



A GUIDE FOR LEADING GROUP ACTIVITIES AND CONDUCTING MEETINGS

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I. GENERAL POINTS

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- What is a method?
- Group dynamics
- The size of the group
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- The causes of bad participation
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- The behaviour and attitude of the competent organiser
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I. LEADING METHODS

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THE FIVE FUNCTIONS OF THE MEETING

The meeting mobilises the energy of personalities who are different according to their competence, their motivations, their aspirations, their wishes etc. Behind closed doors are forces where conscious and unconscious facts of an affective nature (attraction, repulsion etc.), as well as of an intellectual nature, have effect. They need to be channelled and rendered complementary in order to reach a common aim.

The meeting has five functions, always more or less inter-linked:

- To transmit information, increase knowledge and lead to the better understanding of a subject
- To improve inter-personal relationship (the understanding of each other, confidence and respect) and group or team work
- To express different points of view and to harmonise them
- To resolve a problem, choose a solution and accept it
- To organise oneself in order to progress towards the aims.

WHAT IS A METHOD?

A way of leading a group, excluding any improvisation: a set of rules, of techniques or tools to be used to obtain a specific result.

There exists a whole series of methods: directive, semi-directive, non-directive, creative, projective, of simulation etc., all of them more original and efficient the one from the others. From a professional point of view, without any doubt, the most relevant and the most used are the directive and non-directive methods.

- In the directive method, the organiser is concerned with providing information, ideas, experiences etc. Generally he wants to convince, to make people adhere, etc. The meeting then takes the form of a vertically descending information meeting.

- In the non-directive method (unfortunately a lot less known), on the contrary the organiser strictly limits himself to the dual function of catalyst and regulator, refraining from giving any information or expressing his point of view or opinion on the discussion theme.

However, whereas he is totally non-directive on the contents, he is very demanding on the form the exchanges take, imposing the procedures or the method, giving or taking away the right to speak, being vigilant concerning the length of exchanges, etc.

GROUP DYNAMICS

A group of people cannot be reduced to a mere collection of individuals.

In fact very quickly strong socio-emotional facts will arise from the mere, even passive, co-presence. For the most part subconscious but they are going to determine the attitudes and behaviour of the participants of the group, without their knowledge of it.

At first these facts are a sort of feeling of uneasiness, of tension, etc.

In most cases they take the form of:

- Individual anxiety
- The formation of “gangs” or mini-groups, successively on the defensive then on the offensive
- Regression with regard to the organiser
- The struggle between individuals or “gangs” to dominate, etc.

If the organiser does nothing, there is a serious risk of disturbing the existence of the group and its productivity. Even more it will be endured throughout the life of the group and will recur at each meeting.

Only the organiser’s knowledge of the phenomenon and of its phases, and a change to adequate techniques for leading activities, will enable him to change the situation which will led to the structure of co-operative and productive groups.

THE SIZE OF THE GROUP

Generally speaking, we have noticed that the work produced by groups of 2, 3 or 4 people remains fairly poor. The optimal density of interactions is situated between 6 and 12 people.

Above 12, communication can no longer take place face to face. There needs to be a relay.

Therefore when the number of participants reaches or exceeds a dozen, it is recommended to fraction the large group into smaller groups of 5 to 8 people, if the theme and aims allow it.

This allows the reduction of anxiety and the lowering of defensive attitudes linked with the group dynamics effect. At the same time the work produced by the groups increases in considerable proportions.

When the work done by the small groups is put together, and the summary made, it always gives a surprising production, in quantity but especially in quality. The production of a group is almost always superior to the sum of the individual productions.

THE PARTICIPANTS' WORRIES BEFORE THE MEETING

They are numerous, varied, and more often than not imaginary. The most frequent are the following:

- With regard to the group, perceived in a fantastical way as a sort of dangerous “super organisation”
- With regard to the organiser and the relationship that will be established with him
- With regard to the other participants, with the fear of their status, their level and their opinion
- With regard to the aims
- With regard to the method, with the fear of being tested
- With regard to the contents, with the fear of not being able to follow
- With regard to time, with the fear of going beyond the allotted time table etc.

