

Facilitation with the Analytic Hierarchy Process

*Tips for Making Collaborative
Sessions More Effective*

Daniel Saaty

Decision Making is Subjective

- “It is hard enough to remember my opinions, without also remembering my reasons for them!”
- “There are no facts, only interpretations.”
- [Friedrich Nietzsche](#)

Meetings, Meetings and More Meetings!!!!

- 11 Million meetings in the U.S. per day
- Most professionals attend a total of 61.8 meetings per month
- Research indicates that over 50 percent of this meeting time is wasted
- Professionals lose 31 hours per month in unproductive meetings, or approximately four work days

SOURCES:

A network MCI Conferencing White Paper. *Meetings in America: A study of trends, costs and attitudes toward business travel, teleconferencing, and their impact on productivity* (Greenwich, CT: INFOCOMM, 1998), 3.

Robert B. Nelson and Peter Economy, *Better Business Meetings* (Burr Ridge, IL: Irwin Inc, 1995), 5.

And more and more executives are using AHP

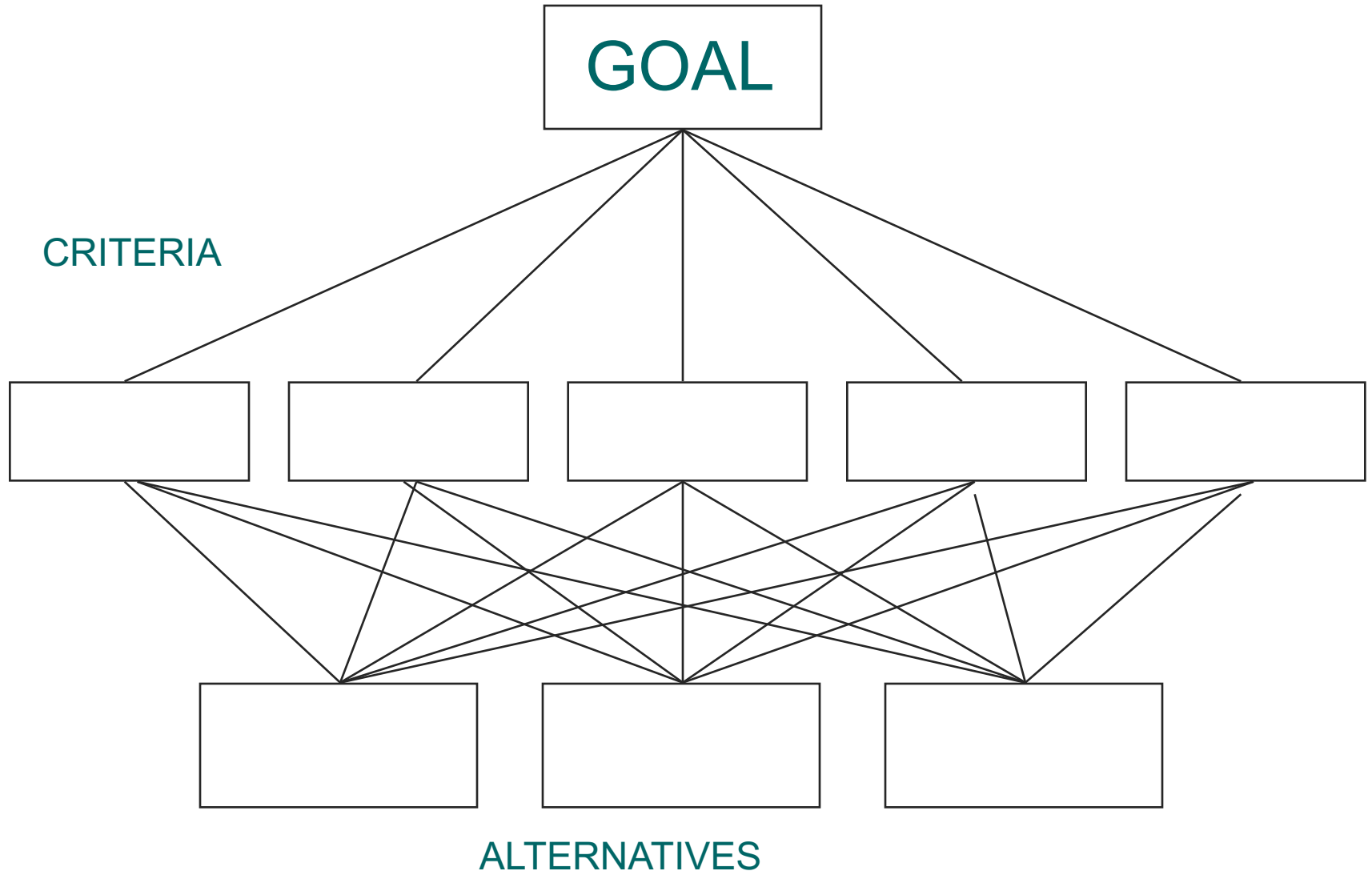
As practitioners, our question is, how do we enable decision makers to be more effective in how make decisions and allocate resources in their organizations?

