

# Approaches to **thinking** in **large** groups

# This report summarises **approaches** to thinking which we find work well for **large groups**

If you would like to use these techniques and methods or would like to share some of your own ideas, please get in touch with us at [think@idenk.com](mailto:think@idenk.com)

The approaches are characterised according the level of effort required and whether they can be used virtually or in a face-to-face setting (or both)

\$\$ Lower effort

\$\$ Higher effort

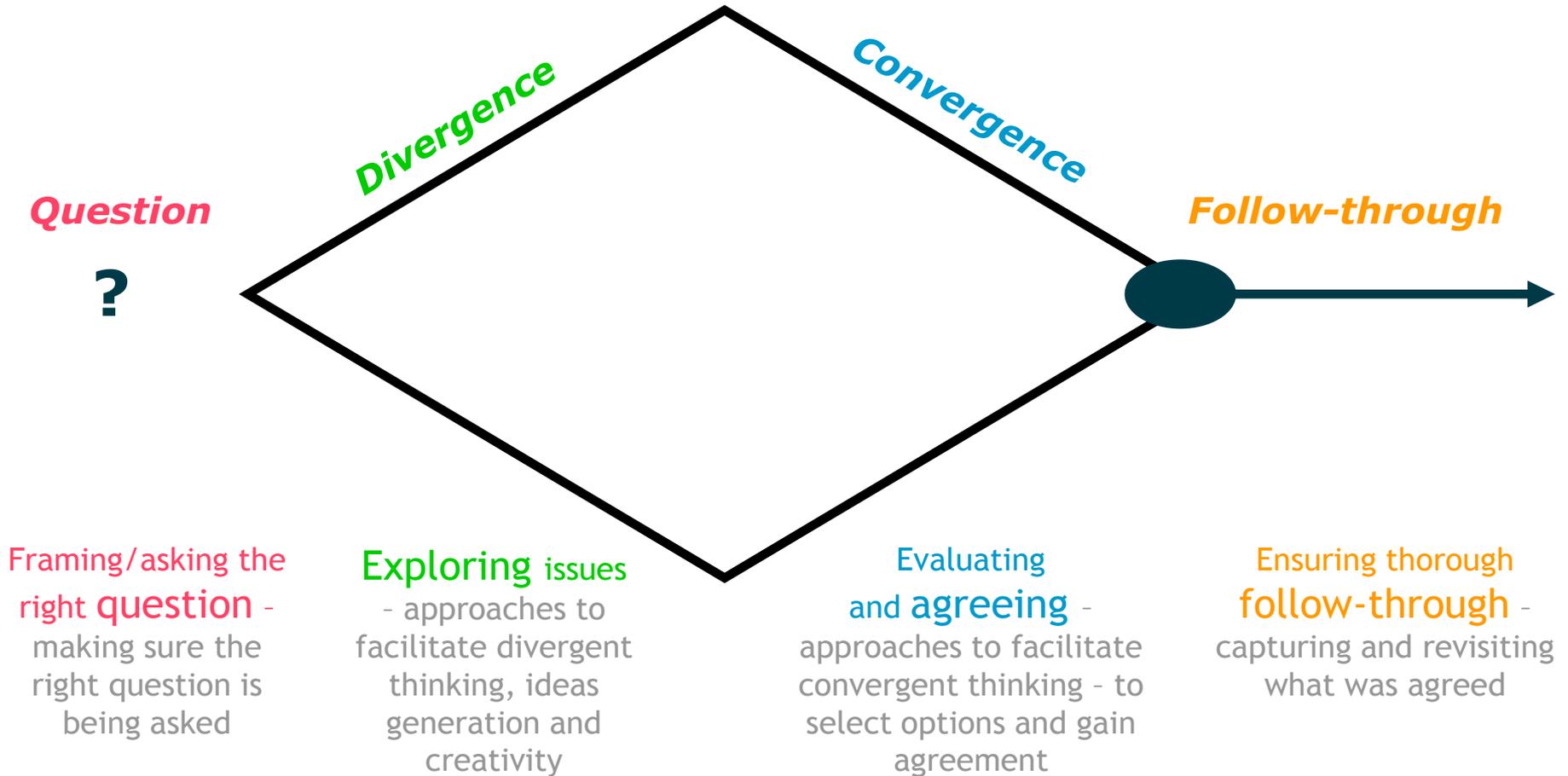
Relative time, effort, resource and financial support needed or a simple addition to the meeting requiring little planning

@ Virtual

😊 Face-to-face

Note: Some of the approaches can be used in either way

We have divided the approaches into **four sections** based on the **decision making diamond**



