

ACHIEVING PARTICIPATION AND TEAM BUILDING IN LARGE GROUPS

**Associate Professor Roy Barton
National Centre for Value Management
University of Canberra**

**John Knott
Centre for Human Resource Development
University of Canberra**

Introduction

The use of large groups in Value Management studies provides a number of advantages both for the participants and for the outcomes of the study. To achieve this however, there is a requirement to manage the facilitation of the group in a manner which ensures full participation and a maximum contribution from individuals.

This paper discusses a management strategy for the large group study, the type of project which would benefit from such a study, and the implications for individuals who participate in a large team.

The ideas expressed in this paper have been derived from experience gained in conducting Value Management studies over a number of years, on a diverse range of projects using both small and large groups. The author has experimented with a range of techniques, and in recent time has collaborated with the Centre for Human Resource Development Studies at the University of Canberra to investigate more closely the role of the facilitator through a task and skills analysis of the competencies.

This paper assumes the definition of Value Management as adopted by the NSW Government and used in the draft Australian and New Zealand standard:

“Value Management is a structured, systematic, analytical process which seeks to satisfy customer needs by ensuring that all necessary functions are provided at the lowest total cost whilst maintaining required levels of quality and performance”.

Objectives of the paper

- To define a Large Group Value Management Study and describe the client's expectations a large group study,
- To identify the advantages and costs of using a large group,
- To describe the participation in a large group study,
- To describe a management strategy for facilitating the large group.

The assumption throughout this paper is that the Value Management study is facilitated in accordance with the Miles Job Plan.

The Value Management Study Team

The composition of a Value Management study team will depend upon the project, the type of study, (ie concept, strategic etc), the technical areas to be addressed and the point on the project timeline at which the study is to be held. The group should comprise the key stake holders; design and technical specialists (provided they have been identified), the client or customer, and representative users of the end-product. On occasions, technical independents may be engaged for their particular expertise, in part acquired through involvement in a similar project.

It is of paramount importance that the makeup of the group provides for all of the necessary technical and financial input that is likely to be required in the study. In making an assessment of the worth of functions for example, it is necessary that indicative cost estimates of the functions be available to the group. If there are gaps then there can be a direct impact on the outcome of the study.

The Large Group Value Management Study

For the purpose of this exercise, a large group is considered to be one with more than fifteen participants. Typically, they range in number from sixteen to twenty five and average twenty participants.

The decision to assemble a large group will usually depend on the following:

- The breadth, size and complexity of the project and the need for representation from a number of technical specialists and interest groups,
- How well formed the project concept may be and the concomitant need for additional input from the study,
- The desire to use the study as an opportunity to promote team development amongst the participants.

Large groups are most commonly employed, with studies that are at the early stage of the project life cycle, usually at concept or strategic planning stage.

Client's Expectation of the Large Group Value Management Study

From the Client's perspective, the study is to ensure that all necessary functions are provided at the lowest cost, and that the assembled team possesses all of the necessary knowledge and expertise to achieve this. Value Management studies have led to millions of dollars in life cycle cost savings and also to more holistic solutions to their particular needs.

The balancing factors that impact upon a determination of the size of the study group, are:

- An appropriate level of representation of specialists, and stakeholders,
- The marginal increase in cost of the increased membership,
- The preferences of the facilitator in managing groups of a certain size.

The group membership is generally drawn up in a collaborative effort between the facilitation team, whose focus is generally on achieving the study objectives, and the client, who is motivated to achieve best value for his investment in the project.

Some clients err on the side of involving too many participants, others in involving too few. The question is, what constitutes an optimal number? There is increasing recognition of the value of participation in the study in terms of team building, and this can be a motivating factor in a decision to maximise the size of the group.

There will be occasions where the client may need convincing of the value of assembling a large group. On other occasions, it is necessary to negotiate a reduction in numbers. In any event, there should be a degree of concurrence between the nature of the project, the need for particular expertise to be available on the team, the wording of the study objectives, and the preference of the facilitator.

Cost and Advantages of Using the Large Group Study

The cost components attributable to the large group, over and above the cost of a "standard" size group are:

- Salaries
- Time away from other activities and the need for substitution
- Consultants' costs (possibly although not necessarily a co-facilitator)
- Venue costs (marginal increase)

To the extent that the larger group does represent a proportional increase in costs, then one has to be aware of the added value that is possible, provided the large group is properly facilitated. The salary component of the additional participant's involvement has to be challenged! To be considered for membership, an individual must have some association with the proposed project and be expected therefore to allocate time to it in some form or another. In terms of the benefits that participation brings to the individual, including enhanced awareness of the project, its objectives, the other people involved, improved communication and networking, the investment of time and money in the study may well be returned even in the short term by more efficient application to the tasks.

