



## Looking at pros and cons

One of the facilitator's main roles is to hold the group in the discomfort of disagreement and the chaos of divergent thinking. Sometimes groups are so anxious to move out of this phase that they jump to positions way too early, turning disagreement into conflict.

Once people have adopted positions, it is hard for them to move away from them without losing face. It is hard for them to draw attention to the weaknesses in their own preferred option, or acknowledge the strengths in others'. So identifying the strengths and weaknesses BEFORE asking for 'positions' is a great idea.

If you can help the group stay in an exploratory mood, examining options or ideas from many perspectives before converging on decisions, you can help avoid unnecessary conflict. (And necessary conflict can be given the space it deserves!)

One technique for doing this is to give space and permission for people to notice both what they like and what they don't like about every idea or option.

Create flips (or worksheets) which have space for the options or ideas, and then two columns: one for the strengths / likes and one for the weaknesses / dislikes.

Working in small groups, people take one option at a time and note down in both columns their initial thoughts.

This could be done as a carousel. In a carousel, each group begins with one option, working on flip charts at a 'station'. They work on this option for a short time. After five or six minutes, they move on to the next one which already has some ideas from the previous group. They build on and comment on the previous group's work. After another short while they move on to the next station and next option, until the time is used up. Each group uses different colour marker pens to make their notes, so that the responses are clearly distinguished.

Or it could be that each small group is assigned one option to look at in detail, trusting that the other groups will build full pictures of the options they are looking at.

If there is enough time, all the groups can look at all the options in this way.

