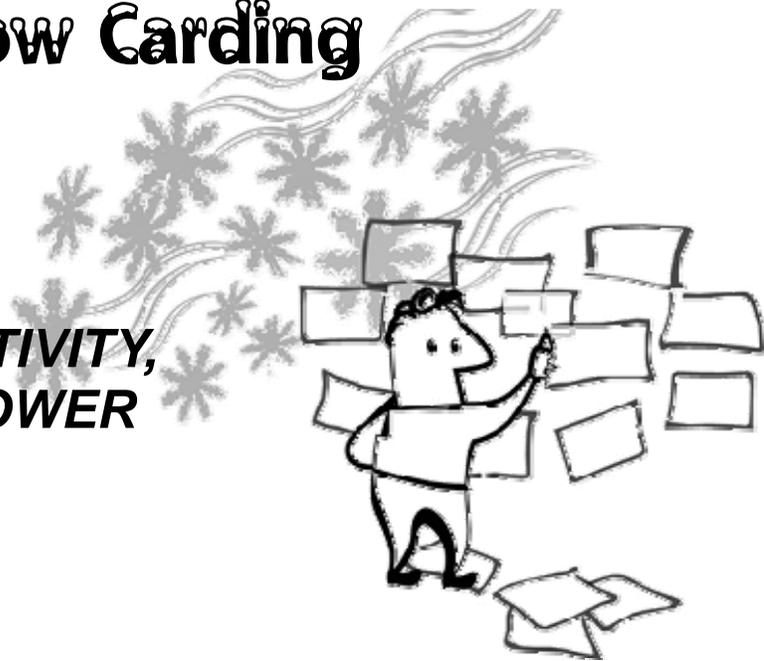


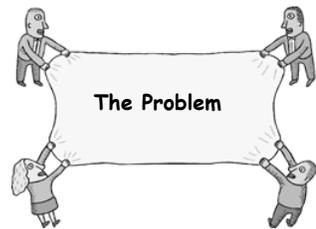
Snow Carding

**QUICKLY
CAPTURE INPUT,
GENERATE CREATIVITY,
AND BALANCE POWER
IN YOUR GROUPS**



S*NOW CARDING* is useful when you need to collect a lot of ideas, thoughts, opinions, etc. quickly and organize the information without strong group members unduly influencing the outcome. This technique tends to silence the initial critics of brainstorming ideas, balances power between assertive (e.g., talkative) and reserved (e.g., quiet) group members, and creates a highly interactive and fun meeting room atmosphere. A 'Snow Card' is a blank, usually white index card, large Post-It® note, or sheet of paper. The name is meant to convey the image that later in the meeting you will be having participants move these sheets around in such a way that it will look like a snow storm of paper landing on the wall.

B*OUND THE PROBLEM.* Begin by 'bounding' the problem the group is addressing. Develop one or two seed questions that precisely express the input you want. An example is, "We are facing a budget cut of 25% for the next two years. What ideas do you have to save money that harms our mission the least?" If you do not have good boundaries, finding the boundaries becomes the seed question. An example is, "We are facing rapid changes in our working environment, how should we address this uncertainty?" In other words, do whatever it takes to get the group focused on the task at hand or, if the task is not clear, define that issue as the problem.



SILENT WRITE. Give each group member some Snow Cards and a marker pen. Then ask the participants to write their ideas onto the Snow Cards, in silence. Give them a time limit (usually 5-15 minutes). Reference your seed questions and remind the participants to stick to these as the boundaries for today's meeting. Impose a ground rule that they write only one idea per Snow Card and that they write as large as the size of the paper will allow. They are to generate as many Snow Cards as they need until they have all their ideas committed to paper.



POST THE SNOW CARDS. When participants are done writing out their Snow Cards it is time to have the participants, one at a time, come to the wall and post their individual cards. In doing this, you have choices.

Choice One. This is the one I use most often. Have the group members self-organize the material as they post it on the wall. The first volunteer comes forward, reads his/her first Snow Card to the other participants and posts it on the wall. She/he then reads their second Snow Card and, if it is similar in content to their first Snow Card, positions it close to the first card. If it has different content, he/she posts it to a different location on the wall. This process continues until all of the first person's Snow Cards are on the wall. Then a second

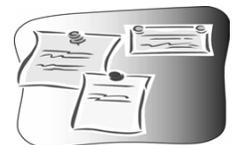
volunteer is invited forward and they post their Snow Cards, one at a time, by reading their material to the audience and posting their content that is similar to previously posted Snow Cards near that spot on the wall and different content to a new location on the wall. Continue until all participants have posted their material.