# But before we start, a few **useful pointers** - our 7Ps for effective group meetings (a checklist)

Getting lots of work done through great meetings should be effortless

1. **Purpose** - always be crystal clear on the reason for holding the meeting: what is the single overarching question to be answered at the meeting?
2. **Participants** - being open to inviting (or de-inviting) more people can help make sure you have exactly the right group.
3. **Principles** - meetings can have all sorts of formats and styles. What principles should you have in terms of: the balance between information giving/interaction; the mix of the familiar and the more stretching; the attention to different learning styles (visual, kinaesthetic as well as aural)?
4. **Pre-work** - finding out in advance what people are thinking is pretty much essential to firm up both the focus and form of the meeting. We find sending round a few questions by email or running a web survey is hugely valuable at this stage.
5. **Place** - this is almost always underestimated in terms of importance (and yet everyone has been in some terrible rooms for meetings). Try to get the best possible meeting space and change the room format to reflect the task: natural light and good temperature control can have a big impact on how the meeting goes.

(cont'd)...

# But before we start, a few **useful pointers** - the 7Ps for effective group meetings (a checklist)

Getting lots of work done through great meetings should be effortless

... (cont'd)

6. **Process** - with the first 5Ps taking shape you can now think about the process for the meeting. This combines both the agenda (the parts of the meeting) with the tools and techniques that you can use to run it. There are dozens of options for how to structure an agenda - see the rest of this report for some great ideas.
7. **Post-event** - a lot of people don't like meetings because what is agreed at them then doesn't happen afterwards. In our experience, at least half the effort around a meeting needs to be focused on ensuring great follow-up. First, ensure you capture the discussions effectively - experiment with different forms of capture at the meeting beyond traditional note-taking (eg live capture of discussions to screen, poster templates for people to fill in, take photos of outputs). Second, line up people and other resources for progressing actions after the meeting. Third, plan a review after an appropriate amount of time (eg 2 weeks or 3 months). Only by pausing to see how things have gone (and learning the lessons from any differences), can you get it even better the next time round - see [www.idenk.com/aar](http://www.idenk.com/aar) for some ideas on how to carry out such a review.

# The 3Ms can be used during the meeting to generate 'energy',

Here are three things we think go towards creating more energy in 'mass meetings'. They can also work for smaller meetings if you'd like to put some life back into tired gatherings

1. **Mix** them up - make sure that people sit with and get to know those they haven't met before or don't spend much time with. Do this right from the start to create an atmosphere that encourages new conversations.
2. **Move** them around - always create space (both in terms of time and room layout) to get people out of their seats. This increases energy and gets people thinking differently. Try having them stand up to talk or work together.
3. **Motivate** them to do something different afterwards - focus people in on one thing they can change themselves that will help achieve your shared aims. Show them (or create together) a vision for what they can personally contribute and then help them work out the simple first steps to achieve this.

..and consider the need for **same time** working and **face-to-face** or **virtual communication**

It can be useful to think about exactly what team function is best served by what method of collaboration

Useful for:

- Efficient implementation and high performance

Useful for:

- Clarifying goals and roles
- Gaining commitment

	Group members interacting at <i>different times</i>	Group interacting at the <i>same time</i>
Group members in <i>different places</i>	Email (reply all) Threaded discussion Web bulletin board (yahoo groups) Project spaces	Conference call Video conference Web seminars Chat room (instant messaging) Collaborative web spaces
Group members in the <i>same place</i>	Notice board Tape/video handovers Poster exhibitions	Face to face meeting/workshop

