

Nominal Group Technique



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Despite the illusion of greater productivity occurring within the context of groups, evidence suggests that individuals are better at generating ideas alone. In order to overcome this issue and those surrounding overwhelmed introverts and those related to 'groupthink', the nominal group technique was developed. This allows individuals to work in each other's presence, but to generate ideas independently. The technique eliminates the early evaluation and criticism of ideas. Once the idea generation process has been completed, ideas are ranked through anonymous voting and a final discussion is held. The primary advantages of this technique are the anonymity that it affords participants, equal weight assigned the contribution of all participants, and its suitability for groups that are not used to interaction or have large differences in the status of members.

Nominal Group Technique

Step 1: Selection is made of participants from different organisational backgrounds with sufficient knowledge to make a valid contribution.

Step 2: The facilitator explains the problem and the rules of the session.

Step 3: Participants are given approximately 10 minutes to write down as many ideas as possible. Quantity is of greater importance than quality at this stage and no interaction is permitted between participants.

Step 4: Each participant anonymously provides the facilitator with their best idea. The facilitator records submitted ideas on a large sheet or whiteboard that is visible to everybody. Participants then anonymously submit their next best ideas sequentially to the facilitator until all ideas have been displayed.

Step 5: Next, the facilitator clarifies each of the ideas and participant discussion is permitted. The purpose of this step is only to clarify ideas rather than to evaluate them.

Step 6: An anonymous vote is undertaken where participants are asked to select the 5 best ideas from the list and rate them 1-5, with the best idea assigned the highest number (i.e. 5). When all votes have been collected, the sum of the ratings for each idea is calculated and the ranking of the top 5 ideas of the entire group is discussed.

Step 7: If required, further discussion and voting may occur until a clear prioritisation of the ideas has been reached.

Instructions for Use

1. Select participants to participate in the technique that represent different functions of the organisation and have sufficient knowledge to make a valid contribution.

2. Explain the focal problem and the rules of the session to participants.

3. Allow participants approximately 10 minutes to write down as many ideas as possible. Quantity is of greater importance than quality and no interaction between participants is permitted.

4. Ask each participant to anonymously submit their best idea. Record these on a large sheet or whiteboard so that they are visible to all participants. Request that each participant anonymously submit their next best ideas, sequentially, until all ideas are displayed.

5. Clarify each of the ideas through dialogue with participants. Avoid making a judgement or evaluating ideas at this point.

6. Ask participants to anonymously vote by submitting their selection of the best 5 ideas. Specify that the lowest rated idea of the 5 is given the lowest score (i.e. 1) and the most preferred idea is given the highest score (i.e. 5). Once all votes have been collected, calculate the total score for each idea. The top 5 ideas according to all participants is discussed as a group.

7. If required, conduct further discussion or rounds of voting until consensus regarding the prioritisation of ideas has been agreed.



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