

INNOVATION/IDEA GENERATING TOOL

QUALITY TOOLS

Nominal Group Technique (NGT)

Description of Nominal group Technique: Is a structured brainstorming process whereby rich ideas are independently generated from within a group (approx. 5-9 members). This method is unique in that individual member original ideas as well as the collective group ideas are well represented. A combined list of ideas is compiled by way of multi-voting.

When to use a Nominal group Technique: NGT may be used:

- 1) To brainstorm/generate ideas when a team is presented with unknown problem.
- 2) To prioritize ideas individually and collectively.
- 3) When there is uneven participation from group members (when ideas are prematurely criticized by more vocal or higher status superiors/dominant members.)
- 4) When team members comprises of various ranks/levels of team mix.
- 6) To improve idea generation when sufficient ideas are not generated by team members.
- 7) When some members are new to the team and shy of expressing their views.
- 8) When the issue is controversial, sensitive or there is heated conflict.

How to use a Nominal group Technique: NGT is applied normally when a team is presented with a difficult problem of unknown solution. The problem statement can be rephrased and properly formulated by the facilitator/group leader with support from the team members. Each member silently writes down as many responses as possible. Applying “round robin”, the group leader asks each member in turn to state an idea from his or her list and writes it on a flip chart placed before the group. The participants indicate their preference for important items by rank-ordering and multi-voting. Materials needed: paper and pen or pencil for each individual, flipchart, marking pens.

Process step:

1. Formulate problem statement/subject for brainstorming.
2. Team member independently and silently generates as many ideas as possible in a set period of time (5 to 10 minutes).
3. Each team member takes turn stating one idea at a time (round-robin). The facilitator records it on the flipchart until all ideas are listed. At this point no discussion is allowed.
4. Next, discuss each idea in turn. Wording may be changed only when the idea’s originator agrees. Ideas may be stricken from the list only by unanimous agreement. Discussion may clarify meaning, explain logic or analysis, raise and answer questions, or state agreement or disagreement.

5. Prioritize ideas using multi-voting or list reduction.
6. Similar ideas may be combined under one common header.

Tips on use of Nominal group Technique:

- 1) Discussion should be equally balanced among all ideas. The facilitator should not allow discussion to turn into argument. The primary purpose of the discussion is clarification. It is not to resolve differences of opinion.
- 2) Keep all ideas visible. When ideas overflow to additional flipchart pages, post previous pages around the room so all ideas are still visible to everyone.
- 3) Round-robin recording of ideas on a flip pad. Round-robin is a process for serially recording ideas where each participant provides an idea in turn. The process continues in a circular fashion until all participant lists are exhausted.

References:

- 1) Deip, P., Thesen, A., Motiwalla, J., & Seshardi, N. (1977). Systems tools for project planning. Bloomington, Indiana: International Development Institute.
- 2) ASQ website: <http://asq.org/learn-about-quality/idea-creation-tools/overview/nominal-group.html>