

The Process of Blind, Weighted Voting – A Facilitator’s Guide

Setting: A team meeting. The team is made up of people who perform a similar function across operations or a team of people who work in a particular area of operations. The principle is that those who perform similar tasks have the knowledge, the exposure and a personal stake in making their work lives safer.

Process Support: A skilled facilitator who is not a member of the team making the choices.

The Facilitator Introduction Script: “In this process, you are being asked to identify and prioritize the risks in your department that are, in your view, the ones most likely to result in serious injury. The question I will be asking is, “What are we doing day in and day out that, if we continue, someone is eventually going to get seriously hurt?” You may take a moment to jot down your initial thoughts. I will go around the room asking each of you for your ideas. You can have as many or as few as you like. I will continue to go around the room and ask for your input until all of your ideas are captured. I will write your responses on a chart pad and if I do not capture what you have said accurately, please correct me. It is OK to ask questions of the person submitting an idea for understanding. It is not OK to make a sales pitch for your or to shoot down someone else’s idea. You will have a chance for your opinion to count later in this process.

After all your issues are captured, we will then go through a process of combining similar thoughts. Then, I will ask you to participate in a ranking exercise to identify the issues that are this team’s top priorities. The result of all of this will be this team’s Critical Few. The Critical Few are the top 2 or 3 issues that you select. The intent is to make sure we are all working on the things that are most important to you. The items not making the top two or three will be saved until the solutions to your Critical Few are well on their way to implementation. At that time, we will bring those not making the Critical Few list back up and add to them as you see fit. We will then re-rank the new list as we will rank your ideas today. Spoiler alert: Once your Critical Few are identified, I or your manager will be asking for volunteer(s) from this team to lead the effort to find a solution to the safety issues for each of your Critical Few.

Why are we asking you to do this? – to make sure that what gets worked on is what you want worked on. It is as simple as that.

Note: No record will be kept about who contributed which thought. This is to ensure that there is no feedback or potential retribution for a team member identifying risks which may represent a breach of existing rules. What we know is if there is fear in the system for telling the truth, then you are not going to get accurate information and the whole exercise is futile. The facilitator should set the stage for open and honest input from the team without fear,

There is a lot to understand for the facilitator but very little for the team to know about the process. The team’s value is in their knowledge about their work and the risks.

Any questions? OK, lets begin.

Individual, Written Responses to the Question: Suggested Facilitator Script

“When you think about what this team does daily or often, what do you think are the practices, situations or conditions that represent the greatest risk of serious injury? Without discussion, please jot down what you feel are our most serious risks. You will have a chance to talk about your thoughts in the next step. Consider not only how serious the injury might be but also how often we are exposed to the situation in our day to day work. When I see the writing slowing down, I’ll start collecting your thoughts. As we go through the process of collecting your ideas, it is OK for others to seek clarification but this is not the time to comment on how worthy or unworthy someone’s thoughts are..

