



# Group Facilitation

T R A I N I N G M A N U A L



---

# Table of Contents

Course Agenda ..... 1

## FAIR CONVERSATION METHOD



Detailed Descriptions ..... 3  
Keys to Success in Preparation ..... 12  
Blank Worksheets..... 13  
Sample Conversations ..... 14

## CONSENSUS WORKSHOP METHOD



Consensus Workshop Method Flow ..... 19  
Consensus Workshop Method Overview ..... 20  
Detailed Procedures ..... 21  
Tips and Alternatives ..... 27  
Flipchart Method Overview ..... 30  
Pulling it Together..... 32  
Practice Session Procedures..... 34  
Focus Question..... 35  
Blank Worksheets..... 37

---

# Course Agenda



## DAY ONE

---

### FAIR CONVERSATION

#### DEMONSTRATION

- Welcome and introductions
- Demonstration conversation

#### THEORY

- Debrief demonstration conversation

#### PRACTICE

- Designing a FAIR Conversation
- Facilitating a FAIR Conversation



## DAY TWO

---

### CONSENSUS WORKSHOP METHOD

#### DEMONSTRATION

- Demonstration of Consensus Workshop Method

#### THEORY

- Debrief demonstration workshop

#### PRACTICE

- Designing a Focus Question
- Facilitating a Consensus Workshop Method Workshop

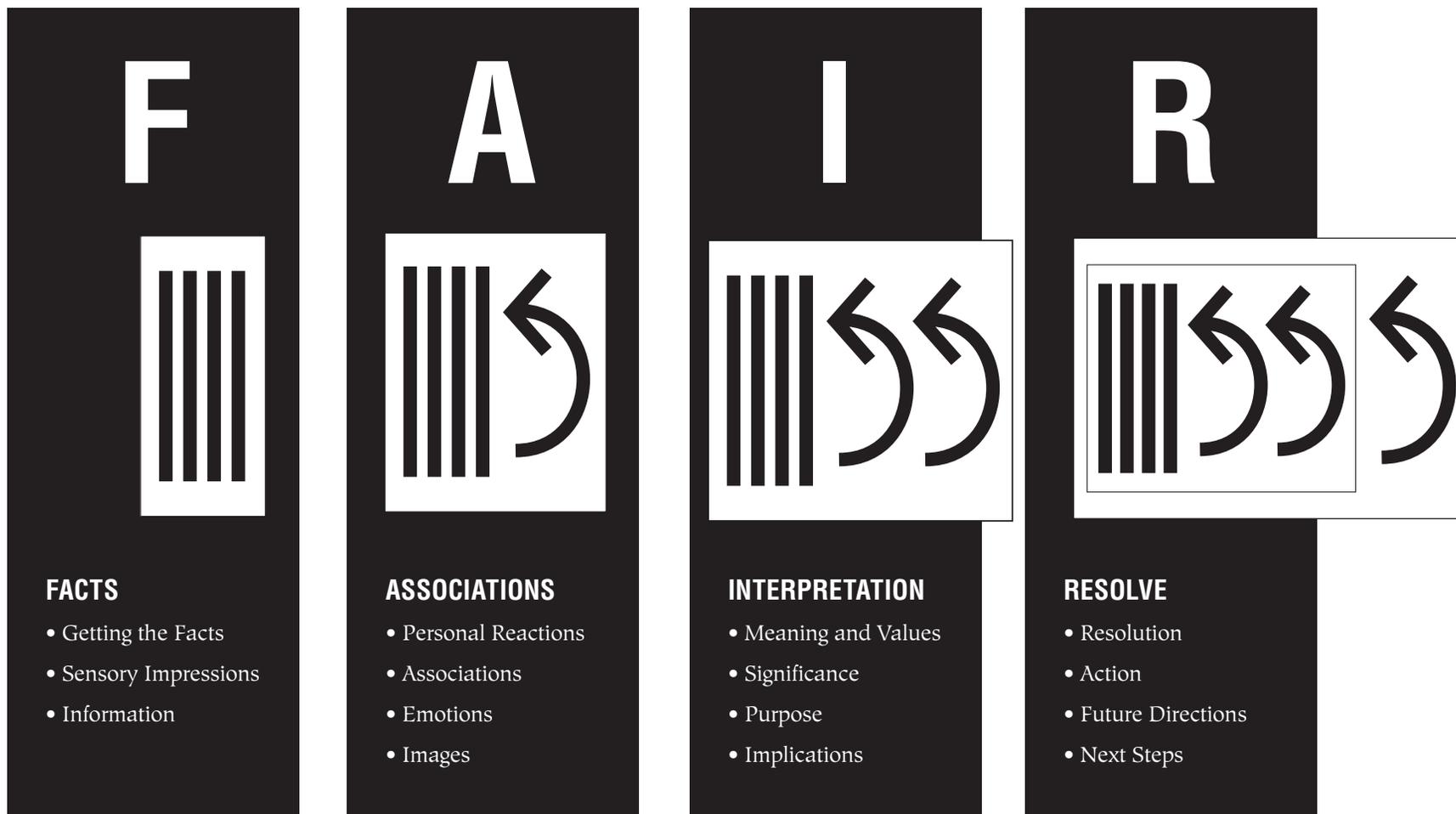


## *FAIR Conversation Method*

---

---

## *FAIR Conversation Method Flow*



ICA'S TOP™  
METHOD (ORID)

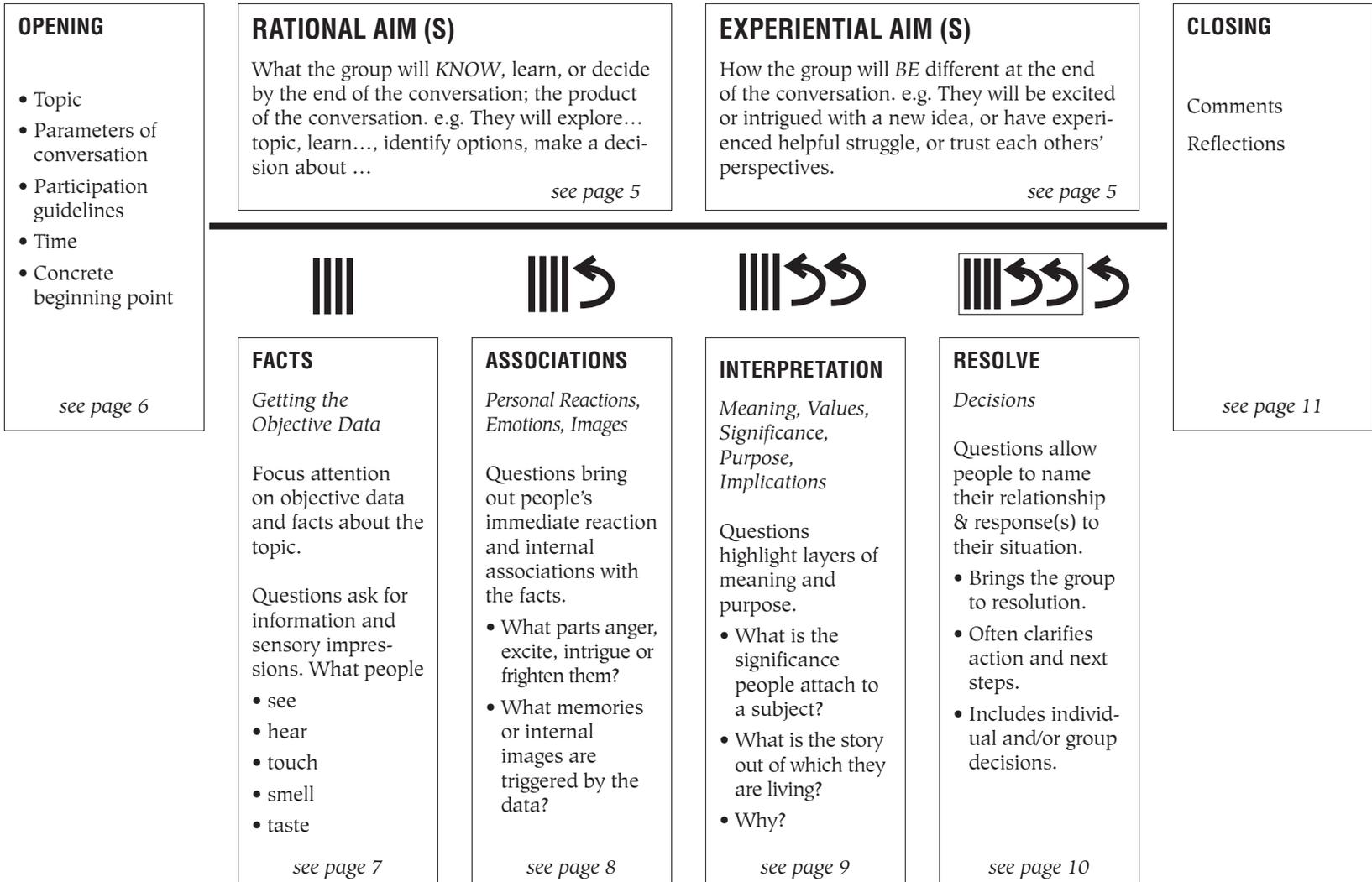
OBJECTIVE LEVEL

REFLECTIVE LEVEL

INTERPRETIVE LEVEL

DECISIONAL LEVEL

# FAIR Conversation Method Overview



# Goals



**RATIONAL AIM (S)**  
 What the group will *KNOW*, learn, or decide by the end of the conversation; the product of the conversation; e.g., They will explore... topic, learn..., identify options, make a decision about ...

**EXPERIENTIAL AIM (S)**  
 How the group will *BE* different at the end of the conversation, e.g. They will be excited or intrigued with a new idea, or have experienced helpful struggle, or trust each others' perspectives.