- One way is with technology
- Another is through enabling effective collaboration

There are many well known facilitation techniques that can enhance group decision making

The Analytic Hierarchy Process

(Saaty- 1971)



Using AHP for Decision Making

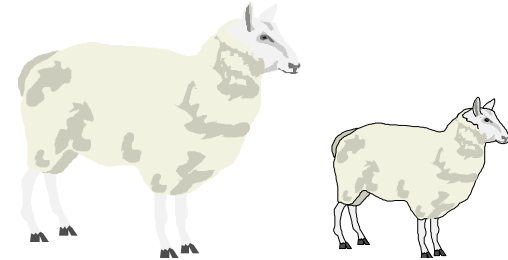
Prioritize both tangible and intangible criteria:

- ◆ In most decisions, intangibles such as political and social factors take precedence over tangibles such as technical and economic factors
- ◆ It is not the precision of measurement on a particular factor that determines the validity of a decision, but the importance we attach to the factors involved
- ◆ AHP assigns importance to all the factors and synthesizes this diverse information to make the best decision

Do Numbers Have an Objective Meaning?

Butter: 1, 2,..., 10 lbs.; 1,2,..., 100 tons

Sheep: 2 sheep (1 big, 1 little)



Temperature: 30 degrees Fahrenheit to New Yorker, Kenyan, Eskimo

Since we deal with Non-Unique Scales such as [lbs., kgs], [yds, meters], [Fahr., Celsius] and such scales cannot be combined, we need the idea of PRIORITY.

PRIORITY becomes an abstract unit valid across all scales.

A priority scale based on preference is the AHP way to standardize non-unique scales in order to combine multiple criteria.

Why are Facilitators Needed?

- Inputs
 - Coordination
 - Organization
 - Clarification
 - Validation
- Outputs
 - Understanding
 - Common vision
 - More effective execution

Role of the Facilitator

- Help clarify the purpose and outcomes of a meeting
- Plan and design the meeting
- Build a good foundation in the meeting opening
- Support good communication and full participation
- Keep the meeting on track, encouraging and affirming good process

Role of the Facilitator

- Listen intently at multiple levels, reflecting back and clarifying
- Guide the group through conflicts and other difficult situations
- Manage and adapt process, making suggestions as necessary
- Stay neutral on content while facilitating
- Serve the whole group

SOURCE: Great Meetings! great results- Dee Kelsey and Pam Plumb

How is Facilitating with AHP the Same as Facilitating Without it

- People are people
- Effective expectation setting and management are key
- The meeting dance still involves moving from divergence to convergence
- In many decisions, there will be some winners and others who consider themselves losers
- People still control the ultimate success of the decisions made in the meeting

How is Facilitating with AHP Different Than Facilitating Without it

- Build familiarity about a new process- often requires a demonstration
- People need to buy-in to using a structured process
- More intervention may be necessary to drive towards the meeting objective
- Definition of consensus is VERY important
- Facilitator needs to be able to balance between managing the group and managing the process

How is Facilitating with AHP Different Than Facilitating Without it

And of course- don't forget your AHP themes.

- Try to cluster criteria where possible
- Focus on differentiators
- No more than 7-9 criteria per level
- Don't over-agonize about governance prior to the decision process

Breakout Groups versus Large Groups

- Small breakout groups can be valuable for parallel processing of a lot of information
- Large groups can also be valuable for building buy-in and a common vision for the AHP model and process

We will work today in both small and large groups.

