip chart sheet or at the top of individual worksheets provided to participants or both. The focus question might be something like:

- What are the principal staff training needs for the public utility department? or
- What are the problems you have encountered as a client of the preventive health program?

Step 3. Silent idea generation. Group members are now asked to write key ideas in response to the focus question presented. Members are encouraged to write on their worksheet brief phrases which come to mind in response to the question. This is to be done silently with no interaction between members of the group. (This is where the term "nominal group" originates. At this stage at least, it is a group in name only, a non-interactive group.) Group members are encouraged to write as many ideas as they can. This is a critical part of the process since most of the final product is based on what is generated in this phase.

Step 4. Round robin recording. After the silent idea generation is concluded, the ideas of individual members are recorded on a flip chart visible to the whole group. The recording is done in round robin fashion. The leader/recorder asks for one idea from one group member and then proceeds around the group giving each person an opportunity to present one idea. Each idea is numbered or lettered serially and written on the chart. As a page is filled, it is torn off and taped to the wall so the total set of ideas remains visible.

The round robin recording may go around the room several times until all ideas are recorded. Members are encouraged to provide an idea each round; but, the leader should make it comfortable for them to pass if they have exhausted their ideas. Also, individual should be encouraged to "hitchhike." If an item offered by someone else stimulates a new idea on their part, they should be encouraged to offer it. If someone else has presented an idea on an individual's worksheet he or she can cross it off, thus avoiding unnecessary duplication on the master list.

Step 5. Group clarification. After all ideas have been recorded and displayed, the next step is to discuss each idea 1n turn. A short period of discussion 1s allowed for each 1tem on the f11pchart. This discussion should be carefully moderated by the group leader to-assure approximately equal time for each 1tem and avoid long argumentation about an individual 1dea. The discussion should:

- Clarify each 1tem to assure that all participants understand its meaning
- Clarify the reasoning behind the idea-
- Expose opinions about the idea, but w1thout extensive argumentation.

Step 6. **Individual ranking.** After the discussion, 1ndividuals are asked to provide their own ranking of the items the group has generated. This can be done by giving each participant five 3 x 5 cards. Participants are then asked to select the five most important items from the flip chart list and write one item on each of the five 3 x 5 cards. They are then asked to rank these five cards from most important to least 1mportant. The number "5" is written on the card w1th the most 1mportant 1tem and "1" on the least important. (It 1s critical not to reverse this scoring and assign I to the most important.) The best way to suggest that participants rank is to spread the five cards 1n front of them, select the most 1mportant of the five, then the least important, then the second most 1mportant, then the second least 1mportant, then the middle 1tem. Wr1te the rank1ng number on each card.

Step 7. **Recording of rankings.** It is a good time for a break after these ranking cards are completed and collected by the group leader. During the break, the group leader can record the rankings on the flip chart sheets, add the numbers, and determine wh1ch are the top ranking 1tems. (See Figure 5).