**DESCRIPTION**

Each conversation is tailor-made to be relevant to the subject and group. Aims allow you as a facilitator to focus the intent of the group's conversation. Aims:

- do not *prescribe* the result you want, but describe the *kind* of result they need to produce for themselves.
- allow you to anticipate the key questions the group needs to address.
- help the facilitator form questions, adapt, and flow the conversation.
- can be changed if they are wrong for the group. At least you know what you are changing from.

**SAMPLES**

The group will make a decision about 10 old computers. (descriptive)  
 NOT ...will decide to keep four and recycle six. (prescriptive).

(RA) The group will decide about the old computers → (D)“What will we do with the old computers?”

(RA) ... will understand implications of new computers → (I) “What are the pros and cons of new computers?”

(EA) The group will feel heard → (R) “What do you think about our computer network?” (silence)  
 “Let me rephrase that question. What problems or anxieties will a new, state-of-the art computer system cause you?”

**RATIONAL AIM (S)**  
 Describes the kind of decision that the group needs to make, or the goal of the discussion.

The group will make a decision about...  
 The group will explore options of ...  
 The group will learn...

**EXPERIENTIAL AIM (S)**  
 Describes something of the quality or tone of the conversation, or the impact that the conversation will have on the participants.

The group will experience excitement.  
 The group will struggle with...  
 The group will trust each other.  
 Each person will have been heard.

# Opening



## OPENING

- Context
- Parameters of conversation topic
- Participation guidelines
- Role(s)
- Time
- Concrete beginning point

## DESCRIPTION

Set the context and outline the topic of the conversation.  
Establish the parameters of the conversation topic. Clarify what the conversation is about and what is not relevant. Usually this is a close rephrasing of the Rational Aim(s).

Share or create participation guidelines, if helpful.

Clarify roles if needed, especially if you are stepping out of an established role (like a participant) and into the role of a facilitator.

Establish available time.

Ground the conversation with a concrete beginning point.  
Start with something that has data that the participants can share:
 

- a shared or common experience, e.g. last week's meeting.
- an object, e.g. video, presentation, or written memo or document.

 This may be a side bar but will lead to the key question.  
E.g. a video about diversity can lead to an Interpretation question, "What have we discovered about our own attitudes toward multi-culturalism from this discussion?"

## SAMPLES

Today we are going to have a conversation about how we can best support a new programme co-ordinator. This is not about whether we should have a new co-ordinator or not! At this point, we'll have to take that as a given. We should have a list of strategies by the end of the conversation.

Let's start with some working assumptions about our conversation.

1. Everyone has wisdom.
2. We need everyone's wisdom for the wisest result.
3. There are no wrong answers.
4. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
5. Everyone will hear others and be heard.

With your permission, I'd like to be a facilitator during this conversation so that everyone is free to share ideas and just let me worry about the process.

We'll take about a half hour for this conversation.

Let's start our discussion by looking at the job description of the programme co-ordinator.

# Facts Level



## FACTS

*Getting the Objective Data*

Focus attention on objective data and facts about the topic.

Questions ask for information and sensory impressions of what people:

- see
- hear
- touch
- smell
- taste.

## DESCRIPTION

### THE FACTS LEVEL IN A NUTSHELL

Focus of the questions:

Data, the “facts” about the topic, external reality.

What it does for the group:

Ensures that everyone deals with the same body of data and all the aspects.

Questions are in relation to the senses:

What is seen and heard and touched, or what you remember having seen or heard.

Traps and pitfalls:

Asking closed questions, or questions not specific enough; no clear focus; ignore objective questions because “they are too trivial.”

If this level is omitted:

There will be no shared image of what the group is discussing; the various comments will seem disrelated. People may feel as if data is being withheld from them on purpose. People may feel reluctant to participate because they don’t know if they are on topic. Something as simple as making different assumptions about the meaning of a word can be the source of ongoing tension.

Subsequent misunderstanding can be avoided when this level of facts, data, and information has been fully clarified.

## SAMPLES

What objects do you see?

What scenes do you remember?

What colours are there?

What words or phrases caught your attention?

Who was there?

What were some... you observed?

What did people say?

What events do you remember?

What questions of clarity do you have?

What other things do we all need to know about?

What teams have you been on?

How many people were there?

When did it happen?

What exactly did he say?

Who are the players?

# Associations Level



## ASSOCIATIONS

*Personal Reactions, Emotions, Images*

Questions bring out people's immediate reaction and internal associations with the facts.

- What part of this angers, excites, intrigues or frightens them?
- What internal images are triggered by the data?

## DESCRIPTION

### THE ASSOCIATIONS LEVEL IN A NUTSHELL

Focus of the questions:  
Internal / personal relationship to the data.

What it does for the group:  
Reveals the initial reactions to the information they are dealing with and opens the door to a better analysis at the Interpretation Level.  
Validates the participants' experiences and converts them into more useful information.

Questions are in relation to:  
Feelings, moods, emotional tones, memories or associations.

Traps and pitfalls:  
Limiting the discussion to an either/or survey of likes and dislikes.  
Thinking that this is just about "feelings" and not tapping into a wealth of experience. Avoiding dealing with what is real in the group.  
For example you will lose the group's trust if you know they are frustrated and don't ask, "What aspect of \_\_\_\_ is most frustrating for you?" Using non-specific questions like "How does it make you feel?" in most situations.

If this level is omitted:  
The world of intuition, memory, experience, emotion and imagination is ignored. People will have the "real" discussion elsewhere.  
Commitment will be weaker, and action may be undermined.

People will feel validated, and heard, and see personal experience as contributing to group understanding when the Associations Level of thinking is fully discussed.

## SAMPLES

- What images came to your mind?
- What associations do you have with this?
- What excited you? Frustrated you?
- What part of this angers you? What part of this excites you?
- What was your first response?
- What is your gut level reaction?
- Where do you remember the whole group reacting?
- What were high points? Low points?
- What moved slowly for you? Quickly?
- What does this remind you of?
- Where have you experienced something like this?
- What impact is this situation having on you?
- What concerns you about this?

# Interpretation Level



## INTERPRETATION

*Meaning, Values, Significance, Purpose, Implications*

Questions highlight layers of meaning and purpose—*why?*

- What is the significance people attach to a subject?
- What is the story out of which they are living?

## DESCRIPTION

### THE INTERPRETATION LEVEL IN A NUTSHELL

Focus of the questions:  
The life meaning of the topic.

What it does for the group:  
Draws out significance from the Facts and Associations Level data.

Questions are in relation to:  
Layers of meaning, purpose, significance, implications, “story” and values. Considering alternatives and options.

Traps and pitfalls:  
Abusing the data by inserting pre-cooked meaning. Intellectualizing or abstracting. Judging responses as right or wrong. Not getting different perspectives and allowing the loudest voice to provide only one alternative.

If this level is omitted:  
The group gets no chance to make sense out of the first two levels. No higher-order thinking goes into decision-making. The group feels railroaded into a decision, and feels that options and perspectives are being avoided. Decisions will seem insufficient or may be overturned later.

People feel like they are looking at the topic comprehensively and really understand things when the Interpretation Level of thinking is fully explored.

## SAMPLES

What were the most significant events of the week?

Why was this point important to you?

What are some of the options open to us?

Which of these actions would be first priority?

What trends do you see emerging?

What story would you tell about this?

What is a metaphor for this situation?

What seems to be missing?

Why did this happen?

What are the values we are holding here?

What are the [layers of] implications of this for...  
other youth?  
the community?  
your organization?  
and for you?

What are the key insights here?

What have we learned?

What are some other perspectives on this topic?

Who sees this in a completely different light? Why?

What are some of the patterns that are emerging?

What might be some of the root or underlying issues?

What might happen if we don't move ahead?

# Resolve Level



## RESOLVE

### Decisions

Questions allow people to name their relationship & response(s) to their situation.

- Brings the group to resolution.
- Often clarifies action and next steps.
- Includes individual and/or group decisions.

## DESCRIPTION

### THE RESOLVE LEVEL IN A NUTSHELL

Focus of the questions:

Directly accomplishes the Rational Aim. Resolution, implications, new directions.

What it does for the group:

Makes the conversation relevant for the future and complete for the moment.

Questions are in relation to:

Consensus, implementation, action.

Traps and pitfalls:

Forcing a decision when group is not ready. Alternatively, avoiding pushing the group for a decision when it is really needed.

If this level is omitted:

The responses from the first three levels of thinking are not applied or tested in real life. People feel as if they have not made any real progress and will feel frustrated by inaction. Individuals will do their own thing afterward because the group has not made a decision together.

People feel as if the discussion has been worthwhile and that they have made real progress when the Resolve Level of thinking is reached and fully discussed.

## SAMPLES

What would you title this?

What would you say about this event to someone who was not here?

What change is needed?

What is the resolve of this group?

What are we committed to do?

What are our next steps?

What are you personally committed to do?

What are your next steps?

What is the top priority issue for us to address next?

Who will do it?

What have we learned here that we need to carry forward?

What do we all seem to be saying?

What is our consensus?

# Closing



<b>CLOSING</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>SAMPLES</b>
Comments Reflections	<p>Comments</p> <p>It is a good idea to repeat the decision or write it down and read it back to the group to make sure all have made the same decision.</p>	<p>Tom, you were taking notes. Could you read back to us what we have decided, just to make sure?</p>
	<p>Reflections</p> <p>If it is a long conversation, do a FAIR Conversation on the experience so that people can process it. This can be done in less than five minutes if time is tight.</p>	<p>F - What words or phrases did you hear?</p> <p>A - What was exciting or frustrating?</p> <p>I - How are we different as a group because of this conversation? What did we learn?</p> <p>R - How does this affect our next conversation?</p>

---

# Keys to Success in Preparation

## **PLAN THE CONVERSATION AHEAD OF TIME FOCUS THE TOPIC**

You can't solve big problems with four simple questions!

