

## Tool 44: Prioritizing and Ranking

### Aim of the tool

This tool will help you to select the most promising ideas or options when many have been generated.

### When to use it?

Convergence stage, when the range of different ideas and options needs to narrow down.

### What is prioritizing and ranking?

So, you have brainstormed a lot of ideas in your meeting (perhaps by having used Tool 33 ‘Combining ideas that might work together’). The question is how you will decide together on which ideas to keep, and which ones to discard. There are various simple yet systematic methods to do this. Below you will find three: Select Promising Ideas (© IDEO 2012), Narrowing a long list, and Ranking & Scoring.

#### (1) Select Promising Ideas

It is the passion and energy of a team that makes the development of an idea successful. To get a sense of which brainstorming ideas generate excitement, let everyone on the team vote on their favourites while they are still fresh in their minds.

##### Cluster the ideas

Spend a few minutes immediately after a brainstorming session grouping together similar ideas.

##### Vote for favourite ideas

Ask the brainstorm participants to each select an idea that is their personal favourite, the one they want to work on, or the one they believe is most promising. Give everyone a limited number of choices. Let people decide in silence first, so that they are not swayed by others’ opinions. Vote directly on the brainstorm Post-its, either using sticky dots or simply drawing a dot.

##### Discuss the results

Count the votes and determine the most popular ideas. As a team, take the most promising ideas and decide which ones to develop further. Be realistic about the number you can pursue—aim for three ideas to start with.

#### (2) Narrowing a long list

If there are many ideas, and much disagreement about which ideas to choose, a ranking exercise can help to select the most important ones in a systematic way. Be aware that the group needs to be clear about the criteria for selection: are we trying to get at the most important idea or the

most feasible idea? Examples of criteria: Most important, Time needed, Cost, Urgency, Feasibility, Desirability, Next step.

Assuming that the criteria are clear, an easy way to narrow down the long-list is to divide the list by three (Kaner et al, 2014):

- Divide the number of items on the brainstormed list by three.
- Each person receives that number of choices. (E.g. if there are 15 ideas; everybody gets 5 choices)
- Everyone may distribute his or her choices any way s/he wants.
- The top third of the list – the items chosen most often – becomes the high-priority list.

The advantages of this tool are that it preserves creative ideas, and protects minority voice.

### **(3) Ranking & scoring**

If you have e.g. 10 ideas and it is not obvious which idea is the most important (or: relevant; feasible; or whatever criterion), this method can be a satisfying way to help make a group decision about priorities.

- Have these 10 ideas written on a flip chart so that they are visible to the whole group.
- Have each member of the group rank the ideas in descending order by assign a number to each item, from most (ten) to least (one) important.
- Calculate average scores based on the individual rankings.
- Rewrite the items in the order of their scores.
- Discuss the setting of priorities.
- Redo ranking, if desired.

### **General tips**

There is a huge range of variations of ranking, prioritizing, scoring methods with groups. None of them are truly scientific, but they can provide much clarity to participants about where the preferences of the group are.

If you have the choice, keep it simple. We have wasted precious momentum in meetings because proposing an unnecessary complicated voting or scoring procedure. This creates confusion and delegitimizes the result.

Therefore, be clear about the procedure you propose, and prepare for it (courtesy of Chambers (2002:137-138):

- Clarify how marks can be given: whether there is a maximum for one item, or only one per item, or whether any number within the personal limit can be allocated to a single item.
- Prepare how scores are to be given: by seeds, stickers or marks.
- To save time in large groups, you can ask small groups to discuss first and cast a group vote. But: this compromises on the value of individual voices being heard.
- Minimize queues to place seeds, stickers or marks by running the activity into the break and/or by spreading out or duplicating the cards or lists of items.

- If two or more lists are needed, have them compiled at the same time. For example: two lists were prepared simultaneously from a brainstorming on words used in development. One was then scored for importance, and the other for the degree of hypocrisy with which the words were used.
- Marks can be added and new ranking lists prepared, but the original messy lists with the participants' marks tend to have greater immediacy, impact and ownership.



Voting stickers: our preferred way of casting votes on a flipchart

### Learn more

IDEO (2012) *Design Thinking for Educators Toolkit*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, page 53. © 2012 IDEO LLC. All rights reserved. <http://designthinkingforeducators.com/>

Kaner, Sam, Lenny Lind, Catherine Toldi, Sarah Fisk and Duane Berger (2014, third edition) *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Chambers, Robert (2002) *Participatory Workshops: A Sourcebook of 21 Sets of Ideas and Activities*. London: Earthscan.