THE ORGANISER'S REMEDIES

- He clarifies his role as a regulator
- He introduces himself
- If need be, he facilitates the introduction of the participants to each other
- He clarifies the aims and the functions to be achieved
- He foresees the expectations, as well as the group representation system
- He organises the timetable
- He positively reinforces the interventions
- He summarises, thanks people and increases their understanding.

THE PARTICIPANTS' SIX RULES OF BEHAVIOUR

1. To agree on the aims and to have the wish to work together in the same direction
2. To take the risk of giving one's ideas without any self-censorship
3. To defend one's ideas as they must contribute to the solution
4. To listen to other people's propositions
5. To accept in a positive way other people's ideas
6. In order to defend one's ideas and to accept in a positive way the ideas of others, one must be capable of changing and therefore avoiding stubbornness.

THE CAUSES OF BAD PARTICIPATION

1. Concerning the people:

- The fear of being judged
- Cultural complex (the fear of not being able to speak in public, of not being of interest)

2. Concerning the organiser:

- He imposes his point of view
- He frightens people
- He hides his aims
- He privileges his friends
- He privileges the hierarchy

3. Concerning the group:

- The existence of gangs, of clans
- Antagonism between certain people
- The wish to dominate

4. Concerning the technical aspect:

- Daily programme, confused problems
- Lack of comfort
- Unspecified timetable.

THE CONDITIONS FOR AN EFFICIENT MEETING

- To hold a meeting if it is the most adequate method
- To gather only the people concerned
- To have an optimum number of participants
- To have a clear and precise aim
- To have it well prepared
- To reply to needs, both personal and institutional
- To stimulate the active participation of everyone
- To take advantage of the differences
- To be strict in one's work
- To be able to resolve tensions
- To eliminate all exterior disturbances
- To ensure the comfort of the participants
- To make sure that the time allotted is not exceeded

THE BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDE OF THE COMPETENT ORGANISER

- He sets an example
- He favours and reinforces expression, awareness and group cohesion
- He stimulates exchanges and interactions
- He incites responsibility
- He favours autonomy
- He is a link between the participants
- He controls the group and facilitates its productivity
- He fixes the aims
- He puts forward the procedure
- He favours the transmission and circulation of information
- He allows decisions to be taken
- He facilitates obtaining a consensus.

THE BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDE OF THE EFFICIENT PARTICIPANT

The good participant's main features are:

➤ **Autonomy**

- He assumes his acts and ideas
- He is capable of initiative
- He is capable of taking responsibility
- He has a good emotional stability

➤ **Sociability**

- He knows how to listen
- He is capable of bringing his contribution
- He replaces competition by co-operation

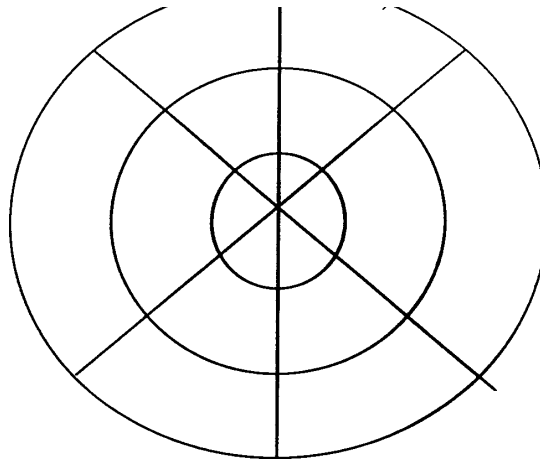
He knows how to express himself, to listen, to consider and to react constructively to other people's feelings and to respect them.

MEETING EVALUATION

It is sometimes interesting to carry out an immediate, “on the spot” evaluation of a meeting, especially if the meetings follow each other.

The target evaluation replies to this need.

- The organiser draws a target on the blackboard, with 3 concentric zones
- He then defines, on the target, as many sectors as the number of facts to be evaluated (see diagram with 6 elements and therefore 6 sectors).



The participants take a piece of chalk or a pen and all together, so that we cannot see their choice, they gather in front of the blackboard to mark their crosses, six each, that is one per sector. When the results are good they put their crosses in the central zone, when they are less good they put them in the middle zone etc. (If they are no good at all they can even put their crosses outside the target).

The organiser then has an immediate vision of the group’s reaction. If need be, he can make comments with the help of the group.

