

Doing It Online

Moon Talk



Scenario: We all live on a moon base. But mice have gotten into the food supply! What do we do? First step: schedule a meeting.

... but ...

We only have push-to-talk radios, and can't see each other.



Compare the experience with moon talk to the types of communication that we use in meetings -- everything from big meetings like General Assemblies to smaller meetings. We use constrained processes and artificial signals in order to be more efficient and effective in large groups.

Group decision making



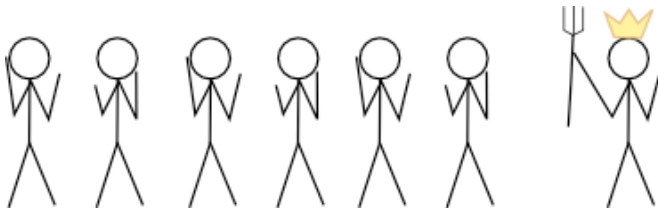
From the civil rights movement through the feminist movement through protest movements of the 90's and 2000's, groups have developed techniques for non-hierarchical, consensus-oriented decision making that allow effective organizations without bosses or charismatic leaders. But in-person meetings can still be slow, expensive, and draining, which can limit our capacity for democratic consultation.

The Three Tyrannies

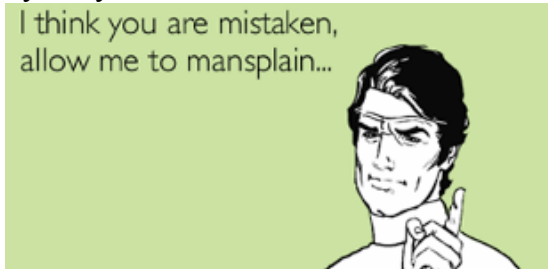
Tyranny of the Majority



Tyranny of the Minority



Tyranny of Structurelessness



Majority

Minority

There is, in fact, never structurelessness. If you throw out overt structure, you get implicit structure, in the form of dominant personalities, social inequalities, sexism, racism, etc. Online, this means tech-savvy people and tech-oriented personalities dominate. You need structure to keep things equitable.

Wealth of diversity in meeting tools!

- Facilitation tools:
 - Stacks
 - Progressive stacks
 - Clarifying questions
 - Points of process
 - Direct responses
 - Proposals
 - Friendly amendments
 - Straw polls
 - Discussion summaries
 - Tabling
- Meeting phases:
 - Orientation
 - Check-in
 - Announcements
 - Agenda
 - Breaks
 - Check-out
- Roles:
 - Facilitators
 - Note takers
 - Timekeepers
 - Vibes watchers
 - Shepherds
 - Buddies

- Hand signals:
 - Twinkles
 - Approval / disapproval
 - Block
 - Wrap-it-up
 - New proposal
 - Point of information
 - Direct response
- Formats:
 - Icebreakers / fire starters
 - Open stack
 - Go-around
 - Popcorn
 - World cafe
 - Dotstorm
 - Spectrogram
 - Solipsist's meeting
 - Neighbor interviews
 - Break-out groups