Within a fixed time-frame, the large group provides an opportunity to address a wider range of topics, by a judicious mix of large and small group work. Sub groups may be allocated different tasks so that a number of themes are

developed concurrently. It is usual for a study to return a minimum of one hundred ideas during the creative phase. Sometimes a total closer to two hundred ideas can be reached by the larger team. The environment of the large group contributes to the creation of the additional ideas, principally through exposure to a greater diversity of views, but again to achieve this, the workshop must be appropriately facilitated.

There are other advantages in using a large group Value Management study;

Wider representation

Permits a broader range and depth of expertise to be represented. The larger the number that can be effectively facilitated, the greater the opportunity to assemble a team that represents *all* of the stakeholders, each bringing with them a particular technical expertise, life experience, assumptions and on the downside, paradigms and pre-conceived ideas.

Client expectations

A large group has the potential to better address client needs. Given that the client is concerned with maximising the value of the project, they would be concerned with exploring as many potential solutions as possible, and seeking some form of endorsement for the project concepts. They are more assured when such endorsement comes from a larger and therefore more representative group.

As a validation exercise

If the expressed outcome of the study is to validate the project objectives as proposed in the brief, the validation is stronger with a broader range of expert input available in the large team.

More ideas

As mentioned earlier there is an expectation of a greater number, range and depth of ideas emanating from a large group. With the opportunity for more specialisations as well as generalists to be represented, the creativity phase is likely to yield a greater number and range of ideas, some in more depth, others more speculative although often containing the seed for a potential solution. The large group provides the opportunity for participants who have a less technically focused orientation, to influence the study into assuming a more systemic view of the project. This is a highly desirable outcome.

Communication

Amongst the participants, there can be a dramatic improvement in communication. This is a feature of any Value Management study of course, but in the larger group, the network is more extensive. Specialists may sometimes be restricted in their outlook by an understandable focus on technical issues for which they have the primary responsibility. The structure of the job plan encourages the development of a systemic view of the "problem situation" by analysing function and establishing the function hierarchy. This is usually done in the whole group, during the analysis phase, with the result that participants are better able to view the project in the broader, more holistic context. In arriving at this view, they will have

entered into a dialogue with others, sometimes contributing, sometimes learning but above all effectively communicating.

Greater coverage

Apart from the wider range of expertise amongst the participants, effective facilitation that utilises sub-groups to advantage, allows different themes to be developed concurrently. This results in a broader range of topics being covered in the time and the creation of a greater number of new ideas. Likewise, during the judgment phase, sub-groups may be used, each working on a task allocated to it by the facilitator.

Team Building

Participation in an intensive, creative, structured, problem solving exercise such as this, allows participants to gather valuable insights about others, more than is possible in the normal forms of encounter. The larger the group, the greater the extent of the networking. It provides the client with some insight into the thinking and the performance of the specialists involved on the project and leads to a process of collaboration and understanding which can extend well beyond the study and into the project itself. The residual benefit is the enhanced networking and improved communication, and is an important component of a team building exercise.

Ownership of outcomes.

The large group provides the opportunity for more people to be involved at a critical point in the project, and provided their contribution is a positive one, they leave the study with an enhanced sense of understanding and ownership. The wider membership of the large group, means that the extent of ownership, and the value that a sense of ownership brings to a project in the longer term, is more extensive.

Commitment to outcomes.

One of the benefits that an increased sense of ownership brings, is a stronger commitment to the outcomes of the study in particular, and to the on-going project in general. To maintain the commitment however, it is important that there be appropriate follow-on activity.

Participation in a Large Group Study

Participation in a creative, structured, problem solving process which is genuinely concerned with exploring issues that maximise the value of a project, provides an experience rich in opportunity to contribute, to understand, and to reflect.

It may provide the first available opportunity to meet with some of the stakeholders and specialists whose work impacts directly on one's own. This generally leads to a fruitful association which in the long run, benefits the project.

Specialists who approach the study with pre-conceived ideas, find that the creative environment of the study, (assisted by the skill of the facilitator in

promoting involvement), assists in them reviewing their position, seeing it from an holistic position, and understanding better the broader system of which the project is a part.