KEYWORD METHOD

Brief definition: Non-directive method of work in sub-groups, taking place in successive phases, in order to reveal the knowledge, the representation or the expectations of the participants.

Aims:

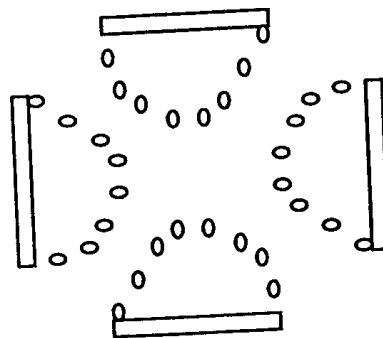
- So that needs and expectations can be expressed
- To estimate knowledge
- To exchange ideas, to allow each person to express their worries, their difficulties
- To construct a programme together
- To make representations emerge regarding a theme
- To overcome difficulties in expressing oneself at the beginning of the meeting, by encouraging progressive communication in sub-groups and by stopping inhibiting taking over etc.

Size of the group: 12 to 40 people

Length of time: 1 hour to 1½ hours, according to the number of participants

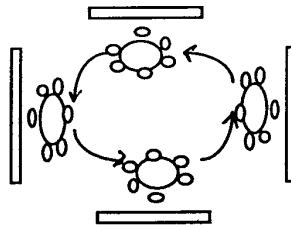
Course of events:

- The participants are divided in sub-groups of 5 to 8
- Each sub-group places itself in a semi-circle in front of the blackboard
- The organiser presents the theme or the question.



The work is carried out in 6 stages.

- ◆ **Phase n° 1:** in silence, each one in turn but in no specific order and without any obligation, the participants write a word on the blackboard to express their opinion on a given question. A participant can only write one word at a time.
But it is evident that each person can write as many words as he likes (on condition that each time he gets up and then returns to his place).
The words can be abstract, concrete, technical, symbolic, etc.
- ◆ **Phase n° 2:** always in silence, and following the same idea, the participants are asked to put a cross next to the word that seems the most important to them. They can only put a single cross at a time. But each person can put as many crosses as he likes next to as many words as he wishes.
- ◆ **Phase n° 3:** The participants are asked to communicate and comment their choices in the respective groups. They designate a spokesman who will be responsible for summarising the major points during the plenary session.
- ◆ **Phase n° 4:** Each sub-group can go and consult the other boards. They can integrate words or ideas that they had not thought of and which seem important.



- ◆ **Phase n° 5:** Each spokesman gives an account of his group's work.
- ◆ **Phase n° 6:** The organiser makes a global summary.

The organiser's role:

- He sets the question. He arranges the room, sees that there is the number of blackboards required.
- He explains each phase, sets the length of time and synchronises the work of the sub-groups.
- He ensures that the instructions are respected.
- He makes the final summary.

Variation:

In phase 4, in front of each board, it is possible to have a participant who will explain the work of his team to each visiting group.

Remarks:

Method to be used at the start-up of the group, or preceding the future meetings.

At first the method somewhat surprises (in silence).

But the method is appealing. Indeed the work in sub-groups, the impossibility of passing value judgement, the sequences by association, can conduct to an interesting and sometimes astonishing result.

PROGRESSIVE-REGRESSIVE ELABORATION METHOD

Brief definition: Method of work in small groups, of increasing size, then if necessary of decreasing size, to favour the participation of everyone.

Aims:

- To achieve from the beginning the participation of each person
- To favour expression by the immediate exchanges of experiences and of ideas
- To create an atmosphere of communication
- To ensure the formation and after the cohesion of sub-groups
- To increase their power of production when the inter-actions are controlled

Size of the group: 8 to 60 – optimum 30

Length of time: According to the size of the group and their interest regarding the theme (1 hour to 1½ hours)

Course of events:

- The participants individually consider the question asked. They take notes, as they will continue to do at each following session
- They choose another person and discuss with him
- The groups of 2 then gather together into groups of 4 and put their ideas or questions examined in common and continue their work.
- Then formation of groups of 8 people, following the same procedure
- Finally formation of groups of 16 people
- It is not possible to go beyond this figure, as there would no longer be the possibility of communicating without going through relays, in view of the size.
- At this stage, a spokesman is designated to give an account of the group's production