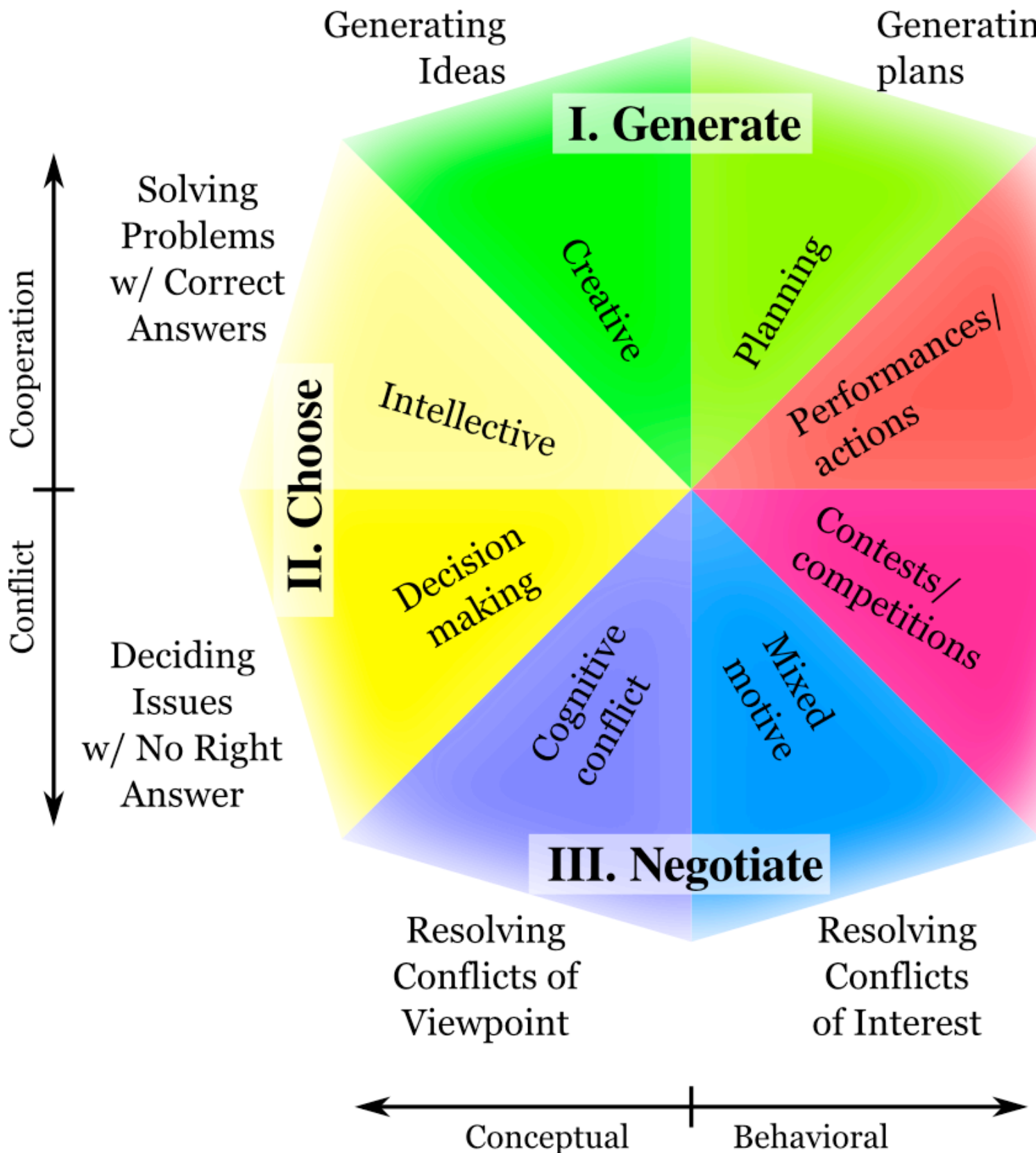
Online, not so much...

• ☆	[-]	[MARK BOMB] attn: libertarians	• Aarc
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] attn: libertarians	• Antl
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] attn: libertarians	• Aarc
• ☆	[-]	[MARK BOMB] DAMN POLITICS [libertarianism] sucks me in [sorry]	• Antl
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] DAMN POLITICS [libertarianism] sucks me in [sorry]	• Aarc
• ☆	[-]	[MARK BOMB] libertarianism	• Aarc
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] libertarianism	• Antl
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] libertarianism	• Jern
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] libertarianism	• Dev
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] libertarianism	• Aarc
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] libertarianism	• Lew
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] libertarianism	• Ana
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] libertarianism	• Antl
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] libertarianism	• Setl
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] libertarianism	• Kell
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] libertarianism	• Aus
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] libertarianism	• ez L
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] libertarianism	• Dav
• ☆	[-]	Re: [MARK BOMB] libertarianism	• pyre
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] libertarianism	• And
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] libertarianism	• Bop
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] libertarianism	• And
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] libertarianism	• Dev
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] libertarianism	• Suz
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] libertarianism	• Ren
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] libertarianism	• Antl
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] libertarianism (Anthony Gregory)	• R Br
• ☆	[-]	[MARK BOMB] hey libertarians	• Micl
• ☆		Re: [MARK BOMB] hey libertarians	• Antl

What are we actually trying to accomplish?

Why do we have meetings?

