Delphi Decision Making

The harnessing of 'collective intelligence'

Sometimes, people with deep expertise within a team may dislike one another so much that they have difficulties working together.

In other situations people may need to discuss issues, which are unpalatable, controversial, polarised or inflammatory.

In still others, proposals may need to be developed and explored in tremendous detail; they may need individual scrutiny and analysis away from a meeting environment.

For these situations, managing the process in a way that allows anonymous and remote contributions can help avoid destructive situations and reach a good, well-thought-through decision, for the benefit of all.

With the Delphi Method, a facilitator helps participants to individually brainstorm solutions and submit their ideas anonymously. The facilitator collects and organises the input, and then presents back to the whole group an unattributed summary of the views submitted, together with the reasoning supporting those judgments.

Everyone then revises their earlier answers in light of what they have just heard from their colleagues. The process continues in a series of 'rounds' until everyone agrees to a defined set of choices, and eventually a final decision.

Conducting these discussions is time-consuming, and the team need an experienced facilitator who can help individuals to work together, paradoxically in a semi-removed fashion, to find a mutually agreeable (or at least acceptable) solution. However, the result is usually a robust decision that has been fully explored, and is supported by each team member.

The other advantage of the Delphi Method is its ability to eliminate 'groupthink'; a phenomenon in which the desire for harmony or conformity in a group results in a poor decision, as members try to minimise conflict and reach a consensus without critical evaluation of sufficient alternative viewpoints and ideas.

The Delphi method has a key role to play in decision-making situations that are sensitive or likely to be controversial.