

Building Dynamic Groups



Nominal Group Technique

Basic Principles

When using this procedure, the participants assemble in groups, but are told not to speak to each other. Since the members are in a group setting, but are not allowed to interact, the groups are nominal – in name only. Each person is then asked to write down what they view as the advantages and disadvantages of the proposition under consideration. Following the individual listing of the advantages and disadvantages, the group compiles two master lists, one of advantages and one of disadvantages, without allowing any duplicity of items.

The individuals then rank the advantages and the disadvantages separately on paper without consulting any other member of the group. In this way, priorities are established.

Key Techniques

There are several characteristics of the nominal group technique that uniquely enable it to minimize many of the problems discussed in this chapter. These are:

1. Because no verbal interaction is allowed, there is less of an opportunity for powerful individuals to control the group. In many groups such a tendency results in important dimensions of the problem never emerging in the group because some individuals will only contribute an idea if it is well-developed and completely thought out.
2. Since no verbal interaction is permitted while all dimensions of a problem are being identified there will be no evaluation made at this time and hence there will be a freer climate. When evaluation is done prematurely, some dimensions of a problem may be ignored.
3. Since each individual must identify dimensions on his own, aspects which never would have been considered are more likely to be considered. In a normal interacting group some participants prefer to confine their participation to reacting to the ideas of others. Since this is not an option available to the participants of nominal groups, a greater number of ideas will probably be aired than would otherwise be true. In an interacting group, the dimensions identified first are the most obvious ones and, quite often, the group does not progress beyond them. In the nominal group, balanced participation issues a greater breadth of ideas.

The nominal group technique has the potential to reduce the magnitude of group problems because it embodies those characteristics that are essential for that goal to be accomplished. It provides for balanced participation. There is no evaluation during the process and hence the climate will not be a threatening one. The group is not allowed to dwell on the most obvious aspects, therefore, a diversity of suggestions is usually forthcoming. Used in conjunction with the problem-solving steps, the nominal group technique will result in greater group productivity as well as more satisfaction to the participants.

➤ Nominal Group Technique

The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) is a structured method for working toward consensus. Its strength is that it gives everyone in the team an equal voice in sharing ideas.

Putting it to work

NGT unfolds in two phases. In **Phase 1, idea Generation**, the team follows these steps:

- Write a statement that describes an established goal, problem, or other subject. Put it on a flipchart or marking board, making sure all participants are focused on the topic and understand it.
- Each participant, working individually, proceeds to list as many ideas as they can in response to the statement.
- The ideas are then transposed to the flipchart. This can be done in one of two ways:
 - The ideas can be shared, one by one in round-robin fashion, by each person in the team. A recorder writes each idea on a flipchart, in full view of everyone. With this format, there's no discussion about the pros, cons, or intent of any idea. If a participant's ideas are exhausted, he or she can pass. The round robin continues until all ideas have been recorded. (Do not number the items until later in the process.)
 - If confidentiality is an issue, the written ideas can be passed on to a recorder – who would then write them on the flipchart. This way, there's no way to link specific ideas to specific people.
- To facilitate the next phase of NGT, it's suggested that the recorder leave a space between items and that no more than five or six be on a sheet.

Phase 2. Priority Setting, is when the group indicates its preferences. Here's how it happens:

- Go over the list and ask for clarifications. Fine-tune the wording as needed.
- Number each of the items starting at the top. Give the same number to items that are similar in content and meaning.
- For lists of 20 or fewer items, give each participant five 3x4 Post-It notes for ranking. Before giving a ranking, each participant should consider what makes this a priority item —such as cost, value-added, importance, and so on.
- Participants are asked to choose the highest priority item from the ones they have selected and give it the highest number, if each participant has five Post-It notes, this number would be 5. The number is written in the lower center of the note and circled. Participants are next asked to select the *lowest* priority item from the remaining items and to assign it a value of 1. Then, of the remaining items, the participants select the highest-priority item and give it a 4. This process continues until the other remaining items have been ranked.
- When participants have finished their rankings, they place each of their Post-It notes on the flipchart – directly next to the corresponding item as written on the flipchart during Phase 1.
- For each numbered item on the flipchart, add the rankings on the Post-It notes and record the total. The results show the team's ranking of all the items. The item with the largest number of points is deemed to be most important or significant to the team. (Knowing how many Post-It notes were received for a given item can prove useful in the event there's a tie in the rankings.)
- Before finalizing, the team should discuss the results to be sure there were no misunderstandings. Create a table showing (in descending order) the item number, a brief statement of each item, the number of votes it received, and the number of participants voting for the item.

Reference: Ihuseman, K., Lahif, M., and Hatfield, J. Interpersonal communication in organizations.