FIGURE 4

FORMAT FOR RANKING CARD

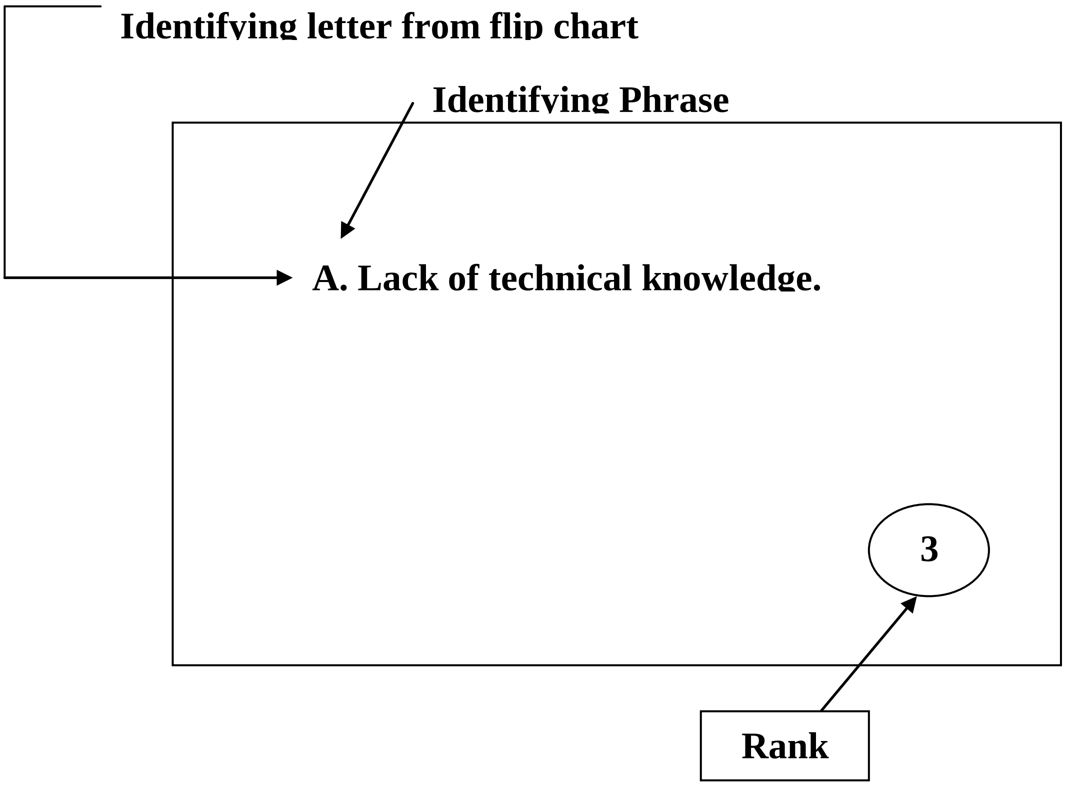
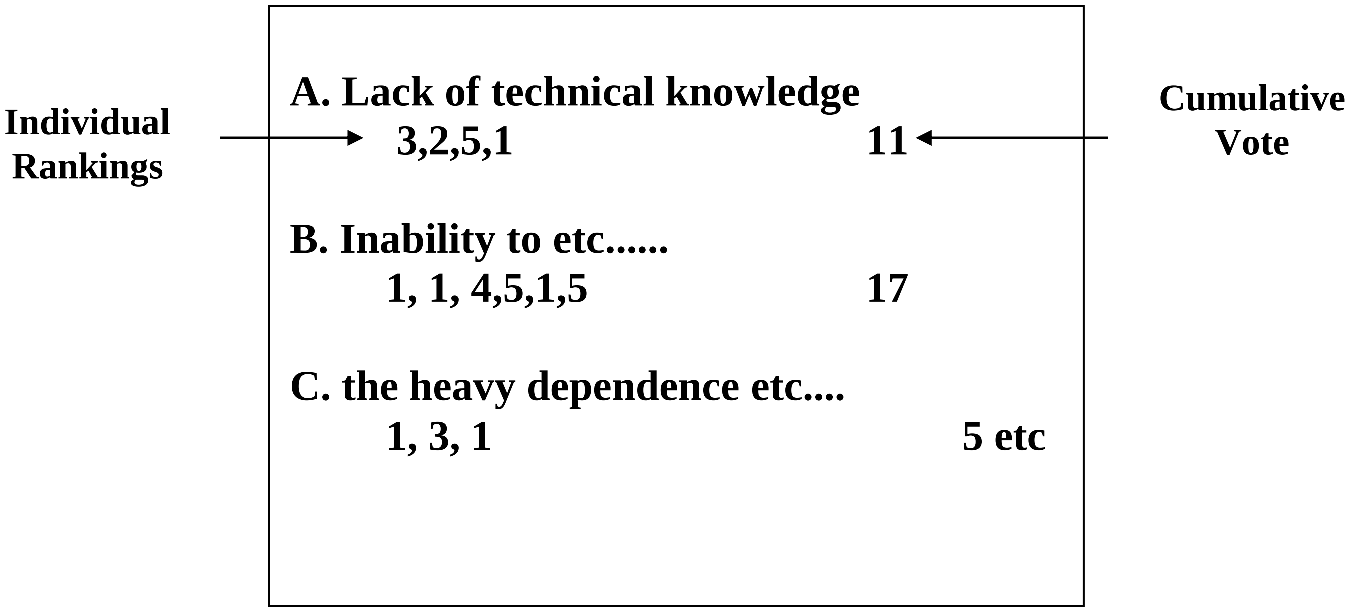