Types of Tasks



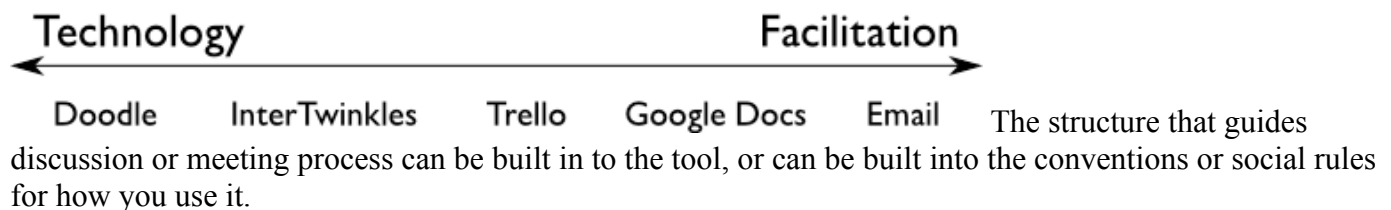
Process *is* Technology

Task→	I. Generate	II. Choose	III. Negotiate	IV. Execute
Social processes	brainstorming go-arounds	deliberating voting delegation	mediation facilitation Non-Violent Communication	action items committees work parties
Technologies	Dotstorm Shared docs	Doodle Decing Loomio	Progressive Clock	Trello Basecamp



- Augmenting channels
 - allowing new things to be communicated
- Guiding and structuring process
 - facilitating meeting process, enforcing rules
- Reasoning, organizing, or contributing content
 - expert systems, knowledge bases, etc

Source of Structure



Making unstructured channels work

What do facilitators do?

- Maintain agenda
- Keep discussion focused
- Proactively phrase and rephrase proposals
- Recommend and try different discussion techniques
- Ensure everyone is able to participate equally
- Keep track of energy, emotions, and tensions
- Tabulate votes and results of proposals

- Enforce policy on proposals, quorum, etc
- ~~Keep stack~~

Email practices

When asking:

- *Be a facilitator.* Ensure everyone is included.
- Subject: Use "URGENT", "FYI", "No need to respond".
- If response is needed, say when (but be reasonable).
- Recommend a process and a timeline.
- Have a policy for how to finalize proposals.

When replying:

- Acknowledge: If you can't respond right away, say when you will.
- Develop group policy on Reply All vs Reply One.
(*Use Reply All for group discussion or deliberation*)
- Keep it as short as possible (but no shorter). Edit before sending.
- Remember that people can't read your emotion.