Participants are able to contribute to matters relevant to the study but outside of their immediate area of expertise. Their contribution could for example be based on their general knowledge or appropriate life experiences, and the involvement can be a rewarding experience.

In terms of a contribution that is within the participant's expertise and responsibility, the workshop provides an important forum for testing ideas and receiving feedback on them.

Involvement, ownership and commitment are the critical outcomes from the participant's point of view, and whilst they apply to both small and large group studies, the large group is usually more dynamic (ie varies between small and large group work, on a wider range of tasks, for projects which are more complex and requiring the involvement of more stakeholders).

Facilitating the Large Group Value Management Study

The success of the workshop component of the Value Management study, whether it be a large or small group, is dependent, amongst other things, on two key factors:

The membership of the team

The skill of the facilitator

A team that has been carefully selected to cover the range of input required, (financial, technical, client and user), is a necessary pre-requisite for the study to achieve its specified objectives. The key to success in using large groups lies in the facilitation of the workshop, and very much therefore on the skills of the facilitator. The Centre for Human Resource Development performed a task analysis on the role of the facilitator, and determined the required competencies to be:

- Leadership
- Personal Presentation
- People Handling
- Adequate Preparation
- Adherence to the Job Plan
- Group Management
- Time Management
- Ability to keep track of the development of complex issues

These competencies require the following skills:

- Knowledge of Group Dynamics
- Knowledge of the Job Plan
- Thorough understanding of the concept of function
- Empathy with the technical content
- Empathy with the participants

Skills of the facilitator (Continued)

- Knowledge of microskills in the areas of:
 - Questioning
 - Creative Thinking Techniques
 - Active Listening
 - Use of hardware ie OHP
 - Giving and receiving feedback
 - Reflection

Achieving Participation and Team Building

In managing the large group, the facilitator must achieve not only the objectives of the study, but an enhancement of the outcomes via the additional benefits that participation in a study brings to the project in the long term (eg commitment and team building). Participation in the study should be satisfying to the individual. This comes about when there is a feeling that one has had some influence, that one's ideas have been recognised and that the understanding of the project and the of the role of the other players has been advanced. With this in mind, the facilitator requires a well developed strategy to achieve participation, to develop the team, and to cover the workload all within the allocated timeframe.

The techniques described in the following pages reflect the model currently in use by the author. It has been determined as a result of much research and experimentation.

Achieving Participation

Establishing an appropriate environment for active participation begins with attending to the physical environment of the workshop. Partly in recognition of the fact that some participants respond more comfortably in the smaller group, the seating plan for the workshop is chosen to optimise a sense of involvement at the outset. Separate tables are arranged to provide an unobstructed view of the projector screens by placing them in a horseshoe configuration with a maximum of five at a table. Participants select their place at a table of their choice and usually remain there during the information phase and most of the analysis phase.

The facilitator then has an important role in establishing the tone of the workshop through an explicit statement of what is required of participants, of the importance of their input, that their ideas are valued, and in turn that they should demonstrate respect for the views of others. An important factor in achieving this is in the demeanour of the facilitator. It is important that the facilitator *demonstrates* through actions and attitudes the accepted standard of behaviour.

It is critical to the matter of keeping participants on task, that they be advised of the process, and to be reminded along the way, of how far they have proceeded.

The workshop is preceded by a ten minute presentation by the facilitator on Value Management, what it can achieve, and the importance of the participants' input to the process.

The facilitator needs to project an image of confidence, demonstrating a complete understanding of the VM process, adequate knowledge of the project, a clear sense of direction and superior leadership skills. Remembering that the team comprises highly skilled professional people, it is important that their attention be captured early and that no opportunity be made available for side-tracking the agenda. They will quickly analyse the situation, whether consciously or not, so it is important for the facilitator to have a strong beginning and provide clear direction. If the team recognises the facilitator to be an authority in authority, then the scene is set for establishing their involvement.

It is important that relationships between participants, and between facilitator and participants are based on respect. Apart from the need to maintain control of the workshop, people will be more likely to contribute in an atmosphere of tolerance and respect. Effective communication, networking and team building, all of which are very important outcomes of the workshop, can only be developed on this basis. The facilitator has to be on guard for any breaches of the code and have in place strategies to deal with it. Naturally this applies to the management of small groups, but the dimension of the task is more than proportionally greater in the larger group given the larger number of permutations of relationships.