FIGURE 5

FLIP CHART SHEET AFTER FANKINGS

ADDED AND TABULATED



Step 8. Discussion of group ranking. The tabulated rank1ng is now presented to the group and the group leader can facilitate a br1ef discussion of the voting pattern. Th1s discussion should be defined as clarif1cation not pressure for anyone to change votes. The discussion may examine inconsistent voting patterns and provide for an opportunity to further discuss items group members think received too few or too many votes.

Step 9. Revote. The process may be stopped after one ranking; however, it is believed that voting, discussion, revoting produces a more accurate reflection of thinking and preferences than does a single vote. Thus, it may be desirable to repeat steps 6 through 8 to reach the final product of the group.

Concluding Notes

Although the NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE is not appropriate for all occasions, it offers a number of advantages in many situations. The NGT offers a definite structure for conducting a problem solving meeting and thus avoids what otherwise might be a rambling and unproductive process. It gives all participants a chance to contribute and still produces a consensus or a record of where the group stands. And it provides a definite stopping point.

BRAINSTORMING

BRAINSTORMING is the process most frequently associated with creativity and idea generation. There have been many adaptations of BRAINSTORMING over the years as well as many misconceptions. One of the misuses of the term is to treat it as a meeting which has no structure. To the contrary, effective BRAINSTORMING is a carefully planned and structured process. Conducted well, it can be very helpful in generating useful ideas and making a preliminary evaluation..

Background and Rationale

BRAINSTORMING has been practiced since at least the 1930's and probably in various forR1s before that. Alex Osborn, an advertizing executive, is given credit for the name if not the invention of **BRAINSTOR-MING. -**

The basic notion is to develop the largest possible number of ideas about a given issue. The larger the number of ideas, the greater the likelihood there will be some good ones. Of course numbers alone are not the objective. Efforts are made to stimulate unusual thoughts that normally would be suppressed.

A key point in the BRAINSTORMING rationale is to reduce inhibitions so that it is socially acceptable, even encouraged, for participants to generate and share what otherwise might be considered dumb ideas. In a BRAINSTORMING atmosphere, the unusual idea is encouraged and rewarded.

Uses

BRAINSTORMING is especially useful in step 3 in the problem-solving strategy, generating alternatives. After there is a good understanding of the problem at hand, BRAINSTORMING is an effective means to develop ideas about how it might be resolved. The technique can be used in other parts of the process, however. It can be used as a part of the problem identification step, the goal setting step or in identifying the possible consequences of an alternative in step 4, evaluating alternatives.

An organization might use BRAINSTORMING as the core of a meeting to find ways to reduce costs, increase productivity, *or*-\\ be more responsive to a client group. It could be used to develop 1deas for a promotional campaign, a political strategy or any number of other purposes.

Planning for a BRAINSTORMING Session

Although BRAINSTORMING can be used spontaneously on the spur of the moment when a group is meeting, it is generally recommended that a session be well thought out in advance.

Five to 15 participants is a good **group size** range, but the technique's .flexibility allows variation on either side.