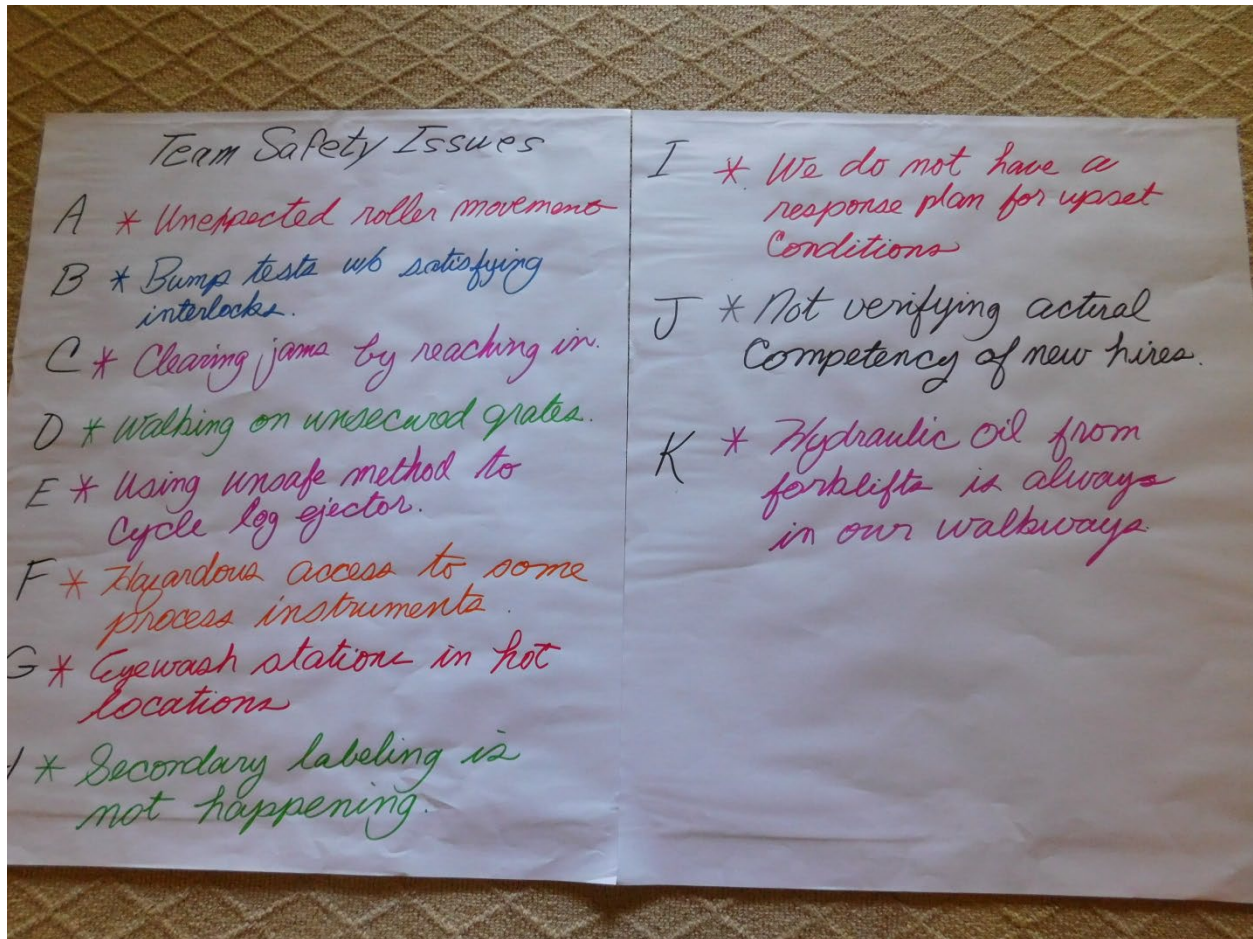
Prop: A chart pad and different colored markers (the different colors help keep the thoughts separate)

Capture the Answers:

Go around the room in random order and collect their thoughts. Tell them that as we go through the process, if you see that some of your entries have already been made choose another of your issues. The facilitator should allow all the discussion needed for all the team to understand each individual’s suggested issue so that they can make an informed decision later but the facilitator must discourage any judgment by other team members as to the worthiness of the individual’s suggestion. The intent is to understand at this point not to evaluate. That comes in the next step.

Capture their issues on a chart pad. You will find it helpful to use different color chart pad markers to help separate the thoughts. As you fill up a sheet, post it on a convenient wall. When all the input is in, ask the participants if some of the items are really addressing the same issue and if they can be combined. Follow their directions and if needed add a word or two to make sure it captures the intent of those who submitted the idea. If the person who submitted one of the ideas objects to it being combined, do not combine it. However, the intent in combining is to assure the team’s highest priority gets the highest number of votes. If two issues are very similar, it may split the votes and the issue may wind up on the bottom of the priority list and that doesn’t serve the team well. The facilitator should remind the team and the person who objects that his/her objection might cause the vote to be split. But, in the end, and with this knowledge, if the team member who submitted the issue still objects, leave it to stand on its own. This is just part of making sure that every team member’s input is valued the same.

The finished product looks something like this.



After the Combining

After the combining is done, and it will be messy, letter each separate issue, A B C. You get the picture. Now, count how many separate issues remain. Divide that number by 2. For instance, if there are 12 remaining, then every person on the team is going to get six votes. If there is an odd number remaining, say 13, then the division results in 6.5 and gets rounded to 7 votes per person.

Individual Voting:

You have ___ votes. If it is six, then tell them that they should give a 6 to the issue they think deserves the highest priority given how often the task/operation is performed and how serious the injury could be. For example, if the individual believes the issue marked with the letter H is the highest priority, then put a 6 beside the H on their paper. For the next issue, if the individual thinks issue A is the next highest priority, it would get a 5 and so on. When the participant, in

this case, assigns an issue with the rank of 1, they are through voting. All other issues, for that individual, by default, gets a 0. A reminder: This should be a completely individual exercise with no discussion of the merits of an issue. However, the participants can ask any questions they have about the process.

The facilitator should have prepared a grid on a chart pad or other media to record the votes. A grid chart with a place at the left for the letter assigned to each issue and a place at the top of each column for the participant's initials. Initials are optional. They do allow for further discussion that is often helpful to fully understand The Critical Few chosen by the team and it identifies those most interested and may be inclined to lead the resolution effort.