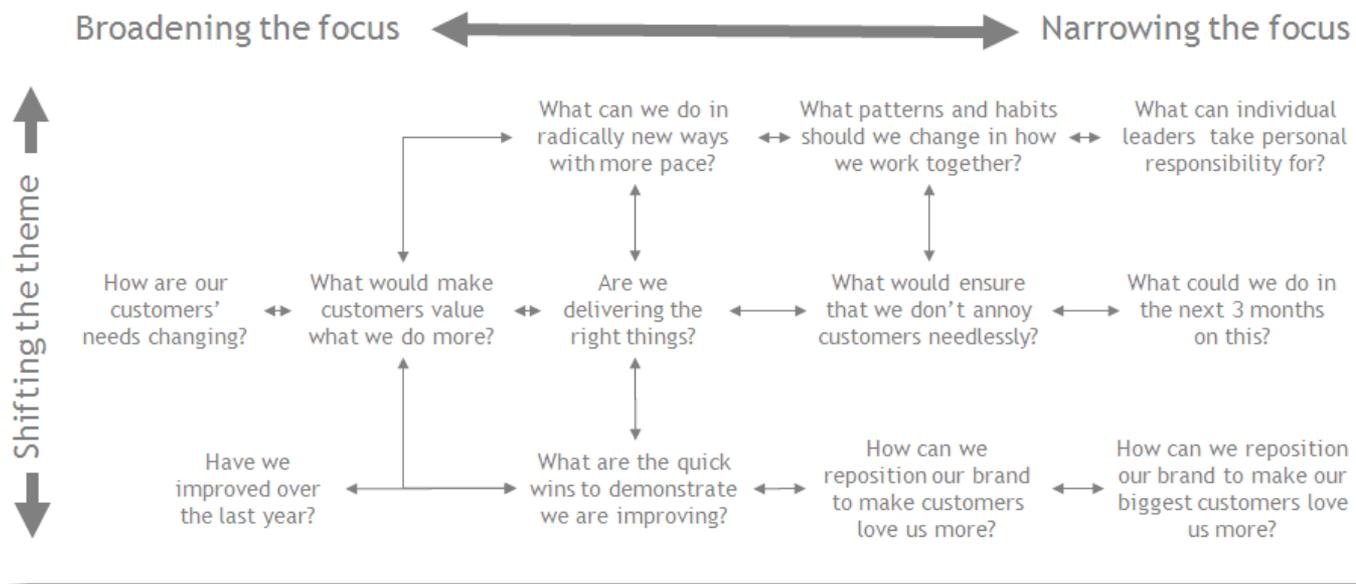
Useful for:

- Team orientation
- Building trust
- 'Renewal'

Framing the right question:  
finding the right place to start

# Question fanning helps to ensure that you are answering the right question

The idea here is to take an initial question and see what other questions you can derive from it. These other questions can be broader (and more strategic) in nature or more narrow. They fan out from your starting point - hence 'question fanning'. And a more strategic question or a more tactical question than your starting question may be more appropriate to work on



# Exploring issues

# Pre-meeting **web surveys** gather **individual views**, ideas and assumptions and reveal key **themes** and priorities of the group

Questions are designed in collaboration with key stakeholders to inform the thinking of the group. A web survey conducted ahead of a large meeting can help to ensure the agenda is tailored to the needs and expectations of the participants and builds on knowledge and experience in the group

[Home](#) > [Survey](#) > [What is a flare of rheumatoid arthritis?](#)

## OMERACT FLARE SURVEY

### What is a flare of rheumatoid arthritis?

#### Research Questionnaire Round 1

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research study. The information you give will be used by the international rheumatology research team only. Your answers cannot be linked to your name.

The issues about flare on the following pages have been raised by people with rheumatoid arthritis when we interviewed them. Now we would like you to help us select the most important issues that we should measure in order to understand flare.

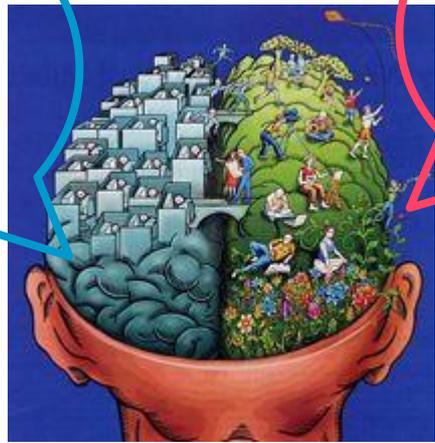
There are four simple tasks, and each one has a clear instruction. We expect it will take you about 15 minutes altogether to do them. There are no right or wrong answers.

It is your opinion about YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES OF FLARE that we value!

In deciding this is a flare, this issue is

- Essential
- Important
- Not important

- How does this feel?
- What's missing?
- What assumptions need to be questioned?



# Vox-pops allow people to connect with individuals

Videos and vox-pops enable you to hear from others what they need, what they think the issues are and how they see you - all in their own words. They're an effective way of finding out what stakeholders and patients really feel, and testing your own assumptions



- Usually works best with open questions: What do you think of the progress that we have all made at this Omeract meeting? What would you suggest we do differently next time?
- Don't aim for high production values - the simpler the better (using a cheap camera)
- Ask perhaps three questions
- Give respondents free reign to talk openly
- Introduce this into large-group, face-to-face settings to stimulate debate, entertain and provoke thinking

# Arrival cards are a great way to capture the thinking of a group

Arrival cards can be used at the start of a meeting or at a break point (eg before coffee or lunch) to review what people are thinking. The answers are rapidly analysed (during the break) and fed back for further reflection

What are the 'RUB' points to progress we need to consider at this meeting?

