



The Innovator: Challenging People to Think

The dynamics of any meeting or training session may differ slightly, but one thing remains true: it's difficult to get full participation and full productivity from all participants. And when decisions must be made, prioritization and reaching consensus can be time consuming and frustrating.

Many devices and techniques have been developed to try to improve these elements. But all have drawbacks, including cumbersome processes and lack of confidentiality. Biases creep in. Time is wasted. And the results of meetings and training sessions can be frustrating and incomplete in terms of action steps and commitment.

The Innovator is a group decision-support system utilizing group polling software, audience response keypads, and distinctive group process facilitation to provide immediate and anonymous feedback involving all members of the audience. **The Innovator** gives participants the ability to see their level of consensus, quickly prioritize issues, and anonymously generate feedback about proposed actions.

The Innovator can be used with up to 250 participants. The ideal group size ranges from 4 to 18 people. Seated in a U-shaped configuration, each participant has a small voting keypad networked to a lap top computer. Output from the computer is shown on a large projection screen.

The Innovator is used to poll the group. For instance, **The Innovator** might be used to assist in strategic planning, where each participant is asked to prioritize among a number of critical success factors for the future.

By pressing a number key on the voting keypad, the participant can cast an anonymous vote for his or her highest priority. The vote is instantly counted and displayed, in almost any available type of chart, graph, or table.

The Innovator speeds up any voting or group consensus process enormously. For example, doing a paired comparison of any ten items means comparing each item to every other item. This would involve 45 or more individual decisions. With **The Innovator**, those decisions can be made at the touch of a button, and collated just as fast.

SESSION DESIGN

The actual design of **The Innovator** sessions depends upon the session objective, but there are some core characteristics. In most cases, issues, ideas, or opinions are elicited from the group on a particular topic or problem. This is done through a series of strategic questions. Next, the participants may engage in a series of group or individual exercises, while the facilitator records the results of these exercises. Finally, the participants anonymously and individually vote on the central factors or issues involved in the session.

The Innovator eliminates a major bias that occurs in some meetings; anonymous voting prevents peer pressure or leader pressure from coloring participant votes. In addition, the voting process ensures full involvement by every member of the group. This in turn leads to greater commitment to and ownership of the group's ultimate plan.

Even though **The Innovator** takes full advantage of computer technology, the process is simple and easy. Above all, using **The Innovator** is a flexible process. It's possible, even probable, that the original session plan will be changed during the course of the work, based on participant feedback given through **The Innovator**. Even more important, the process is enjoyable and people are rewarded for their efforts with instant results.

USES OF THE INNOVATOR GROUP DECISION SUPPORT SYSTEM

Sessions can be designed to last anywhere from two hours to two days. Topics that **The Innovator** process can address range from an individual unit of analysis (Critical Competencies) to organizational issues (Critical

Success Factors).

While the hardware and software are the most apparent components of this system, the protocols that have been developed are the key to its value. *The Innovator* can be used in several decision-making situations, such as.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

As a tool for senior management and planning groups, *The Innovator's* primary purpose is to facilitate strategic and operational planning at the organizational, divisional, or departmental levels. *The Innovator* has enabled groups to reduce processing time from weeks to days.

The Innovator gives participants the ability to see their level of consensus, quickly prioritize issues, and anonymously provide feedback about proposed actions. Through their use of *The Innovator*, organizations are able to make higher quality decisions faster and implement decisions that stand a higher chance for long-term success because of the consensus achieved. Planning issues most often addressed with the help of *The Innovator* include:

- Development of mission, vision, and core value statements
- Identification and impact analysis of change
- Identification and prioritization of critical success factors
- Identification of core behaviors or actions required
- Identification of key obstacles and supports for implementation

TEAM PROCESS

As organizations move toward team environments, creating innovative solutions to complex problems in an efficient way becomes increasingly important. Team activities that can be facilitated by *The Innovator* include:

- Analysis of problems and contributing factors
- Identification and prioritization or weighting of criteria
- Identification and specification of alternative solutions and best solution
- Specification and assignment of implementation activities

The Innovator facilitates open communication and helps the team build consensus quickly without limiting the participation of individual members. It also provides tools to help teams identify and concentrate on the most important issues facing the team at any point in the process.

THE INNOVATOR'S BENEFITS

The Innovator provides multiple benefits in the quality and speed of group interactions. Through a combination of facilitated discussion and computer-assisted consensus, each session is uniquely designed to fit the issue and/or purpose.

The Innovator:

- Focuses group energy
- Accumulates and immediately synthesizes large amounts of information
- Speeds the decision-making/consensus-building process
- Decreases the chance that only the loud will be heard
- Increases communication through the identification and discussion of areas of conflict or disagreement
- Overcomes limitations of individual participation
- Helps build teams through increased participation and clear focus
- Identifies opportunities that permit the greatest payoff for actions taken
- Builds group consensus, alignment, and commitment around an issue