Some Techniques for Fostering Involvement:

Participants while introducing themselves to the whole group, are invited to state their interest in the project.

Two sheets are issued. On one, participants are asked to record any "why" questions, and on the other, they are invited to record any "can-we" questions. The "why" questions may come to mind at any time during the Information phase, and rather than interrupt the flow (important to maintaining the momentum), participants record them. "Can-we's" arise as an idea usually in the form of a potential solution or as an alternative to a problem situation. They too are recorded, and the facilitator makes the opportunity at an appropriate time, to record the whys and the can-we's in the presence of the whole group. In due course they are dealt with.

Three or four activities during the information phase usually precede the presentations: they are the recording of the problem situation, recording the givens, recording the assumptions and identifying system functions. The facilitator exercises a judgement on whether these are developed in the large group or in small groups, based on a number of factors, but an important one relates to involvement, another to the total workload, and yet another to the time available. To foster involvement, these activities are useful as precursors to the more demanding work that follows. By working in the group at their table, participants can begin their involvement in the comfort of the smaller group. A spokesperson for the sub-group usually presents the findings to the whole group,

and by rotating this responsibility, another dimension of involvement and confidence building is encouraged.

Before the end of the information phase there has been involvement in the whole group, as well as involvement in the small group seated at each table. It is important to break up the information dumping with active participation in an activity. During the expert presentations, involvement is restricted to asking questions for clarification only. Participants are reminded to record the why and can-we questions to be dealt with later in the workshop.

During the analysis phase, there is again opportunity for both small and large group work. The exercise in identifying the "problem situation" leads to an identification of "themes" which becomes a logical basis on which to divide the workload during the analysis, creative and much of the judgement phases of the job plan. Based on these themes, the facilitator may restructure the membership of the small groups. For example, a theme might be allocated to a table, and the participants invited to select their group on the basis of the theme of their choice, with the limitation that there be no more than five in any group. Later in the workshop, the facilitator may make a judgement to allocate individuals to a group, based on the task at hand, and on the expertise of the individual. If the preceding experiences have been positive and they are fully aware of the requirements, then the participants willingly comply. The facilitator has to ensure that everyone is kept fully aware of progress, and the plenary sessions are important in this regard.

There are subtle differences in the different types of group membership (ie whole group, voluntary small group, allocated small group), with each enhancing the value of the contribution from participants. This is to a large extent dependent on the judgement of the facilitator and his/her ability to assess the expertise and the potential contribution from each participant. They may not be aware of the process by which they are allocated to a sub-group nor of any difference in the impact of their contribution, but if nothing else, the impact of their input to the study is maximised, the opportunity for them to be exposed to the ideas of others is greater, and in the process their own ideas are modified, enhanced and usually better focused.

Involvement has to be planned for and structured. Attention to the fine detail such as availability of resources and materials, numbering overhead slides, putting headings on slides to remind participants of the task at hand, are important contributions to the smooth running of the workshop. Creating a climate of respect, maintaining a disciplined approach, creating a momentum that minimises opportunity for participants to sidetrack the discussion, catering for the need to ask questions in such a way as to not interrupt the flow, rigidly adhering to the standard job plan, suspending judgement until the judgement phase, reminding the group where they are at on the on the plan, and allocating people to tasks are just some of the tasks that the facilitator must perform with apparent ease to guarantee a full involvement on the part of the participants.

Team Building

To a large extent, the activities that were crucial to the effective involvement of participants, also underpin the team building. An additional ingredient is the willingness of the participants to commit themselves to an on-going association with the project and the other participants. It is also important that there is a on-going activity on the project itself so that there is reason for the team to hold together. There is an increasing number of reports indicating the success of the study in promoting the development of the team.

Summary

This paper has dealt with the application of large group Value Management studies to projects. It has identified the advantages of using large groups, and focused on the techniques for promoting the involvement of participants. In the process, the role and the requisite skills of the facilitator have been identified.

- Definition of the large group study team:
From sixteen to twenty-five participants, average twenty.
- Has application where the project is large and/or complex, requiring a broad range of expert input.
- The large group can generate more ideas over a wider area because of the spread of representation.
- The management of a large team requires the establishment and maintenance of participant involvement, group formation, task allocation and time management.
- The critical skill in achieving involvement is the application and knowledge of group dynamics.
- An important outcome of effective involvement is team building.
- The additional cost of the large group is marginal and largely illusory.