The amount of **time** for a full-fledged-BRAINSTORMING session can range from 45 minutes of well over 2 hours. The idea generation stage itself may range from 15 minutes to an hour or more.

The **physical setting** for a session should be one in which participants can be comfortable and away from distractions.
There should be room for two flip chart stands and it should be possible to tape flip chart sheets to the wall.

Two stands with flip chart pads, markers, and masking tape are the only **materials** needed.

Conducting a BRAINSTORMING Session

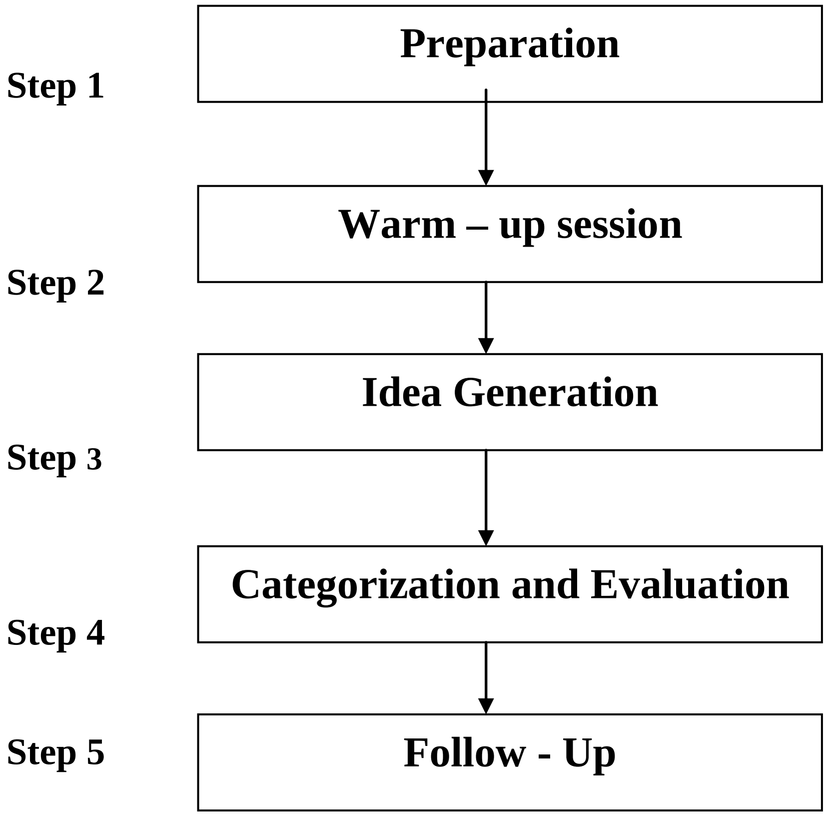
Five steps are involved in a classical BRAINSTORMING session (see Figure 6). At the conclusion of a good session, you should have one or more ideas of immediate usefulness, one or more ideas worth further exploration, a lot of ideas which cannot be used, and perhaps a new way of looking at the problem.

Step 1. Preparation. Like the Nominal Group Technique, preparation for BRAINSTORMING involves logistical matters like meeting room and supplies (see above) and substantive matters like type of participant and statement of the problem to be addressed.

The development of a single question which captures the issue to be addressed is a good way to proceed. It is important too that the question be neither too broad nor too narrow -it should focus on the issue of importance to the organization, but allow enough latitude to encourage innovative ideas.

FIGURE 6

STEPS IN BRAINSTORMING



Step 2. Warm-up session. This step is frequently left out, but it can add considerably to the effectiveness of the BRAINSTORMING process. The warm-up can accomplish several

things: familiarize participants with BRAINSTORMING, redirect their attention away from matters not related to the session, help them shed inhibitions, and create the non-judgmental atmosphere necessary for idea generation. Further, if it is a group that has not worked together, the warm-up period helps participants become comfortable with one another.