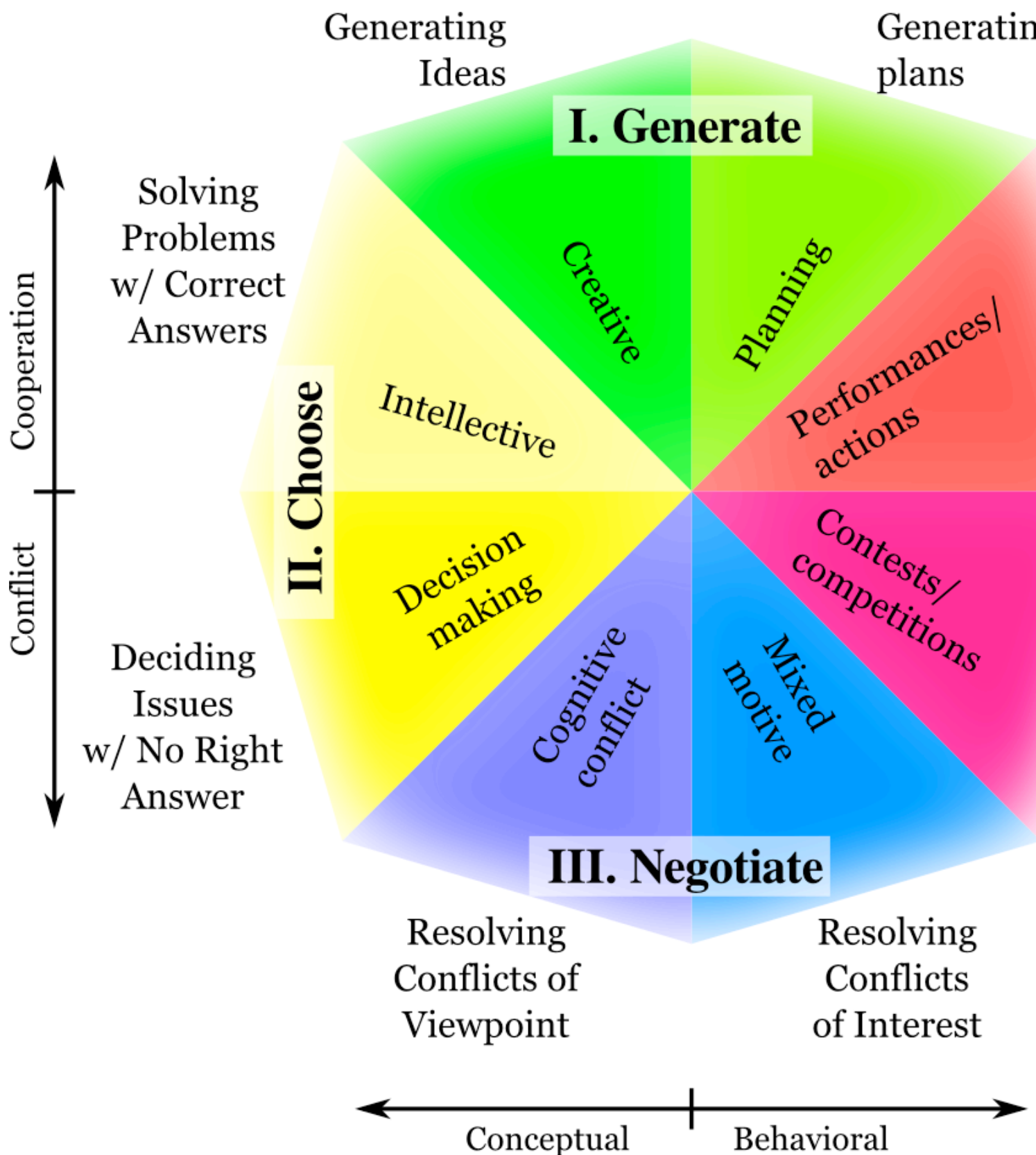
Phone conferences

- *Use active facilitation.*
- Teach people what to expect.
- Speak up boldly; back off if you interrupt.
- Ask questions in the negative: "Does anyone disagree?"
- Allow and expect silences!
- Make frequent use of go-arounds; call on people.
- Address audio quality issues early on.
- Google Hangouts, Uberconference, and similar make some parts easier.
- Have a policy for how to finalize proposals.

Structured channels

Source of Structure





McGrath, "Groups, Interaction and Performance", 1984

Doodle

Loomio

InterTwinkles

Trello

Doodle

Best for *scheduling*.

	July 31, 2013				
	9:00	11:00	2:00	4:00	8:00
Tom		✓		✓	
Paula	✓	✓	✓		✓
Chris		✓		✓	✓
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Alternatives:

- <http://meetme.so>
- <https://dudle.inf.tu-dresden.de/> (free/open source)

Doodle best practices

- Use **specific times** of day, e.g. 11:30am, 7pm
- If your group needs it, enable timezone support. Think about the extremes of your timezones (e.g. is it too early for Pacific, or too late for Eastern?)
- Use three color poll option for **YES, NO, IF NEED BE**
- Try to **limit the number of options**
- When sending out the poll, give a deadline for responding. Don't expect people to hold times open indefinitely.
- Try to poll dates with **as much lead time as possible**

*These tips brought by to you by the irreplaceable Esteban Sunshine Superboy Kelly

Loomio pros and cons

Pros

- Great for simple proposals and discussions.
- Designed by an awesome cooperative in New Zealand.
- Built for small democratic groups like co-ops.
- Notification system helps you stay up to date.
- Simple and intuitive.

Cons

- Everyone needs to set up an account.
- Is another discussion space; divides attention.
- Only supports simple proposals.

Trello



Trello pros and cons

Pros

- Great for project management, TODO lists, tasks.
- Commercially supported, very widely used.
- Good balance of structure vs flexibility.
- Very easy to use

Cons

- Everyone needs to set up an account.
- Easy to over-build beyond actual use.
- Proprietary, closed source.

InterTwinkles



play

- Inspired by sticky-note brainstorming... something you may have done
- You can draw, type, add notes with the camera, drag them around, vote on them.
- real-time synchronous, edits instantly visible
- works on any device with a modern web browser, without installing anything.

Resolve

play

Resolve is about finalizing proposals.

- asynchronous: proposals can be edited and evolve, votes change
- notifications
- full history all in one place
- No discussion: that's for email.

Points of Unity



Summary

- Strong facilitation is key.
- The more flexible a tool is, the *more* you have to facilitate.
- Groups must develop practices/policies for how to use online communication, just as groups must develop practices/policies for meetings.
- Education is essential, just like education in meeting process.
Sit down with every member and walk them through.
- There are lots of options
- Be as creative with (ab)using online systems as you are with running meetings!
(Sparkle dance party?)