Facilitation Tools



- Meeting Objective
- Agenda
- Ground Rules
- Definition of Consensus
- Parking Lot
- Tracking/Prioritizing Conversations
- Mirroring

AND...

Listen, Listen, Listen



Listening Skills- Active Listening

- People may not always say what they really mean the first time
- Asking probing questions in a non-confrontational way enables people to clarify and sharpen their thoughts and communication
- Facilitators and team members should all be good active listeners- inquiring and trying to understand

Try to put yourself in their shoes...

Facilitation Tools

Meeting Objective

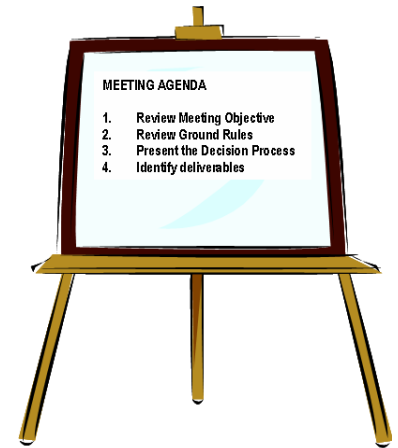
- Purpose of the current meeting
- State in clear and meaningful terms
- Validate understanding and consensus with the team



Facilitation Tools

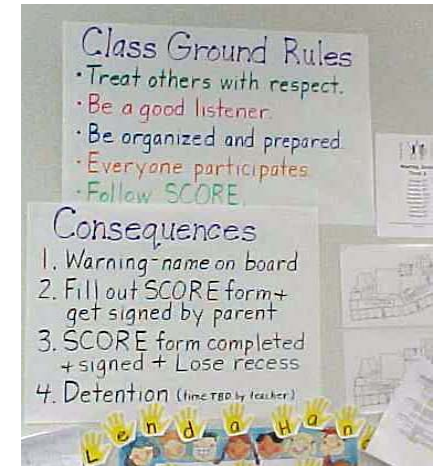
Agenda

- Review the agenda with the team
- Constantly and visibly track progress against the agenda
- Signal to the team when they are behind schedule
- Initiate a contingency plan if necessary



Facilitation Tools

- Sample Ground Rules
- No stories
- Extend “conversational courtesy”
- Hold to the “justification rule”
- Return on time after breaks
- Others?



Facilitation Tools

Definition of Consensus

The outcome is one that I can live with and support when I leave today; not necessarily my most preferred choice but one that I can not talk badly about when I leave today...



Facilitation Tools

Definition of Consensus



The 3 Part Test:

- Can I live with the decision made here today?
- Can I support it?
- Can I devote the resources necessary to make the decision successful?

Facilitation Tools

Parking Lot

Designed to track important issues that require further action outside the meeting.

- Document all ideas / issues
- Revisit, resolve or define post-meeting actions for each item in the parking lot prior to completion of the meeting
- Ensure that clear responsibility, target dates and deliverables have been defined for each item.



Facilitation Tools

Tracking / Prioritizing Conversations



- When more than one idea are stated at the same time
- Stop the group
- Mirror comments from multiple participants
- Ask the group which comment they would like to address first
- Work through comments until you are back on top of the conversation

Facilitation Tools

Mirroring



- Attempt to summarize or exactly repeat what a person said
- Give them a chance to hear their own words
- Make their comment more concise
- They will work to clarify their comment if miss-state what they were trying to see so don't worry too much.

Facilitation Tools

Interventions

Group interventions: Directed towards group and process: Agenda, Ground Rules, Parking Lot

Individual interventions: Directed towards an individual, their role, behaviors and position on topics

Facilitation Tools

Avoid Collusion!

Starting the Decision Meeting

Introduce Facilitator

“As a facilitator, my goal is to foster a collaborative environment and keep us on track towards our meeting objective.”