This step might consist of two parts. First could be a brief presentation and discussion of BRAINSTORMING rules and procedures and second, a 5 or 10 minute idea generation exercise on a topic totally unrelated to the main business at hand. This can be something silly or farfetched like: "What uses can you think of for a bunch of old ties that are out of fashion?" or "How would our society be different if the automobile had never been invented?"

<u>Step 3. Idea generation.</u> The idea generation phase is, of course, the heart of the BRAINSTORMING technique. The hope is to get many ideas flowing in an uninhibited, high energy atmosphere.
A single individual can serve as the group leader and recorder in this phase; however, it is usually more effective to have one or two recorders in addition to the leader. I prefer two recorders who alternate recording ideas on a flip chart with a page taped to the wall as soon as it is full. With only one recorder, the session may drag waiting for the recorder to catch up.

Four "rules" guide the conduct of the session and it is the_leaders' job to make sure that all participants are aware of them.

- No judgment during idea generation

- many ideas are desired
- Thinking should be wild, creative, free-wheeling
- piggybacking or hitchhiking is encouraged

The need to suspend judgment, including subtle forms like snickering or rolling eyes, is critical. No evaluation of any kind of any idea should occur during this period. The leader should be aware that it is very difficult for some people to refrain from expressing judgment, so he or she should be prepared to nip it in the bud if it begins to occur.

As indicated above, many ideas, including unusual ones, are desired. There are two important reasons for encouraging wild and impractical ideas in a BRAINSTORMING session.

First, until an idea is evaluated you cannot tell whether it is practical or not and concern about practicality will keep -good ideas from being thought at all and/or expressed to the group. Thus, potentially usefu1 ideas will never get generated.

Second, "bad ideas are useful. That is, an idea which is totally impractical may lead to an idea which is very useful. For this reason piggybacking or hitchhiking is encouraged. A participant is encouraged to take someone else's idea, build on it, turn it around, or adapt it. (Note, however, that piggybacking does not mean amending or changing someone else's idea. Let their idea stand as it is, then add a new one to the list even if it is very similar.)

In most 1dea generat1ng sess1ons there is a lull at some point. It is important not to assume that a lull means the group is out of ideas. Often the biggest spurt of ideas comes after a 2 or 3 minute period of silence. When a lull occurs, there are several things a leader can do. He or she can simply wait 1t out with appropriate encouragement to the group. Or the leader can throw out ideas of his or her own to help stimulate new ideas from the group.

Third, he or she can-suggest some way to think about the issue or ideas already on the list, e.g., "What if we tried just the opposite of the idea?"

While 1t is important not to let a lull prematurely signal the end of the idea generation phase, it 1s also wise not to let the session go on too long. Stop the session before the group has run totally out of steam.

Step 4. Categorization and evaluation. After a good idea generation session, there should be a very large, but disorderly list of ideas. In this form the list of ideas is not very useful. The list needs to be sorted and culled. There are several options:

- The idea generation group can do the evaluation immediately
- The same group can do the evaluation at a later meeting
- A new group can do the evaluation or
- It can be done by the person or staff which will use the results.

An advantage of using the same group is that participants get a feeling of closure, see a product which has the appearance of order and usefulness.

The first move in this phase is likely to be categorization to reassemble the list with related items together.

Categories may be based on tilling, usefulness, or content. A timing categorization might sort all the ideas into:

- Ideas which can be used immediately
- Ideas which can be used in the near future (6 months to 2 years)
- Ideas which can be used in the long term
- Unusable ideas.

A set of usefulness categories could be:

- Clearly can be used
- May be useable with adaptation and further development
- Not useable.

Content categories, of course, are dependent on the issue involved.

This preliminary categorization may be all that is required of the group or further steps may be helpful. in some cases it may be appropriate for the group to arrive at a definite decision or to assess the merits of each group of ideas.

One simple process for categorizing is to place the entire original list where it can be seen, then works with a blank flip chart. Write the categories on the chart and have the group suggest where items fit with the recorder listing them by number or number and a brief phrase.