**3 Risks**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**2 Uncertainties**

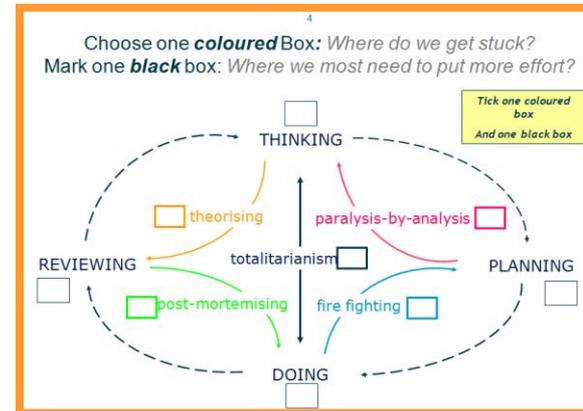
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**1 Blocker**

\_\_\_\_\_



At the start of today...

What is **one thing** I reckon **I** could do to improve the ways of working of OMERACT?

Please complete and hand in before by the start  
 These will be shared later on

What is the quality of our thinking on this issue?

**Structured thinking checklist**

<b>Define:</b> Understand the scope and intent of the initial question that is being asked	___/10	<b>Score 1-10 (10 = high)</b>
<b>Frame:</b> Is that the right question - should it be narrowed or broadened?	___/10	
<b>Enquire/inform:</b> Check what you already know and the data you need to gather	___/10	
<b>Create:</b> Come up with new ideas on how to answer the question	___/10	
<b>Model:</b> Quantify the costs, impacts and risks of the options being generated	___/10	
<b>Filter/evaluate:</b> Critically assess each idea to decide which should be implemented	___/10	
<b>Communicate:</b> Articulate the key messages and arguments needed to progress change	___/10	
	___/70	

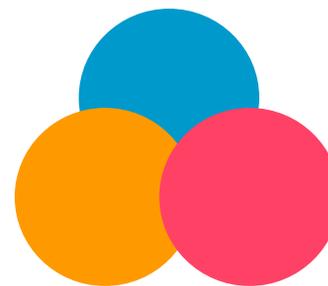


# Reflecting in small groups allows everyone in a large group to contribute

Reflecting in small groups allows everyone in a large group to talk, and find out what others are thinking. It can also be useful to generate energy within a quiet group. This is particularly useful at the start of a meeting, when deciding what questions or themes are important to work on



In pairs, but moving three times!



- Ask everyone to get into twos, threes or fours
- Ask them to discuss what they think important questions or themes are, or what they would like to achieve or learn
- This is particularly useful to capture 'sound-bites' and quickly gather thinking from the entire group while giving everyone a chance to contribute

# Six thinking hats improves decision making by ensuring different viewpoints are considered

Six-hat thinking can help to defuse disagreements that can happen when people with different thinking styles discuss the same problem. It opens up the opportunity for creativity in decision making and allows emotion and scepticism to be brought into what might otherwise be a narrow, rational process. Decisions are more resilient because they've been discussed and tested from different angles



Feelings, emotion; hunches and intuition

Information, analytical, objective, factual, data



Creative, possibility, new ideas, think wide, alternatives, adapting

Ask the group to discuss the issue from each perspective in turn, or break out into six groups and work on the issue from the six perspectives simultaneously



Why it won't work; Devils advocate, critique, Doubting, finding weakness

Orchestrating thinking, order and structure, choosing hats



Why it will work, benefits, potential, optimism, value

# Open space technology, *Unconference* and *World Cafe* are self-organising approaches to large meetings dealing with complex issues

Contrary to the name, no technology is needed. It's designed to simulate the natural way people seek out each other and share ideas in different cultures and countries. It is also based on the understanding that there is a great amount of wisdom and experience in any gathered group of people

Starts with a circle of chairs, with **no pre-designed agenda**

The **group sets their own agenda** by identifying issues and topics that have heart and meaning for them; topics for which they have **passion and interest** and for which they are personally willing to host a discussion group

**Small group discussions** happen throughout the day, with participants **moving from group to group** whenever they feel that they can no longer learn or contribute to a discussion, or when they feel **drawn to another topic**

For further detail see :

<http://www.openspaceworld.org/>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unconference>

<http://theworldcafe.com/>

The “Law of Mobility”  
Only sit in a discussion if you're genuinely interested!