- Break the larger issues down into bite-size topics.
- Choose simple small topics, especially in the beginning, for a simple run through the process once.

A conversation starts with some concrete information, then moves through associating and interpreting to a decision, then a closing. It is often part of a larger process, including several conversations, or workshops, or other methods. Clarifying the outcomes or aims will help. If you have more than one Rational Aim, you likely have more than one conversation.

## **PLAN THE TIME**

In simple conversations, to move once through the four levels usually takes no more than one-half hour unless answers are really long. More complex conversations may be made up of several smaller conversations and therefore take much longer; i.e. when there is a list of possible options at the Interpretation Level, a quick FAIR Conversation may be used to explore the implications of each option before pulling the whole conversation together into a decision.

## **THINK THROUGH WHO NEEDS TO PARTICIPATE**

As far as possible, make sure that the participants represent many perspectives on the topic and that it is theirs to discuss.

- The wisest decisions result from incorporating the perspectives of everyone who has a stake in the results.

When this is not possible, ensure dialogue from as many perspectives as possible.

## **USE THE PLANNING FORM TO PREPARE**

Write down the intents of the conversation - the Rational and Experiential Aims.

Ensure a concrete beginning point for your Facts Level questions.

Brainstorm possible questions.

Select the questions you need to realize the Rational and Experiential Aims.

## **Some hints for preparing questions:**

- Ask open-ended questions that cannot be answered with "yes" or "no" or a single right answer.
- Specific questions get better results.
- Ask for specific examples and illustrations in answers.

Arrange the order of the questions for flow.

Prepare your opening comments and the closing.

## **TEST YOUR DESIGN**

When you have a draft ready, rehearse the conversation in your head.

- Walk through the questions, imagining the participants and the range of answers they may have to each question.

Focus the language you use to fit the group -- different people respond in very different ways to the same words. It is the kind of answer you get that reveals what level of thinking the group is at.

- Check to see if the flow of questions and answers will get you to the aims. Adjust as necessary.

## **ENTER THE FACILITATOR ROLE**

And finally, before starting your FAIR Conversation, double-check your own motives: In what way are you genuinely interested in what other people think about this topic?

---

**FAIR CONVERSATION METHOD FORM****TOPIC:**

<b>OPENING</b>	<b>RATIONAL AIM (S)</b>		<b>EXPERIENTIAL AIM (S)</b>		<b>CLOSING</b>
	<b>FACTS</b> 	<b>ASSOCIATIONS</b>    ↷	<b>INTERPRETATION</b>    ↷↷	<b>RESOLVE</b>    ↷↷↷	

**FAIR CONVERSATION METHOD FORM**

**TOPIC:** *Focusing a Topic for a Conversation*

<p><b>OPENING</b></p> <p><i>We each need to pick a topic for which we can each design a Focused Conversation that will work when we facilitate it later this afternoon.</i></p> <p><i>Some people find it easy to get started yet others find it hard, so let's be methodical about it.</i></p> <p><i>Let's sort this out.</i></p>	<p><b>RATIONAL AIM (S)</b></p> <p><i>Participants will decide which topic to have a conversation on and clarify a rational aim for that topic.</i></p> <hr/> <p><b>FACTS</b> <i>(Getting the Facts)</i></p> <p><i>What is the general topic or topic area I am thinking of discussing? What facts do I know already about this topic? What facts do the other course participants know?</i></p>	<p><b>ASSOCIATIONS</b> <i>(Personal Reactions, Associations, Emotions, Images)</i></p> <p><i>What part of discussing this topic is most worrying? What are we most anxious about? What is most interesting or fascinating about this topic?</i></p>	<p><b>EXPERIENTIAL AIM (S)</b></p> <p><i>The participants will feel satisfied that they have chosen an appropriate topic.</i></p> <hr/> <p><b>INTERPRETIVE</b> <i>(Meaning, Values, Significance, Purpose, Implications)</i></p> <p><i>What might be separate sub-topics (or pieces) of this topic? What are gaps that need to be thought through? What might be most important for this group to deal with? What part of this topic needs to be thought through first?</i></p>	<p><b>RESOLVE</b> <i>(Future Resolves)</i></p> <p><i>What is the specific part of this topic we will deal with in this conversation this afternoon? What is the specific kind of outcome the group needs at the end of their conversation? What are the key questions this group really needs to answer?</i></p>	<p><b>CLOSING</b></p> <p><i>Write specific topic and outcome in boxes on planning form.</i></p> <p><i>Then complete the planning form.</i></p>
--	---	---	---	--	--

**FAIR CONVERSATION METHOD FORM**

**TOPIC:** *Discussing an Intolerable Problem*

<p><b>OPENING</b></p> <p><i>We need to solve this problem.</i></p>	<p><b>RATIONAL AIM (S)</b></p> <p><i>Participants will understand the problem better and come up with possible solutions.</i></p>		<p><b>EXPERIENTIAL AIM (S)</b></p> <p><i>Participants will experience a sense of resolve and feel more confident about handling a similar situation in the future.</i></p>		<p><b>CLOSING</b></p> <p><i>We'll begin to implement this solution ASAP.</i></p>
<hr/>					
<p><b>FACTS</b></p> <p><i>(Getting the Objective Data)</i></p> <p><i>Let's reconstruct the events that have lead to this issue.</i></p> <p><i>What was the first thing that happened?</i></p> <p><i>Other things?</i></p>		<p><b>ASSOCIATIONS</b></p> <p><i>(Personal Reactions, Emotions, Images)</i></p> <p><i>What has been the most irritating?</i></p>	<p><b>INTERPRETATION</b></p> <p><i>(Meaning, Values, Significance, Purpose, Implications)</i></p> <p><i>What patterns do you begin to see here?</i></p> <p><i>What do you think are causes of this problem?</i></p> <p><i>What are possible solutions?</i></p>	<p><b>RESOLVE</b></p> <p><i>(Future Decisions)</i></p> <p><i>Which one (or combination) of these solutions shall we try first?</i></p>	

# Sample FAIR Conversation Method Applications for Facilitators

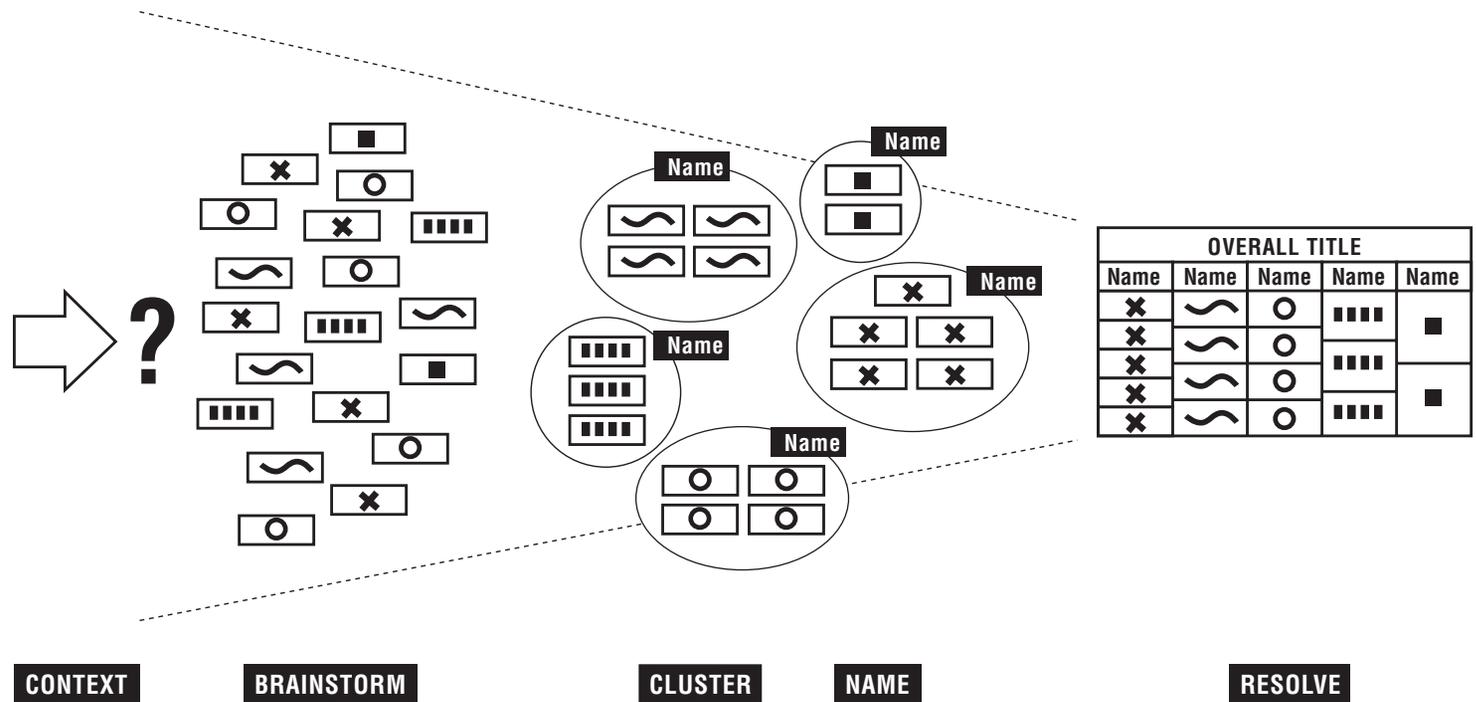
		S	SS	SSS	
Topic/Context	FACTS	ASSOCIATIONS	INTERPRETIVE	RESOLVE	Closing
<b>Focusing group for a workshop.</b> Let us review what brought us to this point.	What are some of the events that led up to this problem? Other background data?	What has been the most frustrating part of this? What has seemed to be working well?	What are the implications of this situation? What are some of the root issues?	What are some things we can do to solve this problem?	Do a workshop with the Decisional Level question as the focus. (see workshop method procedures)
<b>Reflecting on a story or a play.</b> Read the story	Who were the characters in this story? What happened first? Then...then...	What part did you laugh at? What was scary? Which character did you identify with?	What was the turning point in the story? Why? What was the story about? Where have you experienced something like this?	What does this tell you about your own life? What have you learned? What response is required of you?	A story is worth reading when it tells us something about our own lives.
<b>Evaluating a workshop (experiential).</b> Let's look back at our experience of this workshop.	What are some things we actually did in this workshop? What words or phrases did you hear?	What were high / low points for you? Where did we laugh? Where was the group at the lowest?	What was the turning point? How are we different now?	What will you do differently as a result of this experience?	This has been a significant step in our journey.
<b>Evaluating the product of a workshop - prioritizing.</b> We need to prioritize the results of this workshop.	Read column names aloud. What words catch your attention?	What surprises you? What intrigues you? Which are you most passionate about?	Which of these is the most important for you? Why? or Which of these needs to be dealt with first? Why?	What have you heard the group saying is highest priority? What is our next step? Who will do it?	This is an important decision and will accomplish a lot.
<b>Understanding recommendations from an operational review.</b> We need to understand the recommendations so we can decide what to do with them.	Looking at the paper, list the recommendations that are made there. What questions of clarification do you have of the author?	What images do you associate with these recommendations?	Why do you think he/she made this recommendation? What difference will they make? Which will have the most / least impact?	What do we need to do with these recommendations? What is our first step? Who will do it?	This has certainly put us in a new place.
<b>Facilitators' internal reflection while leading a group.</b> This is a crisis. I need to do something.	What is actually going on? What words or phrases have been spoken? What background data do I know?	What reactions do I notice in myself? In the group?	Why are we reacting in these ways? What are possible reasons for this situation? What values do I need to hold as we continue?	What can I do to hold these values? What is my next step?	Do It.