During this exercise, the facilitator can observe the progress and when the voting is at or very near completion, the facilitator reverses the flip chart/ grid so that it is not visible to the participants. Then, the facilitator asks the participants to come up and record their votes. Their initials go at the top of the column and their ranking goes in the row indicating their choice for its rank, an example follows. The facilitator should stand by the chart to make sure the votes are recorded in the right places. Invariably, after all the discussion about giving the top priority the highest number, someone will come up and record their highest priority with the number one.

Once all the votes have been recorded, the facilitator will record the number of people voting for each issue and record that number. Then the facilitator will add the weighting numbers assigned to the issue. For example: If six people voted for an issue and those six people gave the following weights: 6,6,4,5,3,4, then the interest and weighting should be recorded as 6/28 for a total of 34. The top two or three with the highest combined numbers ARE the team's Critical Few because these are the issues supported by the greatest number and represent their belief about what is most important to them. This process is not perfect but, in my experience, this is as close as you are ever going to come to empowering the team to make their best choices and voluntarily engage in making their area or function safer.

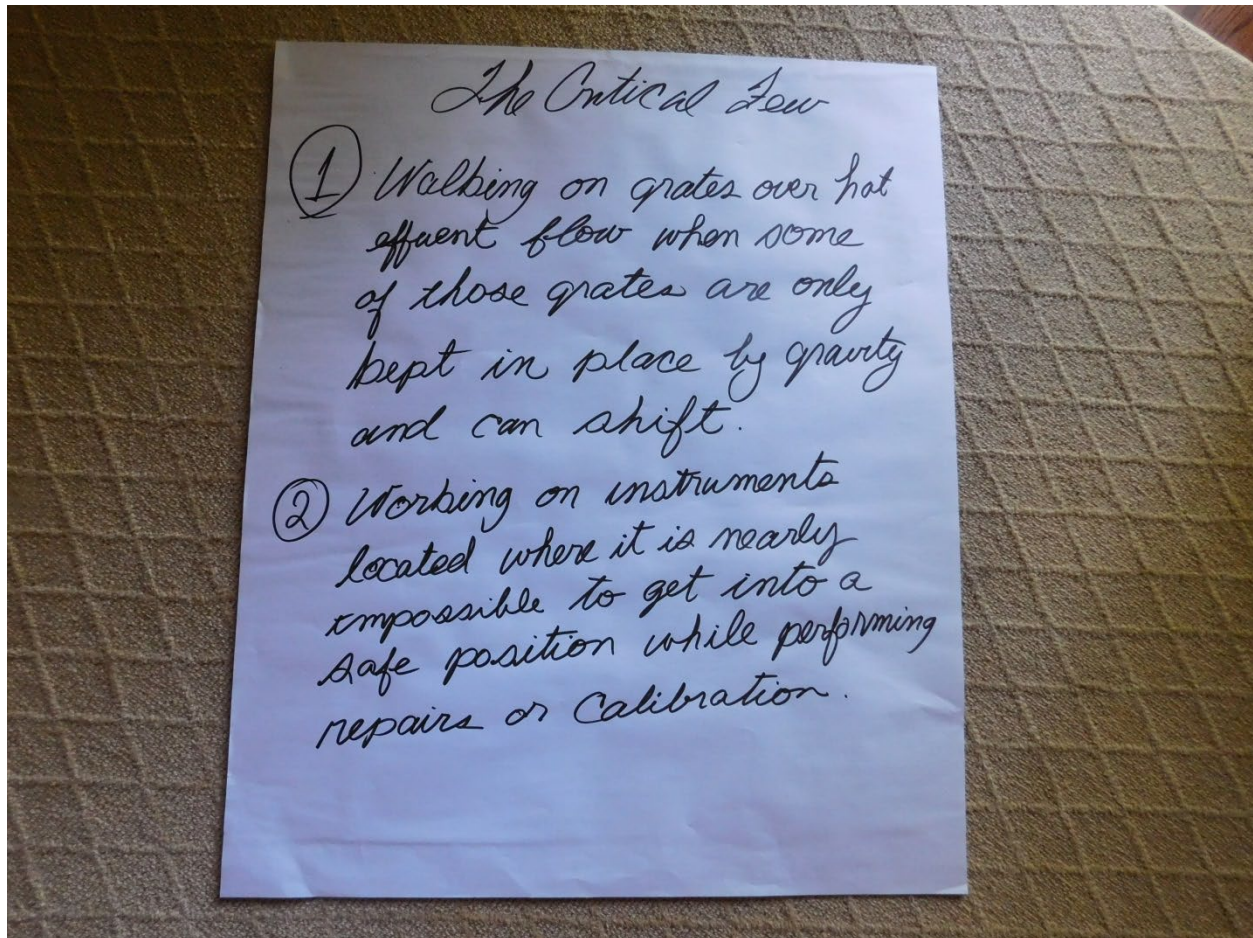
This is what it looks like.