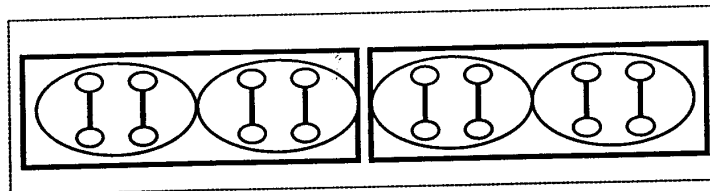
- If the figure is a multiple of 16, the organiser proposes that a summary of all the reports be made.
- In as far as it seems relevant (necessity to integrate information and to memorise it, etc.), the organiser can ask the groups to form again by groups of 8, then of 4 and finally of 2, before separating. This is the “regressive” phase of the method.

The organiser’s role:

- He decides on the theme of the discussion
- He controls the length of time of the different stages, it being understood that they increase at each session
- He encourages the group and at the last session he helps the spokesman with his report
- He makes the final summary.

Variation:

- To adapt the size of the groups if need be (3, 6 12)
- To ask for group reports only from 8 people onwards, etc.



Remarks:

Used during the first meeting, the method enables us:

- To grasp the expectations, needs and concerns of the participants
- To reveal former ideas and knowledge.

In particular it makes one understand the intellectual force of a group when it neutralises the negative phenomenon of its dynamics.

One notices that:

- Work always improves with the size of the groups (up to a maximum).

- The score of a group is generally better than the score of the best member
- The group improves individual performances
- It is the opportunity to correct individual projections and is therefore the condition for better objectivity etc.

INTER-GROUP METHOD

Brief definition: A method that allows an exchange between all the participants.

Aims:

- To enable a rapid confrontation of all the ideas and of all knowledge
- To enable a census to be made
- To review the question
- To construct original solutions that are acceptable to everyone
- To fight against the formation of clans or of antagonistic sub-groups.

Size of the group: From 12 to 40

Length of time: 1 hour to 1¼ hours

Course of events:

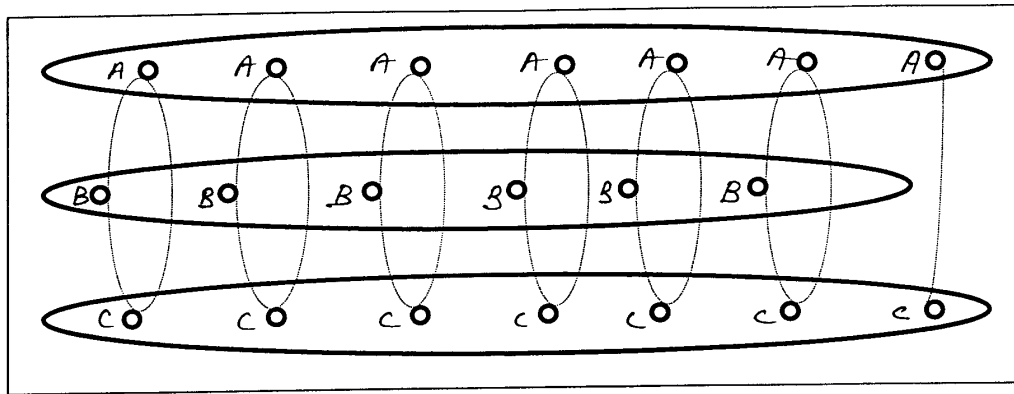
- The organiser divides the large group into as many mini-groups as possible (3, 4, 5 people, according to the number of participants)
- During the first session, he encourages the participants to exchange their ideas on the theme proposed and to take notes if they wish

He refers to each member of the mini-groups by a letter A, B, C, rather than by a number.

- During the second session, he encourages all the participants referred to by the same letter to gather together to continue the exchanges (see diagram)

He then asks for a spokesman to be chosen.

- At the end of the work sessions, he makes a summary of the different reports.



(diagram for 20 participants)

The organiser's role:

- He gives the problems
- He makes sure that the groups are made
- He sets the length of the sessions
- He takes charge of the final summary.

Variation:

There is no variation, except to add this method onto another one (for example: to give each participant an adviser. See the method of the “assisted debaters”).