Step 5. Follow-up. At whatever point the BRAINSTORMING group disbands, 1t is likely that new ideas or app1ication of ideas will occur to individual members after the meeting is over. Rather than loose these ideas a group leader may want to:

- Give members his or her phone number and invite a call about any additional ideas

- Type the list of ideas (with or without the categorization and evaluation) and send copies to group members asking for additional ideas

- Have a follow-up meeting at a later time to review ideas from the original meeting and supplement it.

Concluding Notes.

BRAINSTORMING remains one of the most effective and versatile methods for addressing a problem situation. It can be especially effective when the full process is used and when its management is treated carefully.

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWING

One-on-one interviewing is perhaps the most frequently used method for getting information and ideas from others. FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWING (FGI) is conducted with one or more especially selected groups of people rather than one person at a time. It is an efficient and effective means to get an assessment by a number of people of a problem or a new product, program or idea or to get a better understand1ng of a problem situation.

Background and Rationale

The FOCUS GROUP method of interviewing began in the marketing field in the 1950's. The application of FGI has expanded over the years from marketing and other topics in the public and not-for-profit sectors as well. As the use of qualitative research has gained momentum, so has the use of FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWING.

One argument for this method is simple efficiency -it is possible to get information more quickly boy interviewing a group of people than by interviewing each individually. The more powerful argument, however, is the increase in the quality and richness of information which a FOCUS GROUP can provide. The purpose is to create a synergistic interview environment in individual group members are stimulated by the perceptions, opinions, and ideas of other members of the group. The overall response is thus stronger than it would be if those same persons were interviewed one by one.

Uses

The strongest use of FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS is still -to elicit the reactions of customers and clients to product or program ideas and their packaging or advertizing. Because of the importance of the relationship between a public sector or not-for-profit organization and their clients, this particular use is as important for them as it is for the business world.

Other uses are also appropriate. FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWING can be used to tap the concerns or the ideas of employees in an organization to conduct training program or other needs assessments, to get reactions to policy options, and other purposes.

In terms of the problem solving model, FGI -may be useful in a" stages; but, it is especially appropriate in Step I, Defining Problems, and Step 4, Evaluating Alternatives.

Planning for FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWING

Most commonly, a study using FGI includes several group interviews. Each group is relatively homogeneous so that the interview discussion will result in an in depth probe of the issue from a particular point of view, not an adversarial proceeding filled with argument or conflict. This also helps insure that individuals will not be afraid to express their real feelings about the issue at hand. Homogeneous groups representing other perspectives are interviewed separately. In a study of some health .care issue, for example, doctors, nurses, and patients would likely make up separate groups rather than combined in a single group interview. Part of the planning process, then, is to determine who is to be interviewed and in what grouping.

Along with interviewer identification and grouping, an early part of the process (perhaps the first step) is to determine just what the focus of the interview is to be. What is it that the decision maker needs to know about?

Group size in an FGI study should be approximately 8 to 12. There should be at least one group, and perhaps more, representing each identifiable segment of the population being interviewed.
The time required for a FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW typically ranges from 1 1/2 to 21/2 hours.

The physical setting can be any location appropriate for an uninterrupted small group discussion. Where FOCUS GROUPS are routinely conducted, a specialized meeting room is often set up. This can include a one way mirror (so that study clients or supervisors can observe), a built in tape recording system (making the recording less obtrusive and easier to manage since most sessions are taped), and videotaping equipment where it is desired.

If you are conducting an INTERVIEW where this equipment is not built-in, it becomes part of the materials you must plan for and bring to the session. Additionally, other "props" may be involved. In some cases, for example, a group is asked to react to a specific product, program announcement, or other artifact which must be brought to the session in appropriate numbers.

