

NONPROFIT MANAGEMENT CERTIFICATE COURSE

**Center for Community Research & Service
College of Human Services, Education & Public Policy
University of Delaware**

Organizational Assessment and Planning

Group Techniques

Nominal Group Technique (NGT)

This is a way to structure the input of people developing an environmental scan or internal assessment. (It is also often used as a problem-solving technique.) It is especially useful to overcome the reluctance of some people to provide opinions in group settings. The technique generates *independent views* and a greater degree of meaningful participation. It can be used with the strategic planning group either in the planning workshop or outside of it. It can also be used with subcommittees of the group or with staff or line management groups helping to formulate the forecast.

The basic steps in the process are as follows:

Step 1. Identify those who are to be involved in constructing the forecast (e.g., planning group, staff experts, line managers, committees, etc.). Set a three-hour meeting of this group.

Step 2. The group facilitator stands at the front of the room with a flip chart and writes out the item to be forecasted (or problem to be analyzed if it is used as a problem-solving technique).
Example: How are social trends that affect our products/services changing during the next five years?

Step 3. Silent generation of ideas. *Each person in the group writes down three major responses to the problem.*

Step 4. In a round-robin fashion each person reads one item from his or her list. The facilitator records the item on the flip chart for all to see. There is no discussion of items at this time. This continues until each person's list is exhausted.

Step 5. Discuss the list of items on the chart. Allow clarification, support, and disagreement. Combine the similar responses as appropriate.

Step 6. Each member **ranks** the items in writing in terms of their likelihood of occurrence. **A scale of 1 to 5 or 1 to 10 could be used with the higher number being the most likely occurrence.**

Step 7. The facilitator tabulates the results and selects those items that have some consensus. These are then discussed further.

Step 8. These are then incorporate into the environmental forecast.

The Delphi Method

This is another way to obtain structured responses from a group of experts to construct a forecast or to solve a problem. The difference is that it is used with *people who are geographically dispersed over a fairly wide area and cannot readily get together* for a face-to-face meeting. It is similar in some respects to NGT and can be used with the planning group, staff people, and outside experts in the field. The procedure is as follows:

- Step 1. Identify the issue to be forecasted. State the issue to be examined. Example: What are the key changes in technology that will likely affect our operations during the next five years?
- Step 2. Select the experts to be surveyed. Those surveyed should know something about the specific topic.
- Step 3. Identify future states of nature that may influence forecasts. This should be briefly summarized and sent in a letter with the problem or key question to be forecasted. For example, we might indicate that technology could be stagnating, changing moderately, or changing rapidly with a brief (one-half page) description of each alternative state.
- Step 4. Ask the experts to attach a probability to each state of nature as well as to provide opinions on each state and the specific technological changes envisioned. (This is done in the mailing.)
- Step 5. Summarize, list, and assign a value of relative importance on the returned mailed responses from the experts using a 1 to 5 or 1 to 10 scale with the higher number being the more valuable expert. This rating should be done on the reputation and expertise of the particular expert rather than on whether the expert's opinion agrees with the opinion of the planning coordinator or consultant conducting the survey.
- Step 6. **Re-mail** the most highly rated list of responses and ask each expert to evaluate each response including their opinion as to its likelihood of occurrence.
- Step 7. Tabulate this final list of responses and incorporate into the forecast.

The Delphi Method is an excellent way to structure expert opinion from a geographically dispersed group. In a firm with several scattered locations or one that wishes to use outside experts in formulating its forecast, the method is an efficient way to structure responses.

Snow Card Technique

Guidelines for using the snow card technique are:

1. Select a facilitator.
2. Form the group that will use the technique. The ideal group is five to nine persons (Delbecq, Vande Ven, and Gustafson, 1975), but the technique can still be effective with as many as twelve.
3. Have the members of the group seat themselves around a table in a room that has a nearby wall where the snow cards may be taped and read clearly from where the members sit.
4. Focus on a single question, problem, or issue.
5. Have the individuals in group silently brainstorm as many ideas as possible in response to the question, and record them on their personal worksheets.
6. Have individuals pick out the five "best" items from their personal worksheets and transcribe them onto five separate index cards. Make sure people write legibly enough and large enough so that their items can be read when posted on a nearby wall.
7. Have group members attach a tape roll (drafting tape rolled sticky side out into a roll one inch in diameter) to back of each of their snow cards.
8. Collect the cards (shuffling them if anonymity is important) and start taping them one at a time to a nearby wall, clustering cards with similar themes together. The tentative label for each cluster should be selected by the group. As an alternative, the group may wish to tape all the cards to the wall at once, and as a group rearrange the cards into thematic clusters.
9. Once the group agrees to a category's name, it should be written on a separate snow card and placed at the top of the items in the category. These label cards should be differentiated in some way, perhaps a different color card or ink, or by drawing a box around the category name.
10. Once all items are on the board and included in a category, the items should be rearranged and the categories tinkered with until the group thinks the results make the most sense. Categories might be arranged in logical, priority, or temporal order. New items may be added and old ones deleted as necessary. Subcategories should be added as needed.
11. When the group members are satisfied with the categories and their contents, they should discuss, compare and contrast the results.
12. When the session is over, the cards should be collected in order, typed up in outline or spreadsheet form, and distributed to the group.