Remarks:

- At the beginning the participants gather together by affinity. One of the good points of this technique is that it breaks up what could become antagonistic clans.
- The inter-group method puts life into the session in the simplest form, but also probably the most efficient form, in a short period of time. The method is always extremely productive and gives the participants the liking and the wish to work in groups.
- The method requires very little knowledge in the sphere of group dynamics, but needs good qualities for making summaries on the part of the organiser.

ASSISTED DEBATER METHOD

Brief definition: An activity that is structured for a small group.

Aims:

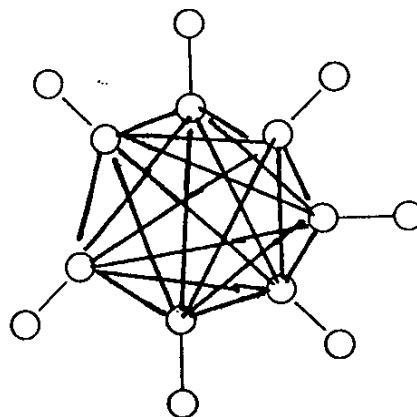
- To make the participants express their knowledge
- To put forward ideas, beliefs
- To encourage the exchange of ideas
- To go closely into the question, to discuss it
- To arouse creativeness
- To come to an agreement.

Size of the group: 12 to 30 – the optimum 18

Length of time: 1 hour to 1½ hours.

Course of events:

- The theme of reflection is proposed, the question asked
- The participants divide into two equal groups
- The volunteers who have accepted to discuss the question are the “debaters”
- Those who play the role of advisers are the “assistants”
- The debaters choose and ask for an assistant
- They get together in a circle, each one having his assistant behind him (see diagram). (There is no table).



- The discussion starts between the debaters who work in a chain network (controlled or not)
- During this phase, the assistants remain completely silent, each one behind his debater. They listen to him and listen to the group. They can take notes.
- After a certain time, about 10 minutes, marked by the decrease in the intensity of the exchanges and the number of ideas, the organiser interrupts the discussion between the debaters.
- The debaters turn towards their assistants and discuss with them for about 5 minutes.
- The assistant's role is clear; he is there to support, advise and encourage the debater, to give him ideas, but also to help the group progress, having observed the dynamics of the group.
- After the 5 minutes of exchange between the debaters and assistants, the discussion can continue between the debaters for a new period of about 10 minutes.
- It is possible to have several sequences of debates, always interrupted by a session with the assistants.
- At the end the roles are exchanged. The assistants go into the centre and become the debaters. But at this stage the orders are strict: in no way must they start the debate again. Their work consists in saying, in simple, short phrases, what they have learnt as essential from the debate that has taken place.
- Their speech must serve as a conclusion.
- The organiser makes a summary of the work carried out.

The organiser's role:

- He explains the method and the course of events
- He explains the roles played by the debaters, the assistants, as well as the other roles if any
- He sets the length of the debates and the length of the debater-assistant sessions

- He decides on the number of sequences and the time when the change of roles takes place
- He makes the final summary of the exchanges.

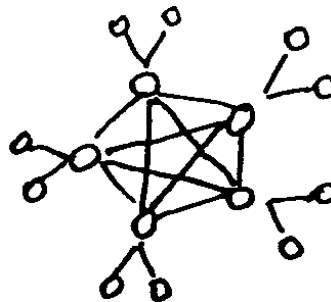
Variation:

In the case of an uneven number of people, a role can be given, in general that of an observer.

If the size of the group requires it, certain roles can become interesting:

- Moderating role or controller of the exchanges within the group of debaters
- Observers
- Secretaries
- Reporters, etc.

The debaters can also each have two assistants.



Remarks:

A method that is a little bit complicated, but it offers the possibility of friendly co-operation, even on subjects capable of dividing and opposing the participants.

The production is often astonishing and is rendered efficient, on a teaching basis, because of the conclusion of the assistants.

The method gives the possibility of exploring complex questions, for example social questions, which put values at stake.

TORTOISE METHOD

Brief definition: Method that has a dual process of simultaneous discussion and reporting.

Aims:

- To obtain a lively, progressive, balanced production in a minimum time
- To encourage the exchange of ideas
- To keep alert the interest and vigilance of everyone
- To maintain participation according to the production of the other sub-groups
- (competitive spirit)
- To obtain a process of collaboration
- To emerge on a certain form of creativeness.