Conducting a FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

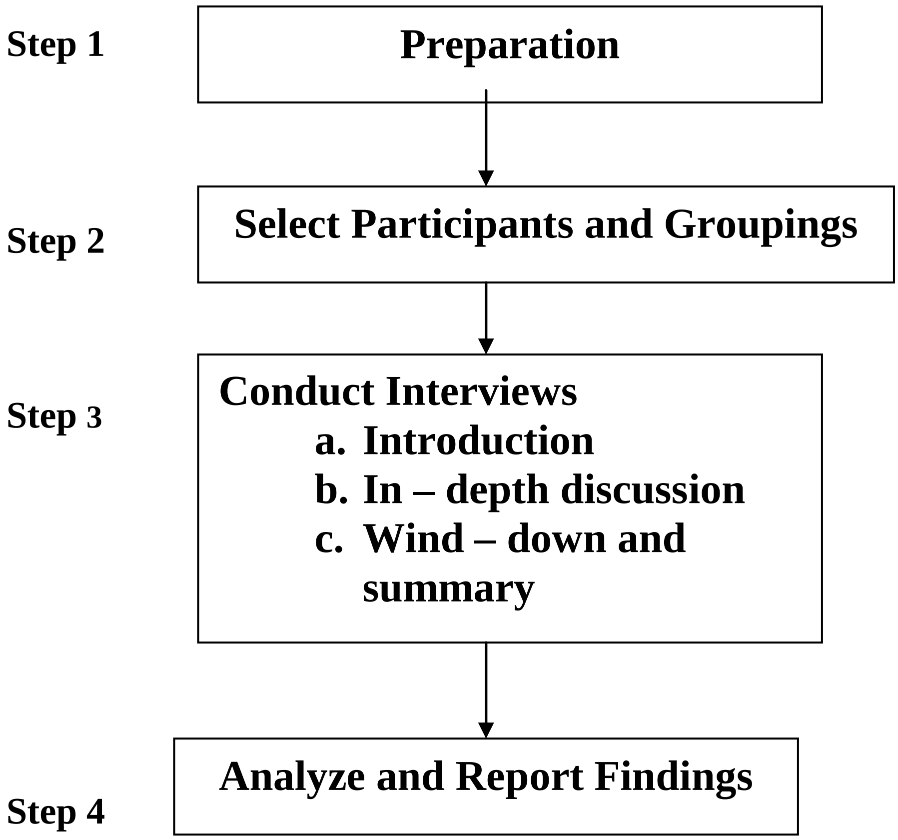
Step 1. Preparation. In some cases, the person responsible for using the FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW results may actually manage the study and conduct the interviews. Typically, however, the study is done by someone other than the party with principal organizational interest in the study. Where the study leader and the client are different an important part of the preparation phase is for the study leader to develop a good understanding of the needs of the client. What is it that the client needs to learn from the study to make an effective decision? Additionally the study leader must become (if not already) conversant with the issue being examined.

Step 2. Select. Participants and groupings. The character of the issue being examined will determine the type of persons to be interviewed. In most cases the basic grouping is fairly straightforward, corresponding to types of participants in the process, client groupings, etc. It is important to assure that any group which may have an affect on the effectiveness of a decision should be included.

After the group types have been determined, actual participants must be selected. Usually this is best done by random selection from a list representing each group. A list of program clients, for example, would serve as the basis for randomly selecting one

FIGURE 7

STEPS IN FOCUS INTERVIEWING



Payment to persons who participate in an FGI session is an important consideration. Some form of remuneration or recognition is usually appropriate and sometimes critical for achieving the cooperation desired. There are essentially two situations, with some variations between.

In one situation, participants have no particular-interest in or obligation to the study or the- organization conducting it. This clearly is the case for a commercial firm exploring a new product line. Payment to participants is definitely called for here. The other circumstance is one in which participants have a definite stake in the organization and the study.

This would be the case where interviewees are employees of an organization and the interview is conducted during working hours.