## Nominal group thinking prioritises issues to achieve true and fair consensus by encouraging everyone to participate

In a large group it's often the loudest, the most vocal or the most senior people who get heard the most. But if it's important to reach a true and fair consensus, nominal group thinking can help

1. Idea - for five to ten minutes delegates write down ideas based on the question/s posed
2. "Round Robin" stage - each delegate reads out one of their ideas, with their best one first, and these are jotted down on to a larger piece of paper, blackboard or flipchart
3. Clarification - each idea is discussed more widely and clarified; duplicate ideas are brought together and the individual ideas are numbered
4. Voting - delegates prioritise the numbered ideas based on an agreed voting system
5. Action - the group discusses its plan of action and, based on the outcome of the vote, agrees how it will deal with the original question



# Affinity grouping helps participants organise large numbers of ideas and identify common themes

Affinity grouping is a brainstorming method in which participants organise their ideas and identify common themes



1. Write ideas on individual cards or adhesive notes
2. Randomly place cards on a table or place notes on flip chart paper taped to the wall
3. Without talking, each person looks for two cards or notes that seem to be related and places these together, to one side. Others can add additional cards or notes to a group as it forms, or re-form existing groups. Set aside any cards or notes that become contentious
4. Continue until all items have been grouped (or set aside). There should be fewer than 10 groupings
5. Now discuss the groupings as a team. Generate short, descriptive sentences that describe each group and use these as title cards or notes. Avoid one- or two-word titles. Items can be moved from one group to another if a consensus emerges during the discussion
6. Consider additional brainstorming to capture new ideas using the group titles to stimulate thinking

# Peer assist can help to develop or broaden a theme

It can be helpful to balance peer assist and peer review, and to be conscious of which is being used



# Online collaborative spaces can improve the way in which documents and rich media are shared and worked on in a group

Collaborative spaces allow you to upload, share and discuss files and links. They provide a clearer and simpler method of taking feedback and organising inputs from a group compared with long email chains

Project workspaces



Collaborate



Synchronise documents



Typical Live features:

- Screen sharing
- Video conferencing
- Instant messaging
- Remote control of another participant's desktop
- White boarding to mark up the documents that are being shared on screen

# Evaluating and agreeing

# 1000Minds enables fast and transparent decision making when there are many factors to consider

1000Minds is decision support software that grew out of research started in the 1990s into methods for prioritising patients for surgery. Based on users' preferences, 1000Minds creates powerful 'decision models'

SELECT	ALTERNATIVE	X Cost (\$K)	Y Total score	Y/X RATIO	Cost (\$K)	Confidence in cost estimates	RANK
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Back-up Generator	1250	95.9 %	0.0767347	1250		3 1 <sup>st</sup>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	*Recruitment Campaign	300	95.9 %	0.319728	300		2 1 <sup>st</sup>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Upgrade System X	1800	89.8 %	0.0498866	1800		1 3 <sup>rd</sup>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Hire New Programmers	800	83.7 %	0.104592	800		3 4 <sup>th</sup>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	New Data Centres	2100	77.6 %	0.0369291	2100		1 5 <sup>th</sup>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Renew Oracle Software Licence	650	71.4 %	0.10989	650		3 6 <sup>th</sup>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	*Desktop Platform Refresh	100	69.4 %	0.693878	100		1 7 <sup>th</sup>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Extra R&D Spending	1600	67.3 %	0.0420918	1600		1 8 <sup>th</sup>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Building Renovations	2700	61.2 %	0.0226757	2700		2 9 <sup>th</sup>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	New Vehicle Fleet	900	61.2 %	0.0680272	900		3 9 <sup>th</sup>
<input type="checkbox"/>	*New Website	50	55.1 %	1.10204	50		3 11 <sup>th</sup>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Inventory Storage System	1400	49.0 %	0.0349854	1400		2 12 <sup>th</sup>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Voice over IP	400	49.0 %	0.122449	400		2 12 <sup>th</sup>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Upgrade Finance System	700	42.9 %	0.0612245	700		2 14 <sup>th</sup>
<input type="checkbox"/>	New Business Development Initiative	2000	38.8 %	0.0193878	2000		1 15 <sup>th</sup>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Server Virtualisation	1300	36.7 %	0.0282575	1300		3 16 <sup>th</sup>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Business Intell Project	300	26.5 %	0.0884354	300		3 17 <sup>th</sup>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marketing Research	500	14.3 %	0.0285714	500		3 18 <sup>th</sup>
<input type="checkbox"/>	New Marketing Campaign	1450	14.3 %	0.00985222	1450		3 18 <sup>th</sup>
Selected total:		7850			7850		14
Not selected total:		13250			13250		28
Sum:		20300			20300		42