## Sample FAIR Conversation Method Applications for Facilitators (continued)

Topic/Context	FACTS	ASSOCIATIONS	INTERPRETIVE	RESOLVE	Closing
<b>Setting a historical context for a vision workshop.</b> Looking at our past allows us to build a solid plan for the future.	What are some events and accomplishments in this organization for the last 20 years?	What, for you, have been high / low points? Really key events?	How would you pull this together into a story of our journey? What have we learned?	What does this tell us about who we are now and where we need to go in the future?	Our past accomplishments tell us we can have a great future.
<b>Appraisal of additional assignments.</b> I need to decide whether I can do this.	What tasks are involved in this assignment? What time and skills are needed for this assignment?	What is my gut feeling about this assignment?	What might I learn from this assignment? What importance is attached to this assignment?	How do I respond to this assignment?	This is what I'll tell my boss.
<b>Reflecting on a frustrating meeting (after the meeting).</b> We need to evaluate the last meeting.	What do you remember about the meeting? What actually happened?	What emotions did you notice? What is the first point where you experienced frustration?	Why did we react that way?	What changes do we need to make for our next meeting? What could we do differently if we had this meeting again?	This has been a powerful learning experience.
<b>Discussion of inappropriate staff behavior.</b> Context phrased in ORID format: O-You've been late _ times R-This worries me, I-and I want to understand D-so we can deal with this.		What facts can you tell me about what's been happening? What effects of this behavior have you observed?	What has been the most difficult for you?	What, would you say, are the underlying issues? What are the implications of this situation?	What can you / we do to make sure your job is done effectively? What is the first action we need to take? I expect this will make a significant difference.
<b>Implementing a new board policy.</b> The board has passed a policy that we need to implement effectively.	As you read this new policy, what words or phrases catch your attention? What does the paper say are the components of this policy?	What intrigues you about this policy? What makes you angry? What worries you?	What implications does this policy have for our operations? What changes will be required of us?	What do we need to do to implement this policy?	I think we're being creative and responsible in our implementation of this policy.
<b>Discussing an intolerable problem.</b> We need to solve this problem.	Let's reconstruct the events that have led to this issue. What was the first thing that happened? Other things?	What has been the most irritating?	What patterns do you begin to see here? What do you think are causes of this problem? What are possible solutions?	Which one (or combination) of these solutions shall we try first?	We'll begin to implement this solution ASAP.
<b>Conversation after a fight on the playground.</b> Let's sort this out.	Jackie, exactly what happened? Suzanne, now you tell me what happened.	How did you feel when she hit you? How do you think she felt when you pushed her?	Why do you think this fight happened?	What could you do differently if this happens again? What can we do now so we can all return to what we were doing before the fight?	OK. Have fun!



# Consensus Workshop Method Flow



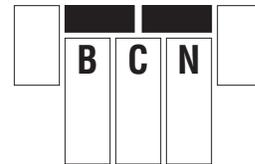
ICA's ToP™ Consensus Workshop Method

---

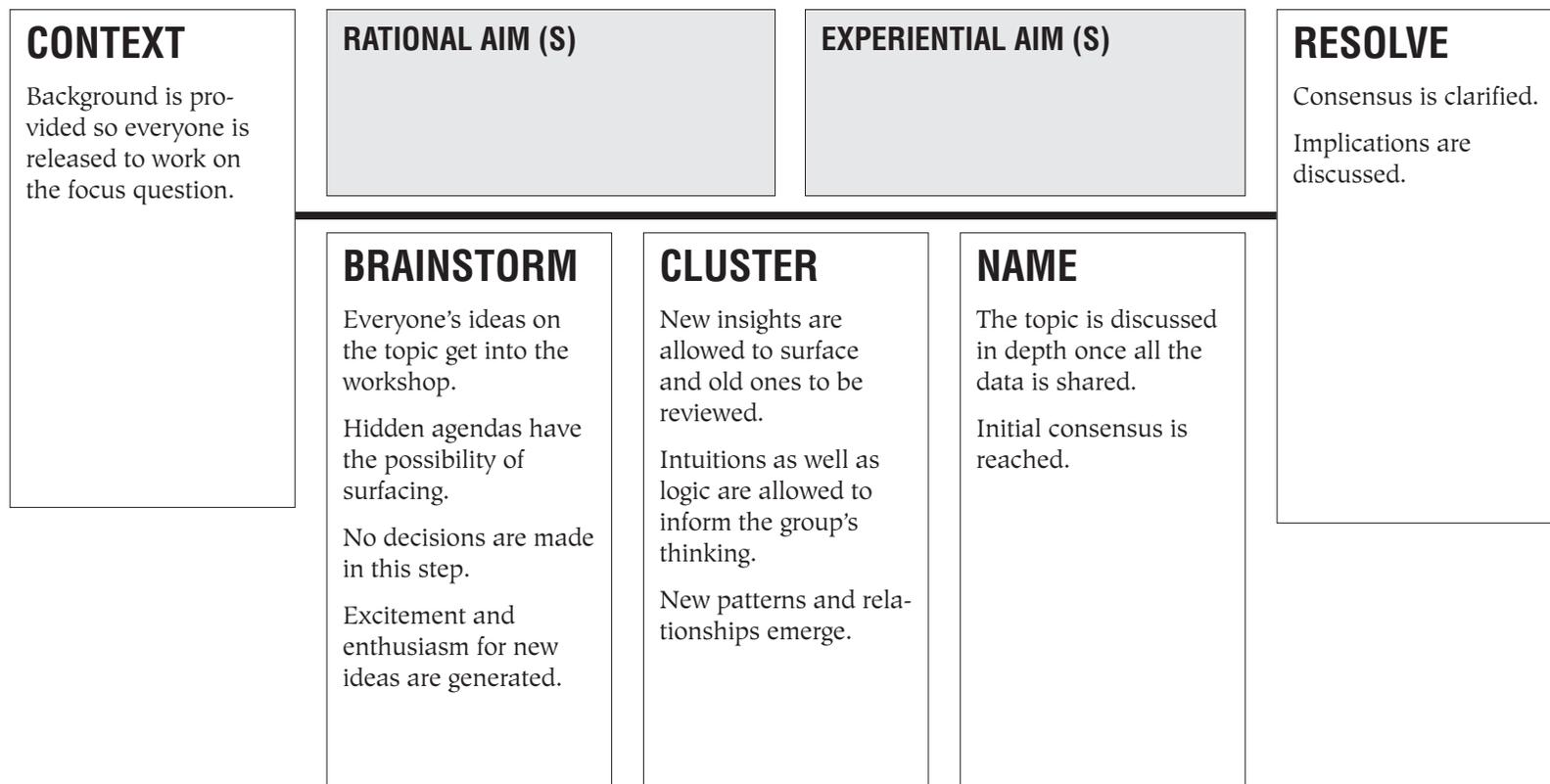
# Consensus Workshop Method Overview

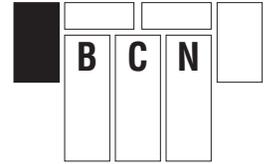
<p><b>CONTEXT</b></p> <p><i>Setting the Stage</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Explain product/outcome.</li><li>2. Outline process and timeline.</li><li>3. Highlight focus question.</li></ol> <p><i>see page 22</i></p>	<p><b>RATIONAL AIM (S)</b></p> <p>What the group needs to <i>KNOW</i>—the product or decision.</p>	<p><b>EXPERIENTIAL AIM (S)</b></p> <p>How the group needs to <i>BE</i> different by the end of the workshop.</p>	<p><b>RESOLVE</b></p> <p><i>Confirming the resolve</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. FAIR Conversation on the resolve.</li><li>2. Create a product from the consensus.</li><li>3. Reflect on the experience</li></ol> <p><i>see page 26</i></p>
<p><b>BRAINSTORM</b></p> <p><i>Generating New Ideas</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Brainstorm individually.</li><li>2. Select your best ideas.</li><li>3. Brainstorm as a small group.</li></ol> <p><i>see page 23</i></p>	<p><b>CLUSTER</b></p> <p><i>Forming New Relationships</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Gather ideas from each group.</li><li>2. Develop clusters.</li><li>3. Relate extras.</li></ol> <p><i>see page 24</i></p>	<p><b>NAME</b></p> <p><i>Discerning the Consensus</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Discern the focus of each cluster.</li><li>2. Discuss cluster for clarity and insights.</li><li>3. Name each cluster.</li></ol> <p><i>see page 25</i></p>	