Size of the group: From 16 to 30

Length of time: 1 to 2 hours

Course of events:

- The participants form several sub-groups for discussion
- In the middle of the room is the “secretarial” table, with several people who have the following roles:
 - * Secretary (ies)
 - * Speech synthesiser
 - * If the size of the group and the theme require it: analyser of similar and differing opinions
 - * Observer, etc.
- Each sub-group appoints two reporters
- As soon as the first ideas appear, a reporter goes and gives them to the secretarial table.

- However the group continues its discussion. When the first reporter returns, he sends the second reporter, and so forth until the end. The procedure is the same for all the small groups.

(Diagram)

The organiser's role:

- He puts the system into place
- He explains the method
- He stimulates ideas, encourages production
- He incites the spirit of competition between the groups
- He helps the “secretarial” group
- He takes part in the final summary by putting the ideas given into categories, on the blackboard.

Variation:

Each sub-group appoints two reporters with complementary skills regarding the theme. The reporters write the reports of their sub-groups at the same time as the debates go on.

They go together to the secretarial table to give their report one after the other. While one of them speaks, the other one can continue to collect suggestions and observations from his sub-group, and so forth until the end of the reports from all the groups.

Remarks:

Ideally several reporters should go to the secretarial table at the same time.

This is a productive and creative method but which needs permanent stimulation from the organiser in order to be carried out properly.

AMBASSADORS METHOD

Brief definition: Method that enables the group to reflect on a complex subject and to give their ideas, information or experiences freely.

Aims:

- To tackle, during a limited period, the different questions aroused by a problem
- To highlight the group's knowledge on the issue
- To enable information and opinions to be discussed
- To propose solutions
- To make everyone's free expression easier

Size of the group: From 10 to 40 people; sub-groups comprising at least 5 people are required

Length of time: 1 hour to 1½h

Course of events:

- The organiser splits the large group into sub-groups according to the number of issues to be dealt with.
- He requests that as many ambassadors as sub-groups be designated
- Each ambassador opts for one of the identified questions, depending on what he is interested in. He then becomes the ambassador of this sole question. He successively goes to each sub-group in order to question them on his topic
- He takes notes in each sub-group without revealing the ideas expressed by the previous groups
- Once each group has been interviewed by all the ambassadors, the latter give a summary on their issue
- The organiser makes a global summary.

The organiser's role:

- He has thought over the matter and decided how many questions were to be asked, depending on the size of the group and the sub-groups

- He explains to the ambassadors the way they will have to lead discussions within the sub-groups, and especially why previous groups' contributions are not to be unveiled
- He controls the length of exchanges and synchronises the ambassadors' moves
- He watches group's dynamics
- He sets the report sequence
- He checks with the large group that the ambassador's reports are complete and that they quote everyone's ideas
- He makes an overall summary based on the main points and leads the resulting debate when necessary.

Alternative: None

Remarks:

Here is a method in which several participants are given the opportunity to play a leading and self-training role

Yet all depends on the debaters' summarising abilities

It is advisable for them to have a little training before starting the exercise so as to enable them to conduct sub-groups and propose a summary based on large categories.

Indeed this is a hard task for the ambassadors who are likely to mainly compile collected information without classifying it

The organiser needs to gather all the reports in order to make a structured summary, together with the ambassadors

Participants appreciate the approach as they are given a great autonomy with regard to the mediator.

NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE

Brief definition: Informal method mainly aimed at generating an agreement within a group experiencing an internal conflict

Aims:

- Collecting data within a representative group on a particular issue
- Outlining the needs
- Analysing a problem
- Making decisions jointly

Size of the group: 8 to 20 people - optimal number

Length of time: 3 to 4 hours, even more where necessary

Course of events:

Participants are placed behind tables arranged in a U form, so as to enable the organiser to walk amongst the tables

A large board is placed in front of the U-form table (whenever these are paper boards there should be at least 12 available!)

The participants sit comfortably, each of them with about a dozen paper cards

- The organiser welcomes and thanks them
- He explains what his role consists in, as well as the method to be used
- He states the goals to be achieved and how the results will be used
- He informs that there will be 6 steps and not any break before the fourth one
- He outlines the issue at stake and asks the question.

1ST Step:

The organiser asks each participant to answer the question, setting out his opinions. Statements are to be clear, accurate, as concise as possible.

One idea only is to be developed on each card.