- *Key is to be substantively neutral.*



Introduce Team

“As team members, you will be asked to provide subject matter expertise, to express your opinions, but also to inquire, listen, and seek to understand from other members. “

Meeting Flow

- Form
- Storm
- Norm
- Perform

Form, Storm, Norm, Perform and AHP

- Meetings tend to flow between divergence and convergence. These cycles play out multiple times when using AHP with groups.
 - Brainstorming
 - Defining Criteria
 - Pairwise Comparisons
 - Ratings
 - Sensitivity/Scenario Analysis

Form: Brainstorming

- Uninhibited free flow of ideas
- Try not to critique ideas as they are listed
- Feel free to “piggy back” on other people’s ideas

Storm

Members are concerned about control, power and influence

- Remember you are not the target
- Mirror the group
- Separate the problem from the person

When using AHP, it is important to not short circuit the storm phase or the conflicts are likely to present themselves again and again

Storm- Structuring Model and Defining Criteria

- Cluster criteria into “theme” categories
 - Don’t worry too much about whether it is perfect right off the bat
- Keep the criteria clusters to 7 to maybe or less when possible
- Keep total criteria in the model down if you have a lot of alternatives- people get tired
- Many people are only using one or two criteria without AHP so 10 total criteria is a massive upgrade

Norm

Group members move towards interdependence

- Mirror and record emerging norms
- Affirm group's cohesiveness
- Affirm value of expressing differences
- Guide group through collaborative negotiation

Norm- Pairwise Comparisons

- During the pairwise comparison process a switch often happens from “Storm” to “Norm” where people start to understand one another’s positions.

Perform

Group is working collaboratively and is highly productive

- Offer effective processes for getting tasks accomplished
- Stay out of the way when not needed

Managing Personalities

The Whiner:

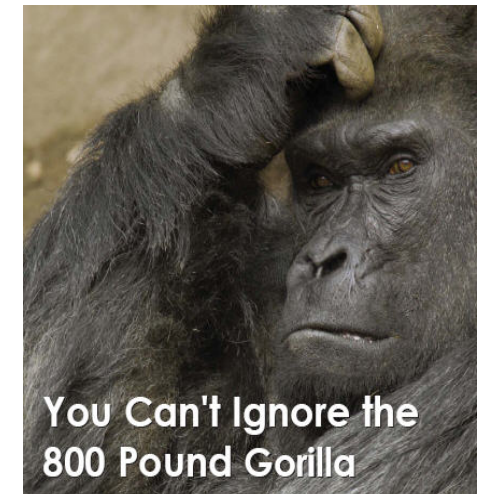
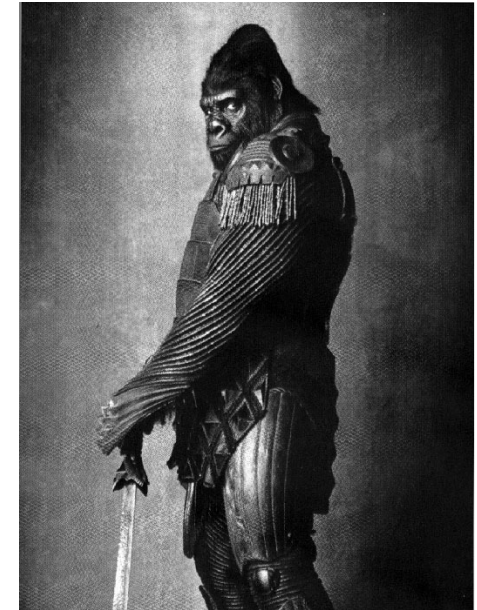
- Acknowledge and repeat their concern
- Ask them for their recommended solution
- Add concern to the parking lot if not relevant and ask them to define the action plan to resolve it.



Managing Personalities

The 800 Pound Gorilla:

- Acknowledge their comment
- Ask for other comments, possibly even specifically request comments by name
- Acknowledge prior to requesting new comments, those that you might expect the Gorilla (use their name) to have. But then say you would like to hear from others.



The Quiet Person:

- Try to identify people who are not engaging in the conversation
- Mention that we would like to hear from some of the folks who have not commented much in the meeting
- Ask specific person for their comments



Benefits of Facilitation for Group AHP

- AHP is based on the concept of using a framework to develop a more thorough, common understanding of a decision
- If people don't feel like they were heard and that their participating counts, they will not buy in.
- Effective facilitating is ***necessary*** for AHP to be effective for group decisions

Resources

- *The Skilled Facilitator-* Roger Schwarz
- *Great Meetings! great results-* Dee Kelsey/Pam Plumb
- *Optimizing the Power of Action Learning-* Michael Marquardt