# Building Consensus through Workshops



*Each step of Consensus Workshop Method, and the order of the steps, directly contributes to the emergence of a group consensus.*





- sets the mood for full participation
- overview of how workshop is integrated into daily activity
- produces confident attitude towards a new situation
- primes the pump for a thorough, comprehensive brainstorm

## STEPS: Explain Product/Outcome

- HINTS:** Name the topic and clarify what the workshop is about.
- State clearly why this workshop is important.
- State clearly what the product or outcome will be, the aim of the workshop.
- Say how the outcome or product will be used.

## Outline process & timeline

Explain how the process will work, and that there will be time for individual thinking and sharing ideas in small teams.

Give everyone a clear understanding of available time.

Tell them what your role will be as a facilitator.

Name or create “working assumptions”

e.g.:

1. Everyone has wisdom.
2. We need everyone’s wisdom for the wisest result.
3. There are no wrong answers.
4. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
5. Each person will hear others and be heard.

*“We are working toward the formation of a consensus.”*

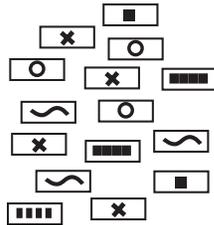
## Highlight Focus Question

Explain how the focus question was decided upon.

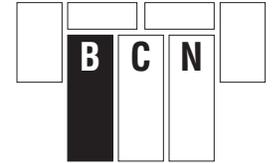
Write the focus question where the group can constantly see it.

You may use the conversation method to focus the group on the topic. If you do, make it clear that it is to be a brief conversation. (See examples offered on pages 16 and 17).

# Brainstorm



- a method of rapidly listing ideas or issues
- a way to involve all participants in contributing their insights
- a process which reveals the group's best thinking first



## STEPS: Brainstorm individually

- HINTS:** Ask a focus question everyone can answer (e.g. each person brainstorm 5 to 6 elements of...).
- Give individuals time to do their own thinking. Remind them "There are no wrong answers".
- May give a few examples first to help seed the imagination.
- Mind-mapping and/or guided daydreaming may be useful.

## Select your best idea

- Ask participants to star (\*) their own 3-5 best ideas before beginning to share.
- Reassure them that this does not completely eliminate their other ideas; it speeds up the small group discussions.

## Brainstorm as a group

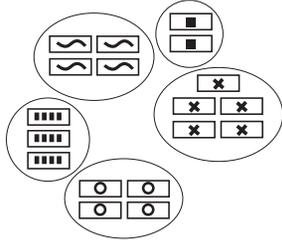
- Move into groups of 2-3 people (or larger teams with a leader if over 40 people total).
- Discuss their ideas for clarity, not agreement, within the small group.
- Each small group chooses \_\_\_# of clear ideas, eliminating overlap but honouring diversity of perspectives (total number of cards from the whole group between 35 and 60 for best results). Calculate ahead of time.
- Write instructions on flipchart:
- "n" cards per group
  - Eliminate duplication yet preserve diversity.
  - Put best ideas on cards (using 3-5 words).
- Show model of WRITING BOLDLY.
- 5x8" cards and broad non-toxic markers are best. Give cards and markers to group.

**LARGE  
BLOCK  
LETTERS**

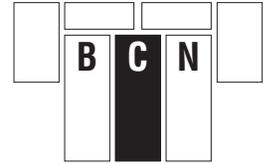
**ONE**

**3-5 WORDS  
PER IDEA**

# Cluster



- a way to push the intuitions of the team
- a way to see where points of agreement are
- a way for new relationships to be revealed
- a way to reveal where more data is needed



## STEPS: Gather cards from each group    Develop clusters

*These two steps overlap in practice*

### HINTS:

Think through ahead of time how you want the ideas organized (e.g., by intent or similar action—related to the focus question) but do not create rational categories.

Go around the room at least once so everyone participates.

Do 2-3 rounds of small groups passing up their cards to get (approx. 15) a variety of cards: first ask for “clearest”; next “ideas you are most confident about”; next “any that don’t fit”.

Place the cards on the board or wall using masking tape or putty.

- Accept and acknowledge all responses.
- Indicate to the group that there are no wrong answers.
- Answer questions of clarity only—let the person whose idea it was do the answering.
- Judgemental or “editorial” comments from you or others will cut off participation of some people.
- If you don’t quite understand what the person meant, ASK rather than try to interpret.

Ask the group to intuitively put cards that are similar together to form clusters, usually in columns. You are looking for new relationships, not just all the ideas related to a particular subject going together, (e.g. money).

Ask the group to guide you in the clustering. Remind yourself and the group to let go of preconceived notions of categories and relationships. You do not have the answers, but may push their intuition by asking why things go together. Keep in mind that each cluster, when finished, forms one part of the final product, i.e., answers the focus question.

Put a symbol with the cluster so the cluster can be referred to without naming an idea.

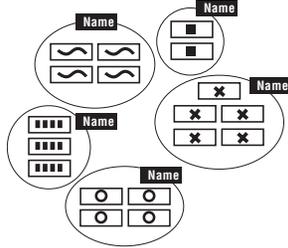
The third round—“any that don’t fit”—may reveal new clusters, or broaden any that do exist.

Discourage naming the clusterings until all the cards are up, to allow the emerging insight to grow or change.

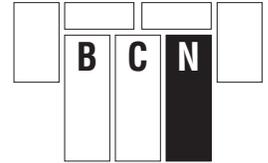
## Relate extras

Relate all the rest of the cards to the clusters. Groups may mark them before sending them up, to save time.

# Name



- depth dialogue to discern the consensus of the team
- a process that allows the team to take their work seriously
- catalyzing ownership of work



## STEPS: Discern the focus of each cluster

- HINTS:**
- Look for the largest cluster first.
  - (F) Read all the cards in the cluster aloud.
  - (A) Ask “What are the key words you hear in this cluster of ideas?”

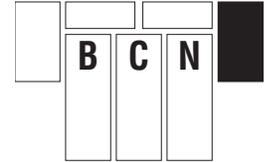
## Discuss cluster for clarity and insight

- (I) Explore the meaning behind this cluster.
- Ask “What is this area about?” (i.e., the focus or insight)
- Listen for insights behind the comments.
- The question you ask at this point will relate directly to the focus question.

## Name each cluster

- Give suggestions for form: e.g., noun and descriptive adjective, or action word, related to focus question and how the final product will be used.
- Ask for a few trial names, pulling together insights from 2-3 people. The name is an answer to the focus question.
- (R) Get consensus on a name. Ask “Does this hold our group’s insight behind all of these items?” Look for more than one nod or “aha” and no worried expressions. Redo this step if necessary until the group is satisfied.
- Write on a card and put up. Use a different colour card or put a border around it.





OVERALL TITLE				
Name	Name	Name	Name	Name
x	~	o	■■■■	■
x	~	o	■■■■	■
x	~	o	■■■■	■
x	~	o	■■■■	■
x	~	o	■■■■	■

- pulling together a whole picture of what the group has decided
- noting how the group has worked together
- stating next steps

## STEPS: FAIR Conversation on the resolve

### HINTS:

Sample discussion to prioritize the product of the workshop:

(Opening) Let's look at what we've come up with here.

Read title cards.

- What surprises you?
- What intrigues you?
- Which one of these is easiest to do?
- Which is hardest?
- Which would make the most difference?
- Which one are you committed to working on? (write names)

OR

- Which one of these shall we all work on first?

## Create a product from the consensus

A chart can quickly and easily hold the total information in front of the group. You are creating a whole picture that holds balance and completeness. In creating the chart, relationships between the clusters can be discussed (i.e. largest issue, key new action).

Sample Charts:

*Shows overall balance*

OVERALL TITLE				
Name	Name	Name	Name	Name

*Shows priorities by number of items*

OVERALL TITLE				
Name	Name	Name	Name	Name

*Indicates forward movement*

Name	Name			
Name	Name	Name		
Name	Name	Name	Name	

## Reflect on the experience

Sample discussion on the experience of the group:

(Opening) Let's step back from our work for a minute.

What are the steps of the workshop we've just gone through?

Where did you get most involved?

Where are you excited/intrigued about our work?

What breakthroughs did we have?

What is the significance of our work?

How does this workshop inform our next steps?

Who will document our work?

---

## *Insight into the Process of Clustering*

EDWARD S. “NED” RUETE

from a posting on a *Group Facilitation* listserv (IAF, 24 March 1997). Reprinted by permission of the author. IAF and listserv information is found in the Appendix.