Absolute silence must prevail (participants' questions dealing the issue will remain unanswered).

Cards are to be marked (by a sketch, a logo, initials, etc...)

Finally they are arranged in a sequence of decreasing importance (i.e. the card showing the most important idea is placed on the top of the pile by each participant, and so on).

2nd Step:

The organiser collects the cards, table by table.

The participants hand over only one card at a time, giving the most important one first.

Then all collected statements are written on the board by the organiser and identified at random by a number starting from 1. This does not mean that number 1 is the most interesting but simply that the statements are given a chronological order.

The organiser proceeds with collecting all the cards from each table, one after the other. If a participant feels that a statement similar to one of his has already been written on the board, he then hands over the following card.

This phase may be long. It often happens that there are over a hundred statements per group of 15 to 20 people.

3rd Step:

This is the statement clarification stage. If requested by anybody the author of a statement gives further details on it

In the case, particularly at the beginning, where a participant (or other members of the group) disagree with the explanation given, the organiser immediately stops the discussion as the point is to clearly understand the statement, not anything else

All requests for clarification are dealt with in the same manner.

4th Step:

This is the combination or gathering phase. It is the longest one, but the most important and the most efficient one. It cannot be shortened.

Merging two (or several) items may be carried out as follows:

- By similarity
- By affinity
- By complementarity.

At the request of a participant, two or more items are reconciled and merged (by articulation or mainly by re-framing), but under the unquestionable condition that the concerned authors fully agree to the proposal. Even if one of them refuses – without having to give a reason – the merging cannot take place.

If it takes place, the highest number is then down graded to the lowest one.

It often happens that an outside participant protests against a denied combination or against an agreed one.

There again the organiser stops the discussion (where possible with humour), as other people do not have to interfere in a discussion between the two parties concerned.

Generally more than one third of the items have been wiped off the board at the end of this stage.

5th Step:

At this stage statements are preliminarily balanced, in other words they are subject to a "guidance vote". This consists in identifying and highlighting the most important items for the group.

Usually participants are requested to select 3 statements. This is enough.

The most important statement will arbitrarily be allocated mark 10, the next one mark 5 and the third one mark 1.

This is obviously not a true mark but a balance.

The mediator distributes (alternatively requests participants to draw up) consultation sheets drawn up as follows:

ITEM	MARK
N°	1
N°	5
N°	1

Results are then written out on the board by the organiser.

They always show an amazing convergence of opinions that deeply impressed the participants.

6th Step:

There are two successive periods. There is a discussion:

- either informal
- or under the organiser's direction

It is aimed at enhancing consensus where possible.

Then the "final vote" takes place and results are recorded on the board.

When this work is completed and in view of the results, the organiser makes a final review

The organiser's role:

- He sets out the issue, ending it with a straightforward and possibly validated question
- He cares for the arrangement of the meeting room
- He explains each step in detail, specifying how long it will last, and cares for a strict application of guidelines
- He makes the final review.

Variation:

Whenever there are numerous participants they are split into sub-groups; each one writing out its ideas on a card.

The number of cards filled in by each sub-group is restricted to 5 or 6.

The rest of the process does not differ from the steps detailed above (i.e. clarification, reconciliation, vote), except that exchanges take place between sub-groups instead of individuals.

Remarks:

The method is tiring but exciting. As reaching a consensus within a conflicting group is at stake this is highly motivating. At the beginning the participants have often dissenting opinions. However they are led to have mutual regard and consideration. They adhere to the decisions that have been taken.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

You will have understood that the methods elaborated in this booklet can, without any doubt, be qualified as participating, co-operation, "collaborator" methods (if we can dare to use this neologism).

As we have seen, the organiser's role is one of a regulator-catalyst, as he does not intervene in the discussions.

He tries to prevent all negative problems between people in order to favour the free and creative expression of each one.

He has several ingenious ways of doing this:

- Formation of sub-groups to fight against the stifling dynamics of a large group
- Pressure to favour production
- Methods for stopping take over and the formation of antagonistic clans, etc.

Although he is totally non-directive concerning the ideas, he is however very directive concerning the way exchanges take place.

The most important benefit of these methods is that "everyone talks all the time" (as a participant one day stated).

They are therefore highly democratic methods and consequently are totally in keeping with democratic values.