**ISSUE BIN**

**The Tool (sometimes referred to as “Parking Lot”)**Often groups or individuals will get off track - a new topic will come up or an idea will begin to be discussed that isn't the main focus of the meeting, or might be better discussed later on. At that point whoever is facilitating the meeting would suggest that this topic or issue be placed in the Issue Bin. They would then go to a chart on the wall labeled Issue Bin and write a brief description of the issue so that the idea won't be lost. In other words, the goal of this tool is to keep a group on track with their agenda.

Beyond that though, the Issue Bin is a way to help a group "hold that thought" so that the idea isn't lost - and can be discussed later when the time is right.

**The Misuse**The most common misuse of this valuable tool is that facilitators put items into the Issue Bin or Parking Lot with no real plan to revisit them - they are using the Bin as a place to put stuff they don't really want to talk about at all. Or, facilitators do have good intentions, but when the meeting runs long (how many meetings have you been to that didn't go long?), and time is short, the Issue Bin item(s) get lost in the rush to finish the meeting.

**The Best Use**

It isn't hard to use an Issue Bin effectively. It just requires a process and a bit of discipline.

* Make sure that everyone knows the function of the Issue Bin.
* Capture items to the Issue Bin as appropriate.
* Schedule time in the agenda (typically 2-3 minutes is all that is required) to review the Issues near the end of the meeting. This review should answer three questions: Is this still an issue (or has it been resolved since it was placed in the Bin?) Is there an action item that can be created from this issue? If so, what is it? Is this a topic that needs to be on a future meeting agenda?
* Don't leave the Issue Bin until something is done with each issue. If nothing can be done with it at this time, consider saving the issue and having it reside on the Issue Bin at the start of your next meeting.

The bottom line? Do something with every one of them! Taking this simple approach to using this tool will make your meetings run more productively and make sure that all of the best ideas and issues are both raised and considered.

Just like any tool, it is wonderfully valuable when used correctly. And just like any other tool, it can be damaging and counterproductive when it isn't.

Silent Brainstorming and

Affinity Process

**Silent Brainstorming:**

The purpose of silent brainstorming is to generate a number of ideas in a non-analytic manner that permits one group member’s ideas to stimulate the ideas of others. This is also a way for every group member to get involved in the process. Everyone’s ideas are recorded and valued.

**Process:**

* Each person generates as many responses to the topic as possible.
* This should be done in seven words or less and use a verb and a noun.
* Only one idea per post-it.
* After everyone is done writing, have all members post their ideas on the flip chart (or other available surface).
* As other members of the group review all the post-its, new ideas will emerge. New ideas should be placed on Post-It notes and put with the rest of the ideas.
* The group should discuss the Post-It notes to check if there are any questions about what any of the post-its say or mean. (Check for understanding)

**Affinity Process:**

The purpose of the affinity process is to organize a large set of items into smaller sets of related items.

**Process:** After there is an understanding of each of the post-its, team members now do the following:

* **SILENTLY** move the post-its around, grouping those which have an affinity.
* If disagreement exists when grouping (noted because they keep moving them from one group to another) make a copy of the item and place it in more than one group.
* After all items have been grouped, discuss each grouping to determine what it is that relates all the post-its.
* Write a HEADER card that captures the theme and feeling of the group of items.
* If there is are single idea Post-It notes that do not fit well with other ideas, the group needs to decide if they want to keep it (“yes” is an okay answer).

**Nominal Group Technique**

This article is online at [*http://joe.org/joe/1984march/iw2.html*](http://joe.org/joe/1984march/iw2.html).