<http://www.1000minds.com/>

1. Specify your selection criteria, for example urgency, strategic fit, implementation timescale
2. Choose between pairs of hypothetical alternatives (trade-offs) to create your 'preference values' (ie a points system); also known as multi-criteria decision making or conjoint analysis
3. Describe each of your options in terms of your selection criteria
4. 1000Minds calculates a score for each option based on your preference values
5. Select your preferred option



# Voting cards\* provide creative approaches to surfacing differences of opinion in groups

Voting cards provide a quick, simple and visual way of gauging the mood in a meeting and finding out whether people are on board. They can also collect information from large groups

How confident do you feel about front line safeguarding practice in your area?



1-2

3-4

5 (50:50)

6-7

8-9

10

Out of 10, where 10 = "very confident"

Where are you all from?



NHS

Local government

Third sector

HEIs

Other colleagues

No idea

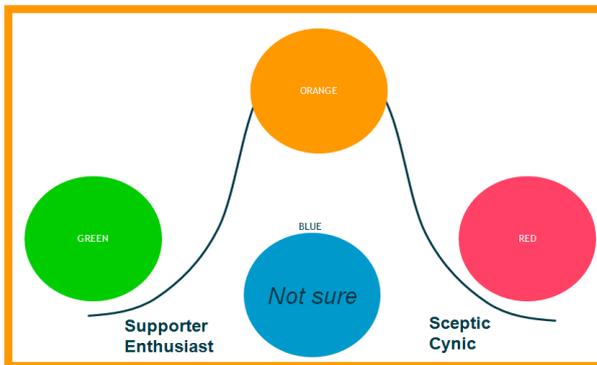
Chair poses a question to the group and assigns a colour to each possible response

Participants show their response by holding up the appropriate coloured card

For binary questions, simple hand voting (eg 'thumbs up' / 'thumbs down') works well



Hot or Not!

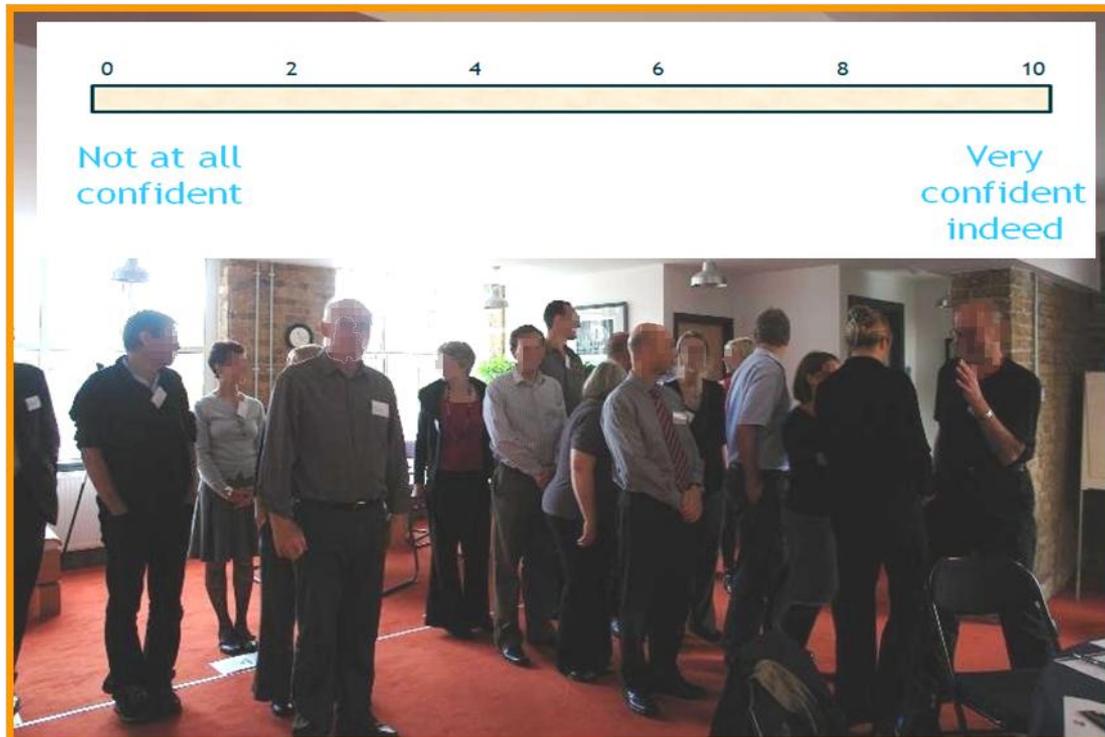


\*Can complement electronic voting tools



# Human histograms are another highly interactive way to gain opinions from the group, see what others think and generate debate

