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Facilitating the '35 Process' for rapid prioritisation



When to use this process

When you have a group with 30 or more topics, issues or items that need to be prioritised in the workshop. 30 is a guide. I have used this with 166 people in the room and it worked fine.

Who does the prioritisation?

All participants in the workshop. A highly democratic and offers strong buy in by participants.

Duration

Generally the process is completed within 45 minutes.

Materials:

- DL size envelopes. 1 per person (do not use windowed envelopes)
- Pen to write with
- 1 large post it flipchart page
- A large enough room that allows for people not only to sit in the room but importantly has space for all participants to gather, standing in a single huddle at the front or back of the room.

Preliminary discussion to 'warm them up'

Hold a plenary discussion that starts to cover off across the topic that you are here to prioritise. It could be irritants, items in a list, projects, etc. You should try to discuss what are the criteria that you might use to make your prioritisation calls?

This conversation serves to prime the group for the task at hand. However, avoid describing the full process to the group as it is important that the participants *do one step at a time*.

Instructions (the example I am using is 'Irritants').

Each participant has a DL envelope and a pen. Instruct them to listen carefully and avoid discussing with people nearby what they have written.

The Key 6 steps

Step 1:

Introduce the task: "What I would like you to do is focus on the irritants that drives you nuts, here at work".

"Think about these. When you feel that you have identified these I would ask you to list your No 1 irritant on the front of the envelope. Only the number 1 irritant."

"Before you do, I would strongly encourage you to write clearly describing the irritant in one sentence. Write this sentence in the centre of the envelope. The clearer it is the better. There is no need to identify who you are on your envelope"

"You have about 3 minutes to do this"

"Once you have completed this task please put your hand up".

Step 2:

"Once you have written down your irritant please stand up and move to the back of the room and take your envelope and pen with you. Again I would ask that you do not discuss your 'irritant' with others".

As the crowd increases so will the chatter. Eventually you will have all participants at the back of the room with a pen and a completed envelope

Step 3:

Call for quite. Here is where you explain the rules.

'Now that you have your irritant listed on the envelope it is ready to be circulated throughout the room. Pass your envelope to the person near you and they in turn pass their envelope to you or someone nearby. It should be a sea of envelope exchanges happening randomly throughout the crowd. No one is to hold on to theirs' or anyone else's envelope. Importantly avoid the temptation of reading the envelopes just keep passing until your facilitator calls STOP.

When you hear STOP please buddy up with one person near you. We need you in pairs.

Step 4:

You can now read the envelope you are holding and read it to you buddy, who in turn needs to read their envelope to you.

Now comes the scoring. Between the two of you, you have **a total of 7 points** to allocate across the two irritants. You have to agree what points each irritant deserves. The points are whole numbers only; 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 – no fractions or decimals.

So you may decide that one irritant is worth 5 points the other irritant is only worthy of 2. Scoring options across the two irritants can only be:

- 0-7
- 1-6
- 2-5
- 3-4

The agreed score is then written on the back of the envelope.

Step 5:

This process is repeated a total of five times. When the 5th time is completed ask people to take their seats and tally up the score on the envelope they have. The highest possible score is 35.

The facilitator then calls out the number - does anyone have 35?, 34?, 33?, 32? 31? 30? 29? Yes I have 29. Someone to Read out the irritant to the group.

Step 6:

On the large flip chart paper list down the left hand side from top to bottom the numbers 35 down to 10.

Record how many envelopes scored against each number. In the case of 29 it was one envelope so is recorded as 29 x 1.

This then brings to a close the rapid prioritisation of a long list.

