**Purpose:**

Paired Comparisons is a way of determining priorities and selecting the order for action that forces decisions. It is a great way of transferring the ideas from brainstorming or other idea generation techniques into an action plan.

**Directions:**

As a technique, it is easy, but it should be supported with data and take account of agreed criteria. When you have a range of actions, rather than ask each person for their top choices, which is likely to produce a range, just compare each item with another in pairs. The outcome is very straightforward.

For example, let’s say there are 5 things to do and we need to determine the order. Simply take A and compare it against B, then A against C and so on until you finish with D against E. The result is best recorded in a table for clarity similar to that shown below. Work along the rows where there is an entry and enter the priority item in each comparison.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Item | Description | | | | |
| A |  | **A or B** | **A or C** | **A or D** | **A or E** |
| B |  |  | **B or C** | **B or D** | **B or E** |
| C |  |  |  | **C or D** | **C or E** |
| D |  |  |  |  | **D or E** |
| E |  |  |  |  |  |

An example of a completed table would look something like the following:-

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Item | Description | | | | |
| A |  | **A** | **A** | **A** | **A** |
| B |  |  | **B** | **B** | **E** |
| C |  |  |  | **D** | **E** |
| D |  |  |  |  | **E** |
| E |  |  |  |  |  |

The priority is then simply a matter of those with the most entries in the table. The table can either be completed as a group or individually in which case the tables of each individual are added together. The above example shows A as the top priority followed E, B, D with C as the lowest priority.

**N/3:** Where there is a long list of potential actions to be compared it might be beneficial to reduce the number of possibilities which is where N/3 comes into play. Where N is the number of possible alternatives then divide that number by 3 and give that number of votes to each member of the team to select their top choices. That will produce a reduced list on which you use Paired Comparisons as above.