Ranking

	MC	LC	RG	BW	BK	BR	# People	weight	total
A	5	1	3	4	3	4	6	20	26
B							0		
C		2	2	3	2	1	5	10	15
D	4	3	4	5	4	5	6	25	31
E							0		
F	3	5	5	2	5	2	6	22	28
G							0		
H	2	4					2	6	8
I			1	1	1	3	4	6	10
K	1						1	1	2

The three issues that the most people voted for plus gave the most weighting are D, F and A. These, then, are this team's chosen Critical Few.

I have listed only the top two and made sure I've captured just what was said.



The whole activity takes about an hour of the team's time. There are subtle but powerful elements of this process that:

- Leverages the team's diversity of thought by encouraging input from those who sometimes are not inclined to express their ideas. This often results in better insights into the risks and better solutions.
- Makes it more likely that project leaders will volunteer to accept responsibility for finding solutions and making sure necessary changes are made.
- Raises awareness of the risk while solutions are identified and implemented.
- Once the team's solution is in place, it makes the safe practice more reliable because it is the team's creation and owned by the team.
- Takes the burden from management for trying to manage compliance in a flawed system.
- Another advantage is that this type of preventative thinking spills over in to quality and production as well as a greater sensitivity to injury prevention.

So, what happens after The Critical Few are identified? The next step is to identify one or more members of the team to lead the effort to eliminate one of The Critical Few. I generally suggest limiting the Critical Few to no more than two or three. Each item making the Critical Few needs a leader or leaders. The first place to start in getting leadership is to identify the team member(s) who expressed the most interest in the particular issue. Make sure the leader(s) are truly volunteers and not coerced in any way.

BIG NEXT STEP

Effective Delegation – The Essential Components

When leaders have been identified and have *voluntarily* agreed to take on the work, the next order of business is to develop an agreement with the leader(s) that assures he or she will have the resources, guidelines and support to be successful in eliminating or minimizing the hazard identified by the team.

The following are the essential elements of an agreement between management and the person(s) who have agreed to take on one of the team's Critical Few. The elements can be as simple or as detailed as the project calls for. Clear communications are key which means that the delegation should be in writing so that everyone is clear.

Desired Outcomes: This answers the question, What does success look like? Is it to eliminate the hazard completely? Is it to minimize the risk to a tolerable level? Is it to add a level of protection or protective gear? Is it to transfer the risk from employees to a contractor better equipped to safely deal with the risk? Desired outcomes should be in specific, measurable terms which are clearly within the sphere of control of the agreement. In my opinion, the most desirable goal is to terminate the risk completely and the challenge should be to explore this option before moving on to other less desirable addresses of the issue.

Guidelines: This provides the degrees of freedom that the volunteer leader has to explore options and implement solutions. Where will the time come from for the volunteer to do the work? At what points in the volunteer's work should he/she check in with supervision/manager? As the project progresses, how will the volunteer keep the team informed and get input?

Resources: There is no free lunch. How will the volunteer's time be funded? Who are the people to whom the volunteer/leader can go to for support? When a proposed solution is identified, what is the process from that point?

Accountabilities: What is the department manager responsible for in this project? How often will a project update be provided? If the volunteer/leader encounters a roadblock, who is informed? And, finally, what is the leader accountable for?

Natural Outcomes of Success: This addresses the benefits of the project's success. For the team, it may be that their input has been valued and the hazard eliminated freeing up resources to tackle the next priority. For the leader(s), it may be that he, she or they are recognized for their work and as the project is publicized at the site (and maybe beyond), their reputation and standing is enhanced. I do not recommend monetary rewards for a project for anyone involved. This takes away from the sense of contribution. The fact that there is no money recognition should be handled on the front end so that there is no such expectation. In the natural evolution of things, employees who take on projects and demonstrate leadership will likely be rewarded but there should be no direct link. For immediate management, a hazard is removed and now needs no constant management involvement in trying to manage safe conditions/behavior that previously existed. For the company, less potential for serious injury.

In my experience, some projects may be long-term in nature and complicated but many are not. I have seen an issue identified and a solution implemented in one afternoon.

One final note: If the solution to the safety issue doesn't improve production, quality or both, the solution is likely not the best one. On the reverse, if improvements in production or quality are implemented and their implementation does not make the work place safer, then the improvement is deficient in its design.

My coaching to the facilitator is to initially stick to the script. As the facilitator gains experience and understanding, start improving the process and adapting it to best fit the culture at your site.

I am available for discussions via phone and email. There is no charge.

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