This voting technique is great for getting people to move around and interact with others while providing a large-scale visual representation of differing views in the room. It provides the group with a snapshot in time of how close or far apart their views are on a particular issue. It also ensures that everyone in the room expresses their view



# Recording to screen ensures that everyone has the same view of the discussion flow in the room

In large groups there's a high chance that different people will recall and interpret what they hear differently. To avoid the possibility of misunderstanding and disagreement a useful discipline is to capture discussions in real time so that everyone can see them. Capture to flipchart works too, although visibility and ability to edit are not as good

- What still need to talk about?
- Need to clarify process
  - What we are here for?
  - We need to agree how we approach disagreement or conflicts
  - Why we act as we do?
  - To structure the work in line with strategy, and workforce
  - Thinking has moved on ... now need to engage with Board on this..

Capture live as the group thinks of the points

This method is also useful for capturing all the questions around a subject *before* the group seeks to answer them

It is also great for capturing the debate on an important question, so that useful comments are not lost in the discussion

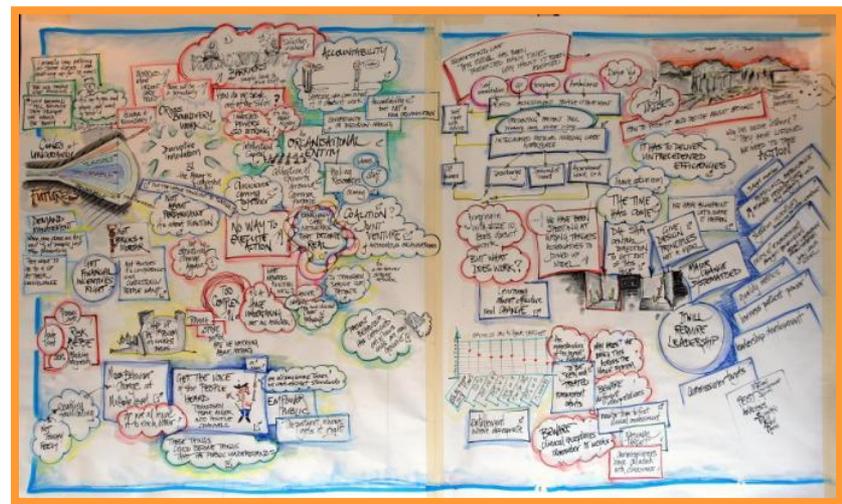
The group can reflect on what is captured, and decide which issues to take forward and which to park

# Ensuring follow-through

# Classic meeting minutes are useful. A **live visual interpretation** can help participants to see the **big picture** and **important themes**

Artists capture *all* the discussions as they happen, interpreting what is being said visually. This can make the meeting more memorable, supporting follow-through