In many public settings, where for example clients or citizens are interviewed, there may be no commitment for them to participate; but, money may not be available or it may be considered inappropriate to provide cash payment. Other means of "payment" may be substituted: a letter from the mayor, a plaque, or other items your imagination may suggest.

Step 3. Conduct interviews. The group interview itself can be thought of as three phases:

a) Introduction,
b) In depth discussion,
c) Wind down and summary.

The introductory phase should include a brief self-introduction of participants, an explanation of the general purpose of the session, and presentation of the central topic of interest for the session.

The introduction of the subject matter for discussion should lead smoothly into the second phase of the session the in depth discussion. There are several goals the discussion leader should try to achieve here:

- Frank involvement by participants in the issue at-hand
- Participation by all members of the group

- Enough discussion on each point to get a clear understanding of the feelings of participants.

- It is important to -remember that the goal is an open, flowing discussion. Although the leader typically has an interview guide with the points which need to be covered, there is no required sequence of topics. It is important that the leader not conduct the session simply as a series of questions which every participant answers in turn. The leader has the responsibility for moving the discussion along, not letting it get bogged down on-any one point.

Usually a well planned FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW has-.a rhythm with the wind down occurring in a very natural way. The points in the interview guide will have been covered and the group may have begun to repeat ideas raised ear1ier. The group leader's job then is to bring the discussion to a smooth close. It is very useful during this phase to summarize the main ideas from the group and, if needed, get final clarification.

The group leader's job throughout the three phases is to provide guidance and assure positive movement of the discussion, but without heavy - handed domination. The leader should be sensitive to the group, but not be a pushover. Walking this line between being over and under d1rective is a matter of experience, practice, and feedback. To help assure an effective meeting flow and to assist in report preparation, some leaders like to work in pairs. One person serves a group leader and the other as highlight note taker, observer of the group dynamics, and a source of feedback to the discussion leader both during and after the session.

Step 4. Analyze and report findings. Since the interview session is recorded (audio or video), there is an accurate record of the discussion. In some cases the tape itself, either edited or in its entirety, is the product the c1ient wishes. He or she can review this material personally and draw whatever conclusions appear warranted. More commonly, the groups' interviews are the basis for a written report. Clearly this requires the exercise of judgment on the part of the person preparing the report. Care must be taken not to allow personal feelings to interfere. While judgment is required, the taped sessions allow the use of direct quotations and other anecdotal material which can enliven the report and aid in the communication of findings.

Concluding Notes

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWING is a method which is receiving more and more attention in the public sector and outside of the traditional market research sphere. It is definitely a technique worth considering for many situations.

AN INTERGRAL PART OF MANAGEMENT:
FURTHER THOUGHTS ABOUT USES

One point bears emphasis as this booklet is concluded:
These methods, and others like them, have very practical uses in an organizational setting. They are not esoteric methods which should be part of the analysis or planning department only; the line manager can use them to advantage as well.

Under what conditions can each of these techniques be put to best use? Although all three are relatively versatile, it is clear that one may be more appropriate in a particular situation than another. Figure 8 is a beginning guide for matching technique with situation and need, a guide to be supplemented your own judgment and experience.

FIGURE 8

A GUIDE TO USE

Use this Technique	Generate Creative Ideas	Develop Consensus or Group Priority	Obtain Reasoned, Critical Feedback	Acquire Information or Perspective From Different Group	Encourage Everyone to Participate	Go Through a Complete Problem Solving Process in a Single Meeting
NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE	O.K.	Best	O.K.	O.K.[3]	Best	Best
BRAINSTORMING	Best	O.K.[1]	Not Appropriate	Not Appropriate	O.K.	O.K.[1]
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIWING	Not Appropriate	Not Appropriate[2]	Best	Best	O.K.	Not Appropriate

1. **If use complete process**
2. **Except that a general consensus often develop in individual homogenous subgroup**
3. **If different sessions are help with different groups**

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