Choice Two. If you have a need for the material to be organized in a specific way you should pre-decide this and impose a ground rule that tells the participants how to post their material to be consistent with this *a priori* organizational need. For example, you may need material organized by type of funding source that is affected or you may be tackling a planning project where you want the participants' ideas separated into categories such as human resources, capital improvements, durable goods, etc.

Choice Three. When there may be a tendency to favor or oppose an idea because of who offers it, the facilitator collects the individual Snow Cards, shuffles them, reads them one by one, and posts them for all to see. Doing so reduces the association of an idea with the person who offered it.

For all choices. The individual posting the cards gets to decide if Snow Cards are similar or different from the material already on the wall. At this stage avoid a group discussion of where the individual Snow Cards should land on the wall.

Caution. There may be a tempta-



tion for the participants to start discussing the meaning of the Snow Card material. Resist this by asking these individuals to make a note for later discussion or convert their thought to a new idea that should go on the wall as a Snow Card.

Organize the Snow Cards. You may not need this step if participants have did a good job self-organizing the Snow Cards. Their initial organization may be sufficient to get a group moving in the right direction. If you need to work further with the material that is on the wall (e.g., remove redundancy, further refine similar material), here are two approaches.



Org-Team Approach. Appoint a small, two- or three-person 'Organizational Team' to do this on behalf of the whole group (e.g., working over a break, over lunch, in the evening). The Org-Team presents a proposal to the full group for a 'best' way to organize the material. The full group then discusses, refines, and approves a final organization. For the Org-Team pick people (or have the whole group appoint them) who are respected for both their ability to assimilate material and as fair, evenhanded members of the group. The Org-Team is my favorite approach.

Whole Group. Sometimes the whole group will want to organize the

Snow Cards, especially if there is a lack of trust in the meeting room. If you go this route expect to facilitate frustration with this organizing process if it takes longer than 30-45 minutes.

For Both Approaches. Have the Org-Team or whole group write titles for various categories they put the Snow Cards under and then post these titles above the appropriate groups of Snow Cards. The objective here is to give a name to each category/group they identify. It is okay and will speed up the organizing process to replicate a Snow Card and place it in more than one place on the wall if the group feels a Snow Card idea can fit in more than one category.

Caution. The same as above. There may be a temptation for the participants to start discussing the meaning of the Snow Card material. Resist this by asking these individuals to make a note for later discussion or convert their thought to a new idea that should go on the wall as a Snow Card.

Group Discussion. Whew! Now it is finally time to discuss the meaning of the information posted on the wall. Guide this conversation with open-ended questions to get the participants to reflect on the pattern of Snow Card placement, the groupings, and details of the most important issues (individual cards).



Be especially alert for “keystone” issues -those, which if resolved, will also take care of several other issues (these can form robust strategies for their work).

O*ther Applications.* This technique can be combined with other facilitation techniques that use brainstorming before the group reacts to the information.

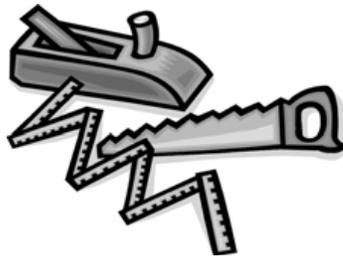
Evaluations. Snow Carding is a good match with evaluation techniques like Force Field or SWOT analysis.

Project Planning. Snow Carding is a good, first-look project planning tool. If your group needs to identify tasks and the sequence of how they should be accomplished, consider using this facilitation tool.

Give me a call if you have these kinds of needs and we can discuss the applicability of Snow Carding to your situation.

M*aterials Needed.* Snow cards, sized from index cards to half-sheets of flip chart paper. Match Snow Card size to the size of your audience so it is possible for the participants to read the material on the wall. Most frequently I use standard or legal-sized typing paper and it works just fine.

Marker pen (dark colors work best) for each participant. Tape if the Snow Cards



are not self-adhesive. Seed questions that capture the essence of your group’s assignment.

M*anagement Considerations.* You will need a room with a large enough wall to post the Snow Cards. You may want a staff person taking notes on a lap top computer or flip chart to capture the essence of the points being made during the Group Discussion phase. You will probably want to capture the actual Snow Cards as a computer file. Do not do this until the group decides the final organization (otherwise a Snow Card typed early in the meeting may change or be moved later in the meeting). This is a simple task when the meeting is over. Just remove the Snow Cards from the wall by subject group. Keep each subject separate and ‘under’ the title the group gave that subject. Then typing them is a simple matter of going through each of these separate ‘stacks’ of Snow Cards.

H*elp!* I am only a phone call or E-mail away. Let’s talk if I can help you create a successful Snow Card facilitation.

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