This technique was originally developed by Delbecq and VandeVen2 and is a structured variation of small group discussion methods. The process prevents the domination of discussion by a single person, encourages the more passive group members to participate, and results in a set of prioritized solutions or recommendations. The steps to follow in NGT are:

1. Divide the people present into small groups of 5 or 6 members, preferably seated around a table.
2. State an open-ended question (" What are some ways we could encourage participants to car pool?").
3. Have each Person spend several minutes in silence individually brainstorming all the possible ideas and jot these ideas down.
4. Have the groups, collect the ideas by sharing them round robin fashion (one response per person each time), while all are recorded in key term, on a flipchart. No criticism is allowed, but clarification in response to questions is encouraged.
5. Have each person evaluate the ideas and individually and anonymously vote for the best ones (for example, the, best idea gets 5 Points, next best 4 Points, etc.).
6. Share votes within the group and tabulate. A group report is prepared, showing the ideas receiving the most points.
7. Allow time for brief group presentations on their solutions.

**NGT Advantages and Disadvantages**

As with any technique, there are advantages and disadvantages. NGT is no exception. Some of the obvious advantages are that voting is anonymous, there are opportunities for equal participation of group members and distractions (communication "noise") inherent in other group methods are minimized. As to disadvantages, opinions may not converge in the voting process, cross-fertilization, of ideas may be constrained, and the process may appear to be too mechanical.

**Footnotes**

1. M D. Dunnette, J. D, Campbell, and K Jaastad, "The Effect of Group Participation no Brainstorming Effectiveness for Two Industrial Samples, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, XLVII (February, 1963), 30-37.
2. A.. L. Delbecq and A. H VandeVen, "A Group Process Model for Problem Identification and Program Planning," *Journal Of Applied Behavioral Science* VII (July/August, 1971), 466 -91 and A. L. Delbecq, A. H. VandeVen, and D. H. Gustafson, *Group Techniques for Program Planners* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman and Company, 1975).
3. K. R. Vedros, “The Nominal Group Technique is a Participatory, Planning Method In Adult Education"(Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, Tallahassee, 1979)

**Force Field Analysis**

**(Technique for group dialogue for implementation)**

1. **QUESTION** (e.g., how can we optimize the likelihood that Phase II of the capital campaign will be successful?) How the question is stated is very important because it will drive the rest of the process. This can also be done in terms of anticipated outcomes or expectations instead of a question.
2. Identify expectations of what the group should accomplish
3. **Force field analysis** (when talking about implementation, need to analyze the forces involved.) i.e., what forces are there which effect the implementation of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_?

 For any driving force there is a restraining force

 Driving Force Restraining Force

 Identify driving forces and restraining forces

1. When you try to decide what action to take, **look at the forces and choose strategy**.

How do you enhance driving forces or how do you reduce restraining forces? What actions can be taken to limit restraining forces?

(If you try to enhance the driving forces, the restraining forces may push even harder.)

1. **Quality check** (*What gets measured, gets valued and what gets done.)*

How did we do???? (Evaluate the process)

**Modified Nominal Group Technique**

**Purpose**

Modified nominal group technique is a technique to help a team or group quickly reduce a large list of items to a smaller number of high priority items. The process elicits a high degree of team agreement and promotes team ownership.

**Steps**

Count the number of items on the list and divide by three. This is the number of votes each person has. (Round fractions off to the lower number.) If the items number more than 60, do not go over a vote total of 20. Vote totals of more than 20 are hard to manage. Give each team member as many colored dots as s/he has votes.

Have each person use her/his votes (colored dots) to select the items s/he wants to keep. While each person can vote for any item, it is good to limit the number of votes any one item can receive from a single person to three. Note: the group can decide if they want to allow more or less multiple voting.

List alternatives in their new prioritized order.

Critically discuss the top alternatives in order to reach consensus. Eliminate those that are outside the control of the team.

**DECISION MATRIX**

**Effort**

**Required**

**Priority**

**#1**

**#3**

**#7**

**Little or no effort = 3**

**#2**

**#4**

**#8**

**Moderate effort = 2**

**#5**

**#6**

**#9**

**Difficult = 1**

**Impact Created**

**Considerable**

**Impact = 3**

**Some**

**Impact = 2**

**Little**

 **Impact = 1**

Considerations

Effort

* Resource requirements
* Complexity of investigation
* Time required
* Ability to measure outcomes
* Number of decision making levels required

Impact

* Effect on quality
* Time savings
* Morale
* Number of people who benefit