



Pairwise Comparison

MEETING ENGAGEMENT TOOL

Description

Pairwise comparison lets you compare alternatives and pick the best one that addresses specific criteria. This practice is useful if you have a lot of alternatives.

Participants

This process can be used with an unlimited number of participants, each with his or her own ballot.

Process

Steps:

1. Decide on your criteria for evaluating the best option.
2. Set up a worksheet like the example below with a box for each pair of options. The example has five options, so 10 pairs will be compared.
3. In each box on the worksheet, circle the number corresponding to the option you prefer, using your agreed-upon criteria.
4. Count the number of times you voted for each option.
5. The highest number is the preferred option based on the selected criteria.

Criteria = Ice cream with the best taste

1. Vanilla
2. Chocolate
3. Strawberry
4. Peach
5. Rocky road

In each box, circle the flavor you think tastes best. For example, in the first box, circle 1 if you prefer vanilla or 2 if you prefer chocolate. Continue comparisons for all ten pair.

1	2			
1	3	2	3	
1	4	2	4	3
1	5	2	5	3
				4
				5

Benefits

- The vote must be repeated if there is more than one criterion.
- Each option is only compared to one other, so it is less subjective.
- Everyone that has a ballot can participate.
- If there is a tie between two options for the top place, look at the scores when those options formed a pair. The option that won that pairwise comparison is the winner.

Considerations

- In order for the total score to be meaningful, everyone must choose one out of each pair.
- It can become tedious to vote if there are too many options.

Debrief

After the votes are tallied, a discussion of how the selected option meets the criteria might be useful to understand how the selection rose to the top of the list.

Materials Needed

- One ballot for each participant.
- A numbered list of options that everyone can see.

References

Adapted from *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* by Senge and others, 1994.