
*Quick Tips for Team Leaders*¹

QuickTip – Issues and Answers ²

Jeff Oltmann

Issues and Answers is a group problem-solving technique. It is a good way to help a large group tackle a long list of issues in a reasonably short amount of time.

When to Use

Use this technique when the group is working on issues that can be partly evaluated in small groups but still benefit from the participation of everyone. This technique is more complicated than many facilitation techniques, so prepare for it carefully and give clear instructions to the participants.

Procedure

This technique has four distinct phases – list the issues to be solved, analyze them, generate potential solutions, and select the best.

List issues

The facilitator may do this step in advance or during a break, depending on the nature of the problems to be solved.

- Agree on which problems the group should work on.
- Write a very short summary of each problem at the top of a flipchart and post the flipcharts around the room.

Analyze in small groups

- Ask participants to select a flipchart that lists a problem they have input on and go to that flipchart. This will result in groups of people gathered around each flipchart.

¹ This series of “Quick Tips” articles is by Jeff Oltmann, experienced program and technology executive and principal of Synergy Professional Services, LLC in Oregon, USA. The Quick Tips offer simple approaches and models for problem analysis, gathering ideas and input from team members, facilitation and taking action. The tips offered in this series were identified or developed over two decades of helping program, project and team leaders get things done in faster, more agile ways. Learn more about Jeff Oltmann in his author profile at the end of this article.

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- Give the groups at the flipcharts time to analyze the problem on the flipchart and write their observations on the top half of it. The groups should stick to observations and analysis and leave recommending solutions for the next step (as much as possible). They should leave the bottom half of the chart blank for now.
- After a short time, stop the groups and ask participants to select a new flipchart that they want to work on. The newly formed groups should add more ideas to the top section of their new flipcharts. Do not repeat ideas that are already listed – only add new ideas.
- Repeat this process until participants are out of observations to write down. It is not necessary for every person to participate in every flipchart if they have nothing to add.

Generate potential solutions

- Ask participants to go back to the flipcharts that they started with. This reforms the initial small groups.
- Ask each small group to read the comments that others have written, then generate potential solutions. Write the solutions on the bottom half of the flipchart.
- Call time, and as before, ask participants to select new flipcharts. The new group should continue adding solutions.
- Repeat this process until everyone has been able to contribute solutions to the flipcharts of their choice.

Select the best

- Each person visits all flipcharts and makes check marks next to their top 1 to 3 solutions. An alternative is to lead the group in multivoting for solutions.

Considerations

1. Alternative: if breakout rooms are available, you can use one room per problem. This may reduce the energy level and make it harder for people to visit other problems to keep track of what is going on, but it also may give more room to people to spread out. Add more time if you use this alternative.
 2. Have extra flipcharts on hand in case the originals over flow.
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About the Author



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Jeff Oltmann is a seasoned leader with over 30 years of experience advising clients, managing successful technology programs, and developing new products. His specialties include strategy deployment, operational and project excellence, and project portfolio management. As principal consultant at Synergy Professional Services, Jeff advises leaders and teams in diverse sectors including healthcare, research, bioscience, and technology product development.

Jeff is the founder of the Portfolio and Project Leaders Forum. He is also on the graduate faculty of the Division of Management at Oregon Health and Science University and was previously on executive staff at IBM. He teaches portfolio, program, and project management and is a certified Project Management Professional (PMP®).

Jeff welcomes your questions and ideas. You can contact him at jeff@spspro.com or read previous articles at www.spspro.com/article-library.