Wise Crowds

Idea In Short

Wise Crowds is a Liberating Structure designed to tap into the collective intelligence of a group to address complex challenges. It structures a process of individual reflection, small group consultation, and whole group sharing to generate practical solutions. Wise Crowds unlocks collective intelligence for problem-solving.

This method offers a structured approach to problem-solving that leverages the diverse knowledge and experience within a group. It moves beyond simple brainstorming by incorporating a structured consulting process that helps individuals refine their thinking and develop actionable solutions. Wise Crowds helps groups tackle complex problems by using structured peer consulting.

The process unfolds in three distinct phases:

1. individual preparation
2. small group consultations, and
3. whole group harvest

Each phase plays a crucial role in generating and refining solutions. This three-part structure ensures that individual insights are amplified by collective wisdom.

Individual Preparation

The first phase, individual preparation, provides dedicated time for each participant to consider the challenge at hand. This individual work is crucial for generating independent thoughts and perspectives. Participants spend time reflecting on the challenge and formulating their own questions or initial ideas. This time for individual thought sets the stage for productive group work. It allows for a more focused and thoughtful contribution during the group discussions.

Small Group Consultations

The second phase, small group consultations, involves forming small groups, ideally of four to five people. Within each group, one person volunteers to be the "client" and presents their specific challenge or question. The other members act as "consultants," offering their insights, suggestions, and advice. This consulting process is structured and focused, allowing for in-depth exploration of the client's challenge. The structured consulting allows for in-depth exploration.

A key element of this phase is the focus on providing specific and actionable advice. Consultants are encouraged to ask clarifying questions to fully understand the client's situation, share relevant experiences, and offer practical suggestions that the client can implement. The client listens attentively and takes notes but does not engage in debate or defend their position during the consulting phase. This allows them to fully absorb the feedback and consider different perspectives. This focused listening is key for the client.

After a set amount of time, the roles rotate within the small group, giving each person a chance to be the client and receive consulting from their peers. This rotation continues until everyone has had a turn as the client. This ensures that everyone benefits from the collective wisdom of the group.

Group Harvest

The third phase, whole group harvest, brings all the small groups back together. In this phase, each group shares the key insights and solutions that emerged from their consulting sessions. This can be done in a variety of ways, such as having each group appoint a spokesperson to summarize their findings or using a visual representation like a flip chart or whiteboard to capture key themes. The goal is to quickly disseminate the collective wisdom of all the small groups to the larger group. This sharing creates a broader pool of knowledge.

This structure is particularly useful for addressing complex challenges that require diverse perspectives and expertise. It can be used in a variety of settings, such as team meetings, workshops, and organizational development initiatives. It is well-suited for situations where individuals feel stuck or unsure how to proceed.

Case Study - Developing a New Marketing Strategy

Imagine a marketing team tasked with developing a new marketing strategy for a product launch. They decide to use Wise Crowds to leverage the collective intelligence of the team and generate innovative ideas.

Individual Preparation

Each team member spends time reflecting on the target audience, the product's key features, and the overall marketing goals. They formulate their own questions and initial ideas for the marketing strategy. This individual reflection prepares them for the consulting sessions.

Small Group Consultations

The team members are divided into small groups of four. In one group, a team member presents their challenge:

> How can we effectively reach our target audience on social media?

The other three members act as consultants. They ask clarifying questions, such as:

> What social media platforms does our target audience use most?
>
> What type of content resonates with them?

They then offer suggestions such as:

> Run targeted advertising campaigns on specific platforms
>
> Create engaging video content
>
> Partner with relevant influencers

This focused consultation generates specific marketing ideas.

This process repeats within each group until everyone has had a turn as the client.

Whole Group Harvest

Each group then shares the key solutions that emerged from their consulting sessions. One group shares the idea of using targeted advertising on specific social media platforms. Another group suggests creating a series of short, engaging videos that highlight the product's key features. A third group suggests partnering with relevant influencers to reach a wider audience. The team then synthesizes these ideas and develops a comprehensive social media marketing strategy for the product launch.

This example illustrates how Wise Crowds can be used to generate practical and innovative solutions to real-world challenges.

Advantages & Potential Limitations

Wise Crowds offers several advantages. It efficiently taps into the collective intelligence of a group. It combines individual reflection with small group consulting, leading to more robust and actionable solutions.

This structure promotes active listening, respectful communication, and peer-to-peer learning. It creates a supportive environment where individuals can share their challenges and receive constructive feedback.

It is particularly useful for addressing complex challenges that require diverse perspectives and expertise. It can also help to build trust and collaboration within a group.

However, there are also some potential limitations to consider. The effectiveness of the method depends on the willingness of participants to engage in open and honest communication. If participants are hesitant to share their true thoughts or opinions, the quality of the insights may be limited.

The time commitment can be a factor, especially with larger groups. The consulting phase requires dedicated time for each person to be the client and receive feedback. It is

important to allocate sufficient time for the entire process.

The success of the method also depends on the facilitation skills of the person guiding the process. The facilitator needs to ensure that the consulting sessions are focused and productive and that the whole group harvest is effectively synthesized.

Summary

Wise Crowds is a valuable Liberating Structure for harnessing collective wisdom to address complex challenges. It combines individual reflection, small group consulting, and whole group sharing. Wise Crowds unlocks collective intelligence for problem-solving.