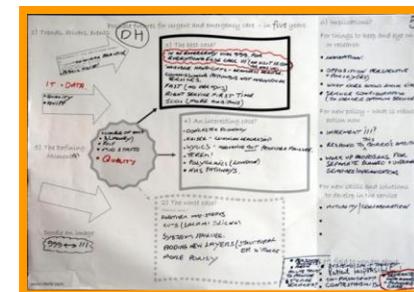
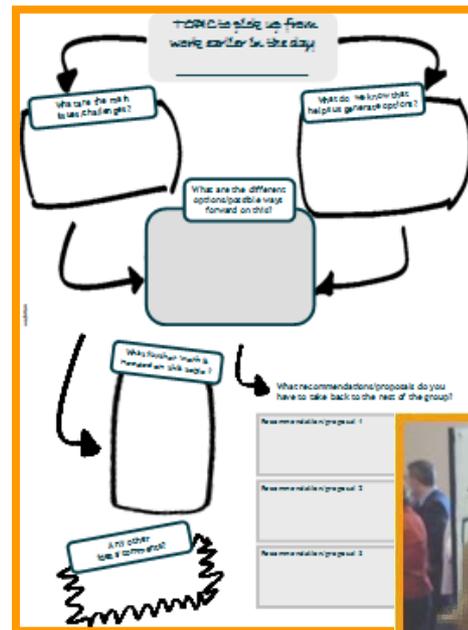
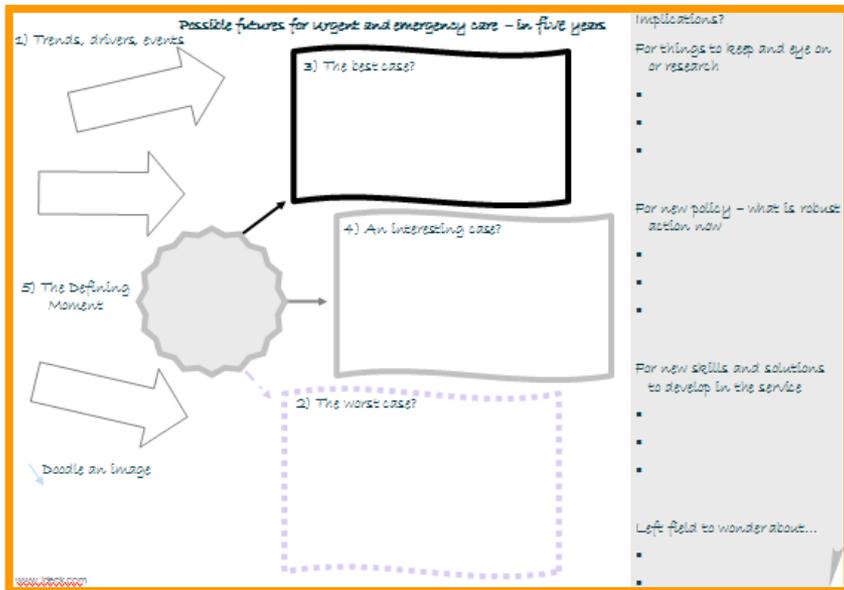
*“Without a record there is no memory...  
...with no memory there is no follow-through”*



# Poster templates enable clear and consistent capture of group ideas and agreements, supporting good follow-through

Poster templates provide a simple way of getting multiple groups to work on issues. They ensure the outputs of different groups can be compared and consolidated effectively. They also show up gaps in thinking or areas where more focus is needed

An alternative to free-form flipcharts



# An approach to **action planning that** that considers **timeframes** can support follow-through

## ACTION PLANNING: \_\_\_\_\_

What actions are needed? By whom?

<i>Within 5 days</i>	<i>Who is responsible?</i>
•	
•	
•	
•	
•	

<i>Within 30 days</i>	<i>Who is responsible?</i>
•	
•	
•	
•	
•	

<i>Within 90 days</i>	<i>Who is responsible?</i>
•	
•	
•	
•	
•	

Capturing actions during the meeting to a framework like this ensures that people leave with a sense of what they need to do immediately after the meeting, and as part of the longer-term plan

An 'after action review' helps the group to learn from what has happened after a meeting

Based on ..

## LEARNING TO FLY

..by Ed Guthrie, formerly with US Army



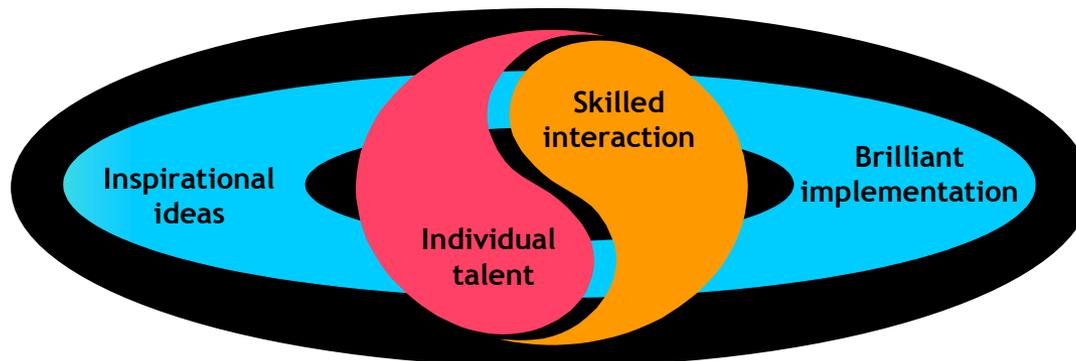
1. What was supposed to happen?	2. What actually happened?
3. Why were there differences?	4. What have we learned?

Also a useful set of questions for a conference call

idenk support encompasses the critical '4 Is' :  
ideas | implementation | individuals | interaction

***The inspiration-implementation cycle***

All organisations face the challenge of delivering results today while creating fresh ideas that make them successful in the future



***The individual-interaction balance***

People need to learn how to unlock their talents through building their own capabilities and improving the quality of how they work together