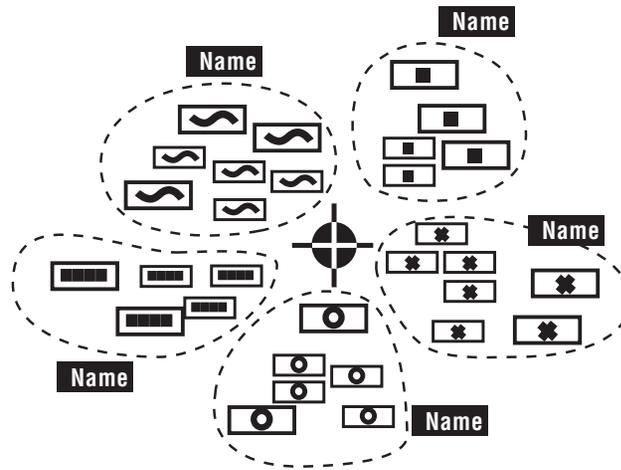
Organic categories come from watching the ideas fall together into bunches through an iterative and chaotic process and then naming the bunches. Coming up with categories in advance is the technique that—on more than one occasion—I have seen destroy the effectiveness of an entire series of workshops.

I try to keep an open mind about nearly everything that has to do with facilitation but on this point I’m gun shy. When I think back to my worst moments as a facilitator, they did not involve dealing with difficult people, or having to scrap my design in the middle of the session and start over, or lack of participation, or forgetting materials, or any of the other usual nightmares. As bad as those moments are (and I’ve had my share of them), they are nothing compared to the sick feeling I get when a good exercise isn’t working because I’m trying to force fit the creative, divergent work of a bright and involved team into pre-determined or hurriedly determined categories. The ideas don’t fit, the participants

get frustrated, and I know that the rest of the work on this project will go badly because the categories we’re going to work on aren’t the real categories we need to work on and don’t have a good fit of ideas in them. I feel like a charlatan—masquerading as a facilitator, but really just leading the group through a fixed process to get their buy-in, not really trying for true collaborative work products. I just don’t do this anymore. Predetermined categories, fishbone diagrams where the main “bones” are the 4 Ms (materials, maintenance, money, and labor), planning exercises with three time frames, process analysis based on functional departments, high-medium-low priorities: these are in my toolbox, but they stay in the box until I see that they are ideas that might help the group create its own categories.

Edward S. “Ned” Ruete

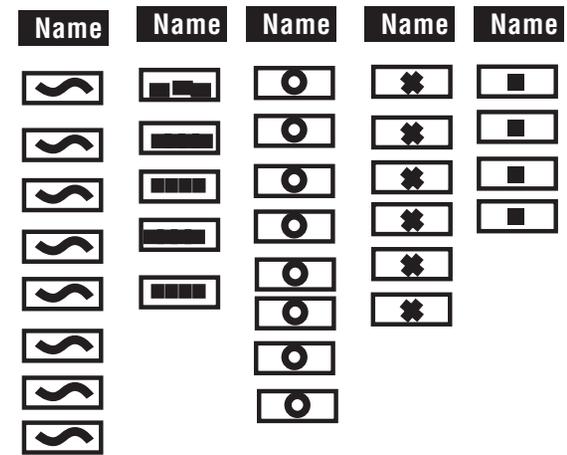
# Common Visual Techniques for Clustering



## IN CLOUDS OR CLUMPS

This visual form emphasizes non-rational relationships. It allows new patterns to emerge and entrenched patterns to be diffused. Its disadvantage is that physical distinctions among clusters may not be as clear.

To increase clarity, use a clock face with 12:00, 3:00, 6:00 and 9:00 markings, or a compass with N, S, E, W markings, instead of symbol cards.



## IN COLUMNS

This visual form encourages the eye to move up and down as well as sideways. It is reassuringly rational. Its disadvantage is that the top brainstorm card can easily be mistaken as the “title” or “category” too early, thus restricting the emergence of new patterns and relationships.

Use simple, value-neutral symbols to hold the columns apart and to avoid premature categorization. √ + Δ 0

---

## *Optional Follow-up Steps at the Conclusion of a ToP™ Workshop*

The Naming step of the ToP™ Consensus Workshop Method creates several clusters of named data. There are many things you can do with this type of consensus. Some suggestions follow. One of these may be more useful than others to reach your aim. For example: for a mission statement, you may want to write a sentence for each column, and then arrange them into your final mission statement. Or, for a set of strategies, you may want to set up a task force for each group of similar actions. Alternatively, at the end of the workshop, during the Resolve step, you could ask the participants which option they would like to pursue.

### **PROSE STATEMENTS**

#### *1. Write Sentences.*

Assign several people to work together to write a sentence for each column giving the name of the column and a description of the main insight contained in the column.

#### *2. Write Paragraphs.*

Use the data in each cluster to provide much of the content of the paragraph. Ask 2 people per column to write a paragraph for each column.

#### *3. Use it as a Table of Contents.*

With an appropriate Introduction and Appendix, the workshop columns could become the Table of Contents of a research paper or a report. An entire chapter can be written starting with the cards in each column.

### **PREPARING FOR ACTION**

#### *4. Prioritize the Columns.*

The amount of data in each column will give a preliminary idea of the priority value of each column. Use a focused conversation during the Resolve step of the workshop to prioritize with the group.

#### *5. Set up Committee or Task Force.*

Assign a small committee or task force to each column to decide the next steps for that column.

#### *6. Do a ToP™ Workshop on some of the columns.*

Schedule one or a series of workshops for each Named Cluster in order to get more input and develop a more comprehensive picture for that Cluster.

#### *7. Weave the columns together to create a solution.*

Use the focused conversation method to make a solution that holds the information in all the columns.

### **IMAGES THAT HOLD INSIGHT**

#### *8. Create a rational chart of columns.*

Engage the participants in a dialogue about the relationship between the columns and then create a chart which holds the relationships clearly.

#### *9. Create a picture, graphic or image to hold the consensus.*

Brainstorm a list of graphic images (geometric shapes, objects, or artforms) and map the column titles onto the graphic image.

#### *10. Create a song or poem from the work.*

Use the column titles, or important words in each column, and put them into rhyming couplets of some other device. Add a tune and create a song.

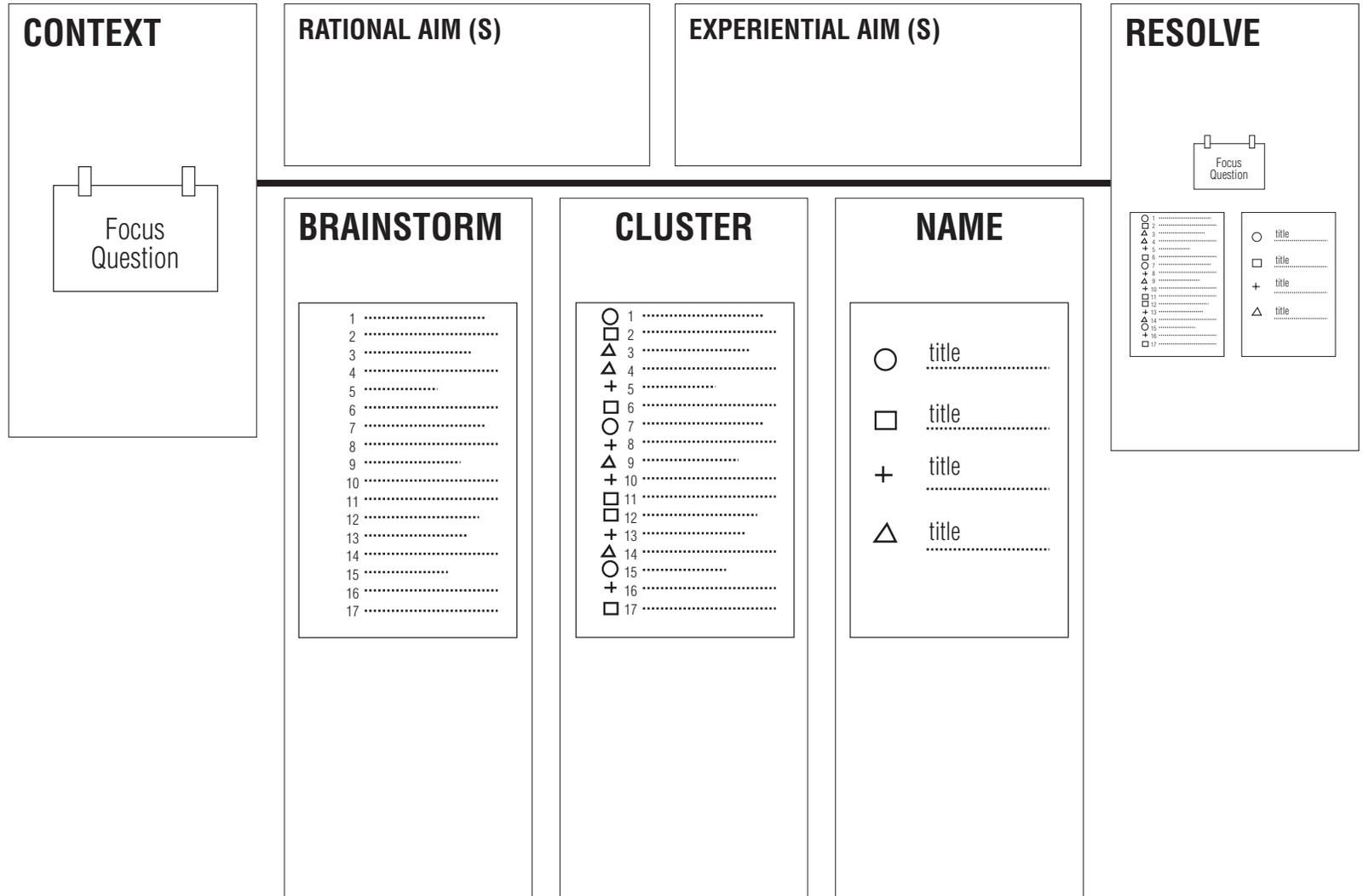
# Consensus Workshop Method Visual Overview - Quick Flipchart Version

Use for:

- informal groups,
- simple, non-controversial topics where similarities are easy to see,
- small groups under 10,
- when you have fewer than 20 items.

