

CHAPTER 25

Session crowdsourcing overview

THIS SECTION OF THE BOOK covers *session* crowdsourcing techniques. These techniques focus on first choosing the right topics, issues, challenges, and solutions to explore, and then moving to appropriate discussions, breakouts, engagement, and learning opportunities.

The following chapter explains *how to prepare for and run* a set of crowdsourced sessions. *Be sure to read it!* Figuring out the right sessions to run is all important, but if your attendees and conference environment aren't prepared in advance to allow sessions to run smoothly and effectively, much of the value of crowdsourcing topics and issues will be undermined.

The next eight chapters cover a variety of approaches to session crowdsourcing, from the quick information exchange and active learning of *pair share* to the intricate lengthy process of whole-group problem definition and solving that *affinity grouping* supplies.

- Post It! For Sessions
- Pair share
- Guided discussions
- Fishbowls
- Fishbowl Sandwich
- Open Space
- World Café
- Affinity Grouping

I've also included six important *participatory voting* technique chapters: tools that are frequently needed in order to move group decision making forward.

- Hand/stand voting
- Roman voting
- Card voting
- Table voting
- Dot voting
- Anonymous voting

But before we dive into these specific session crowdsourcing techniques, let's define the term *crowdsourced session* and describe five key characteristics.

What is a crowdsourced session?

A crowdsourced session is a meeting session where attendees have significant impact on what happens during the session.

A session where only a few attendees affect what occurs is not a crowdsourced session. For example, traditional meeting sessions—presentations with a few opportunities for questions—do not satisfy the above definition.

During a crowdsourced session, every attendee has the opportunity to influence what happens. Not every attendee has to influence the session, but every attendee can.

Crowdsourced sessions have three important advantages over traditional presentation-style sessions:

- Attendees learn about each other in relevant and valuable ways during the session.
- Participants shape what happens at the session to make it maximally useful to those present.
- Expertise and experience available in the room that can usefully contribute to the session is uncovered and made available.

I've designed the following session crowdsourcing techniques to make it as easy as possible for any attendee to learn about other participants, participate, and shape the session to their specific wants and needs.

Five key characteristics of crowdsourced sessions

1) Crowdsourced sessions are facilitated

Crowdsourced sessions are facilitated, not taught. They are discussions or explorations of a topic or issue by attendees who possess different amounts of experience and expertise.

Sessions are led by a facilitator who, at a minimum, needs a working knowledge of the terminology and core topic background. Or, the facilitator may be a subject-matter expert who is able to share expertise on a wide range of topics.

Regardless of the facilitator's level of subject-matter expertise, what happens at the session is largely determined by participants.

2) Useful expertise and experience is uncovered, not assumed

Unlike traditional meeting presentations, crowdsourced sessions don't begin with assumptions about who has valuable expertise and experience to share, aka the presenter(s) at the front of the room. Although the session leader may have subject-matter expertise, the crowdsourcing process helps to uncover participants who can also make useful contributions.

The session then taps into these resources, maximizing the perspectives, expertise and experience available from and for everyone in the room. The result is a better session.

3) Participants determine what happens

What happens at traditional sessions is largely or completely determined by the presenter(s). Crowdsourced sessions request participant input. The facilitator and participants use this information to shape the resulting session into a form that reflects and attempts to satisfy the expressed needs and wants in the room.

4) Crowdsourced sessions use a variety of meeting formats

Traditional sessions use only two formats: lectures and Q&A. Crowdsourced sessions include a mixture of different formats that support appropriate processes: individual work, small group work, short presentations, and facilitated whole-group discussion.

The processes used are determined by session objectives. In some situations, a single multistep process—e.g. *The Solution Room*, (Chapter 23)—is appropriate for the entire session. In others, the facilitator chooses the processes in response to circumstances that develop during the session, rather like how a carpenter selects appropriate tools for their work.

5) Participants learn about each other during the session

At lectures, most attendees never say a word, and those who do speak only to the presenter. In contrast, every crowdsourced session includes facilitated interaction between attendees.

As a result, participants get to know each other in useful ways, and the ensuing new or strengthened relationships often continue after the session is over.