Use it, for example, in:

- Small breakout groups during a larger process.
- Consolidating items on a busy meeting agenda.
- Quickly sorting out minor complexities.
- Getting a handle on issues that pop up suddenly.
- Short training exercises.
- Assigning tasks from “to do” lists.



# Consensus Workshop Method Overview - Quick Flipchart Version

Use for:

- informal groups,
- simple, non-controversial topics where similarities are easy to see,
- small groups under 10,
- when you have fewer than 20 items.

Use it, for example, in:

- Small breakout groups during a larger process.
- Consolidating items on a busy meeting agenda.
- Quickly sorting out minor complexities.
- Getting a handle on issues that pop up suddenly.
- Short training exercises.
- Assigning tasks from “to do” lists.

## CONTEXT

*Setting the Stage*

1. Explain product/outcome.
2. Outline process and timeline.
3. Highlight focus question.

## RATIONAL AIM (S)

What the group needs to *KNOW*—the product or decision.

## EXPERIENTIAL AIM (S)

How the group needs to *BE* different by the end of the workshop.

## RESOLVE

*Confirming the resolve*

1. Read through all named groups out loud.
2. FAIR Conversation on the resolve.
3. Next steps.

## BRAINSTORM

*Generating New Ideas*

1. Brainstorm individually.
2. Individuals select their best ideas.
3. Go around the room and get each person's idea, one at a time. Print it on a flipchart in their words, then go to the next person.

Continue until you have all the data. Number each item for easy identification. Pre-number the page, if possible.

## CLUSTER

*Forming New Relationships*

1. Ask for 2 items that are similar. Place a symbol beside them.
2. Ask for another pair, different from the first pair. Place a different symbol beside this second pair.
3. Identify 5-6 pairs, placing a different symbol beside each pair.
4. Add extras until all items have a symbol.

(Some items can be changed or may have more than one symbol.)

## NAME

*Discerning the Consensus*

1. Draw all symbols on second sheet of flipchart paper.
2. Read aloud carefully and clearly all items with same symbol. Ask what that grouping should be named. (Use FAIR as in card method.)
3. Write the name on the second flipchart beside its symbol.
4. Repeat for each grouping until all are named.

# Worksheets Work Together

**FOCUS QUESTION WORKSHEET**

**1**  
Start by understanding your group and creating your Focus Question using the Focus Question Worksheet.

**2**  
Transfer your Focus Question and Aims onto a Workshop Form.

**WORKSHOP FORM**

CONTEXT	RATIONAL AIM (S)		EXPERIENTIAL AIM (S)	RESOLVE
	BRAINSTORM	CLUSTER	NAME	

**?**  
FOCUS QUESTION

**FOCUSED CONVERSATION METHOD FORM**

OPENING	RATIONAL AIM	EXPERIENTIAL AIM	CLOSING
<b>O</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>D</b>

**3**  
You probably need to design Focused Conversations for:

- setting the CONTEXT,
- NAMING the Clusters,
- and perhaps more than one at the RESOLVE stage.

**4**  
Finish by adding to the Workshop Planning Form:

- reminders of all the steps,
- the math (# of small groups and cards),
- timing and other considerations.

## Example of Consensus Workshop Documentation

Documentation tips:

- Do not try to make a separate table cell for each card. Instead...
- Use punctuation to improve readability.
- Clean up abbr'ns (abbreviations) and maybe spelling too, but do not change words.
- Use sans serif narrow fonts for brainstorm cards and bold, centred Times fonts for titles.
- Modify the borders of the cells of the title cards to make them stand out further.
- Shrink font size and adjust column widths to fit the chart onto one page.

<b>WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SEE IN PLACE IN 5 YEARS?</b>						
ACADEMIC COLLABORATION	POWERFUL PUBLIC PROFILE	POLITICALLY PROACTIVE	INTERACTIVE PROVINCE-WIDE COMMUNITY	VISIONARY CORPORATE MANAGEMENT	RESPONSIBLE PARTICIPATIVE MEMBERSHIP	EFFECTIVE MEMBERSHIP SERVICES
<p>Strong links with students and universities</p> <p>Collaboration with universities</p> <p>Money into research equals accountability</p> <p>Involvement with academic curriculum committees re professional issues and academic program</p> <p>Continuing refresher education with universities</p>	<p>Powerful public profile</p> <p>Being an authority on profession in Ontario and having a say about it</p> <p>Marketing ourselves</p> <p>Institutional lobbying</p> <p>Increased person power</p> <p>Cost effective</p> <p>Legislated body</p> <p>Professional image – self and others</p> <p>High public profile</p> <p>Make our field a household word</p> <p>Public relations profile</p>	<p>Effective proactive politics</p> <p>Politically proactive</p> <p>LINK – medium to politics</p> <p>Proactive to issues</p> <p>Representation in government ministry</p>	<p>Working groups all over province – coordinated and proactive</p> <p>Forum for networking</p> <p>Province wide community</p> <p>Professional networking</p> <p>Fat LINK</p> <p>Local members involved</p> <p>Networking – interest groups – conferences</p>	<p>Strong financial base</p> <p>Ongoing assessment of activities, to-do lists, needs</p> <p>Fulltime provincial office</p> <p>Proactive leadership</p> <p>Corporate office – flawless, accessible</p> <p>Stronger, expanded improved administrative structure</p> <p>Sound operation</p>	<p>Membership – 90%</p> <p>Guilt-free membership</p> <p>Stakeholder driven</p> <p>Responsive to members' needs</p> <p>Direct responsive communication – in touch with members</p> <p>Training and respect for Board members</p> <p>Increased membership participation</p> <p>Listen to the consumer</p> <p>Confidence in and commitment to profession</p>	<p>Accessible continuing education</p> <p>Office – resource data base</p> <p>Viable membership services</p> <p>Leadership for private practice</p> <p>Guidelines for practice</p> <p>Resource centre (office)</p> <p>Diversified professional development</p> <p>Education – accessible, practical</p> <p>Broadened educational opportunities</p> <p>Refresher educational program</p>

# Practising the Consensus Workshop in 30 minutes - Some key steps

## FOCUS:

<p><b>CONTEXT</b></p> <p><i>Setting the Stage</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Print the Focus Question on a piece of flip chart paper and post it high on the wall</li> <li>2. Welcome everyone to the workshop.</li> <li>3. Set a context for the workshop and the focus question.</li> <li>4. You may need to tell them the range of perspectives they need to keep in mind.</li> </ol> <p><i>1 minutes</i></p>	<p><b>RATIONAL AIM (S)</b></p> <p>Try out the steps of the Consensus Workshop Method and see how people respond.</p>	<p><b>EXPERIENTIAL AIM (S)</b></p> <p>Become confident that the Consensus Workshop Method can be used.</p>	<p><b>RESOLVE</b></p> <p><i>Confirming the resolve</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Read Focus Question and column titles out loud (as many as are named). (There is no real reflection on the content of the workshop because it is only an incomplete demonstration.)</li> <li>2. Thank everyone for their participation.</li> </ol> <p><i>Start the reflection on the experience to learn from each other about what it is like to facilitate a Consensus Workshop.</i></p> <p><i>1 minute</i></p>
	<p><b>BRAINSTORM</b></p> <p><i>Generating New Ideas</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hand out five index cards per person and magic markers.</li> <li>2. Ask each person to print five answers to the Focus Question directly onto index cards, one per card.</li> </ol> <p><i>3 minutes</i></p>	<p><b>CLUSTER</b></p> <p><i>Forming Relationships</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Collect three cards from each person.</li> <li>2. Read the cards aloud as you stick them onto the wall.</li> <li>3. Ask if there are any questions of clarity.</li> <li>4. Ask if they can find any cards that pair-up, reminding them of the clustering principle.</li> <li>5. Put symbols on each set of paired cards.</li> <li>6. Collect the rest of the cards and read them out loud as you put them up.</li> <li>7. Continue clustering.</li> </ol> <p><i>15 minutes</i></p>	<p><b>NAME</b></p> <p><i>Discerning the Consensus</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Read the longest column of cards out loud.</li> <li>2. Ask which words stand out?</li> <li>3. Ask what this column is about?</li> <li>4. Read Focus Question out loud.</li> <li>5. Get participants to name the cluster, in answer to the focus question.</li> <li>6. Depending on how much time you have remaining... continue with naming each column of cards.</li> </ol> <p><i>10 minutes</i></p>

# Creating a Focus Question

The FOCUS QUESTION is the starting point for the group's work. It is a question which focuses the attention of the group on a specific subject, while allowing creative responses.

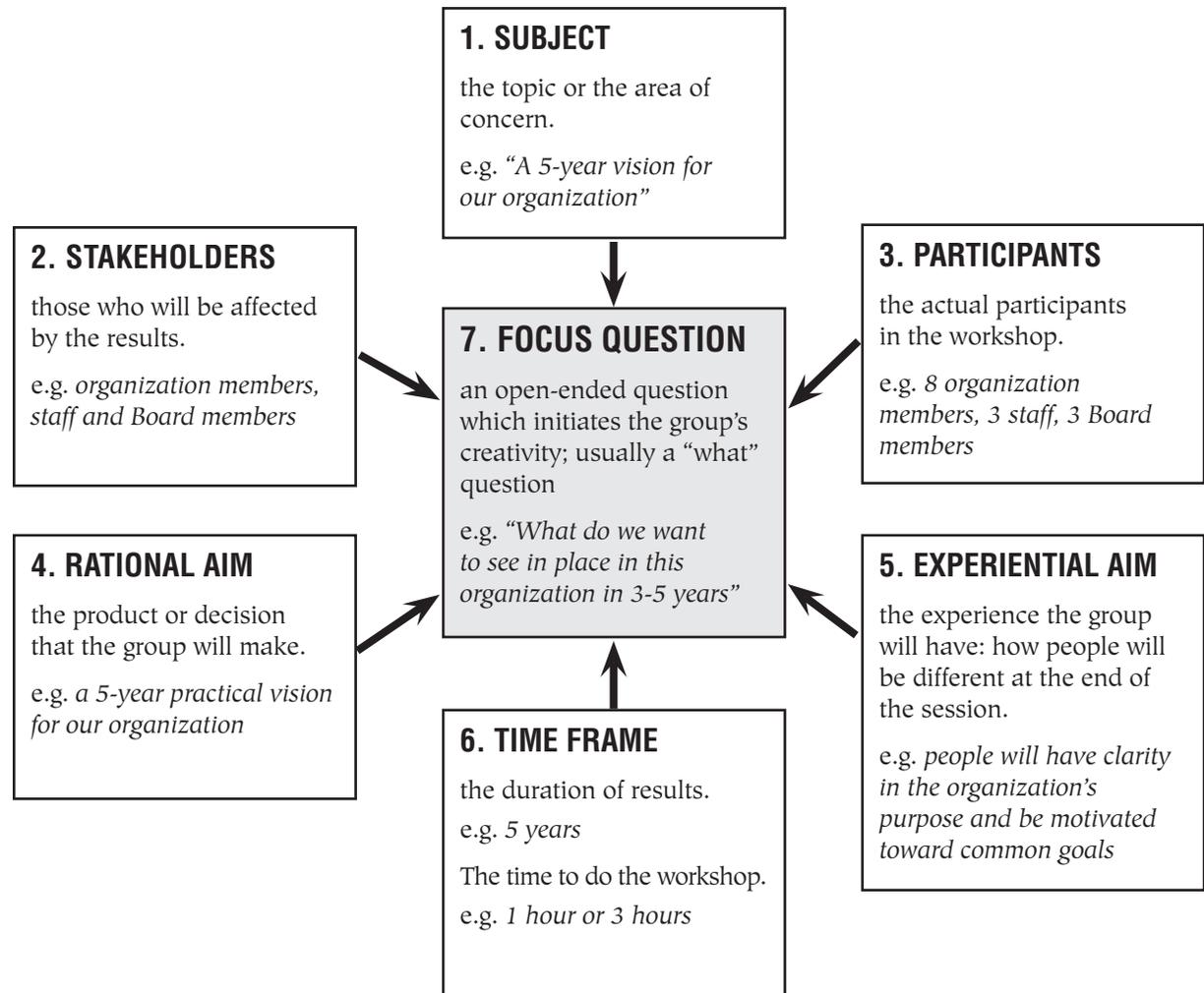
To create a focus question before a workshop, first identify the subject, rational and experiential aims, the participants, the stakeholders in the product, and the time frame.

The focus question should:

- be an open-ended question.
- draw out many specific responses from each person.
- name the subject as specifically as possible.
- identify the stakeholders (at least as "we").
- identify the time frame (if relevant).
- be simple and clear enough for the participants to answer with a minimum of explanation.

Check the focus question by imagining possible answers from the group. Will there likely be many different specific answers? Imagine how they might cluster together. Will the results be the product the group needs?

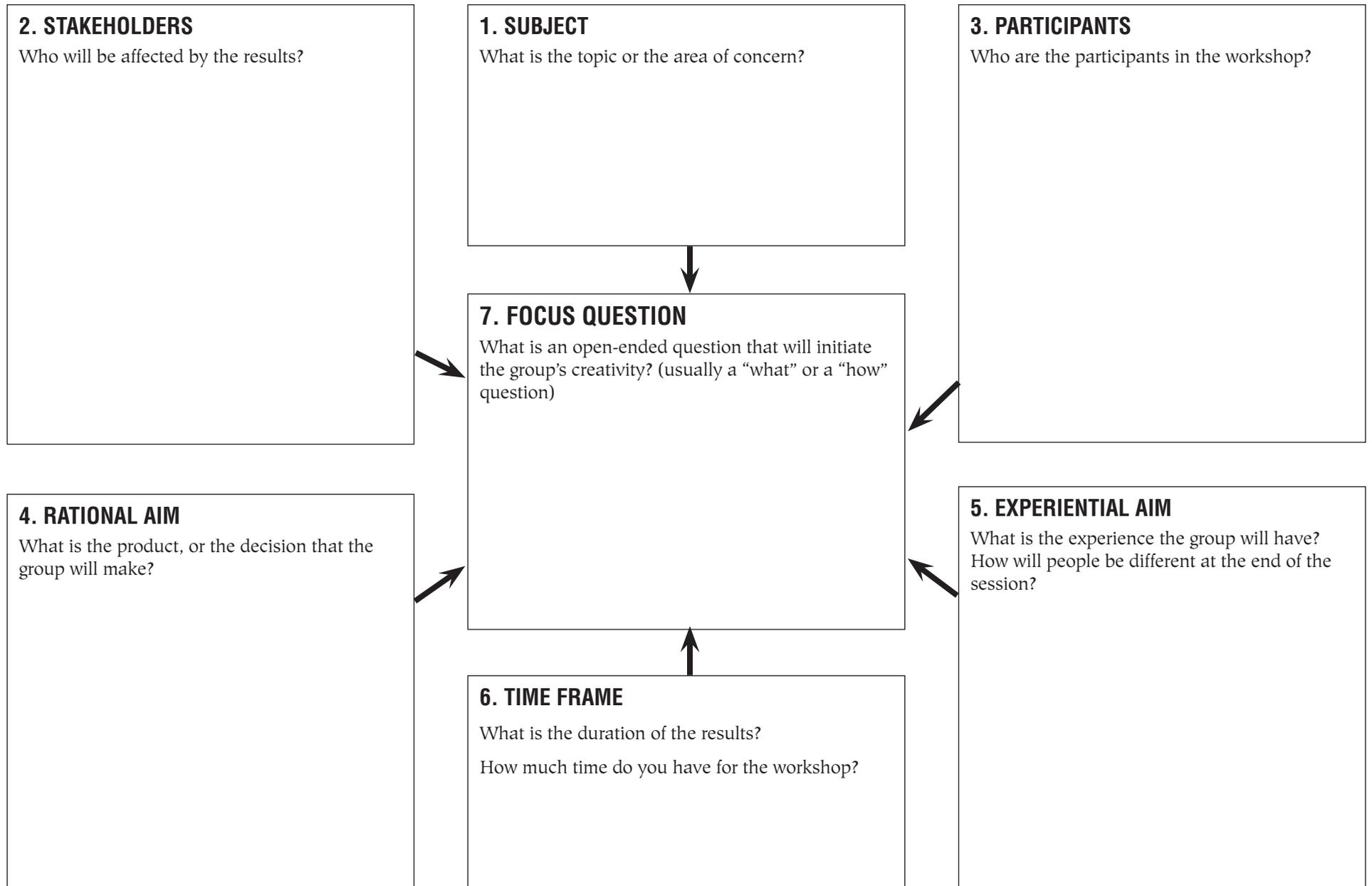
The focus question may be written up on a flipchart to keep the group focused throughout the workshop.



# Sample Focus Questions

<b>Rational Aim</b>	<b>Sample Focus Question</b>	<b>Cluster by:</b>	<b>Suggested Form of Cluster Names</b>
Create a 5 year Practical Vision for our organization	What do we want to see in place in this organization in 3-5 years?	Similar characteristics	Juicy adjective, adjective, noun, e.g. state-of-the-art communications department
Outline of the report	What are all the pieces of information we want to include in this report?	Similar kinds of info - chapters	Adjective noun, e.g. historical influence
Action plans to do project	What are all the things we need to do to accomplish this project?	Actions that can be done together	Gerund noun, e.g. cleaning grounds
List of shared elements to include in holiday plans	What are elements of a successful holiday?	Similar components	Adjective noun, e.g. quiet time
A set of strategies to unblock us	What can we do to deal with these obstacles?	Actions that can be done together	Gerund noun, e.g. starting new business
Description of qualities to work toward as a team	What are the qualities of a high performance work team?	Similar qualities	Juicy adjective or metaphor, e.g. respectful
Basic attributes for a “dohickey”	What attributes are needed for this “dohickey” to work well?	Similar attributes	Juicy adjective noun, e.g. slick wheels
Underlying obstacles that block us	What blocks are we running into?	Underlying root issues	Descriptive phrase, e.g. undeveloped personal capacity
Consensus on solution to problem	What are elements of a solution to this problem?	Similar components of a solution	Adjective noun, e.g. focused training
A useful project framework	What are all the things that need to be included in our overall framework?	Similar elements of framework	Adjective noun
An improvement plan for team performance	What are all the things we could do to improve our team performance?	Similar actions	Verb object, e.g. hold regular meetings
Values for dealing with topic	What are all the things we have to consider in approaching this topic?	Similar considerations	Adjective noun, e.g. personal feelings
Shared vision of a healthy community	If you were looking for a healthy community to move to in the next year, what factors or identifying characteristics would you be looking for?	Similar characteristics	Juicy adjective noun, e.g. lively commercial activity

## FOCUS QUESTION WORKSHEET



---

**WORKSHOP FORM**

**FOCUS:**

<b>CONTEXT</b>	<b>RATIONAL AIM (S)</b>	<b>EXPERIENTIAL AIM (S)</b>		<b>RESOLVE</b>
	<b>BRAINSTORM</b>	<b>CLUSTER</b>	<b>NAME</b>	