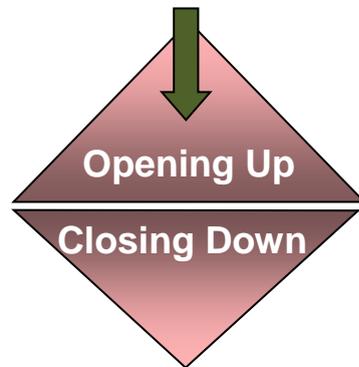Problem Solving – generating ideas and finding a solution

Solving the Problem

There are two basic stages to problem solving: *Opening Up… Closing Down*

Opening Up

Closing Down

Opening Up…this is the generation of ideas. As a team you think up all the possible solutions to the problem.

Closing Down…   this is the decision about which option to implement. As a team you will consider each option and decide the best.

There are two useful approaches to opening up ideas:

1: Mind Mapping

Write the topic (problem) in the centre of a sheet of paper.

Let your mind 'wander' around the subject.

When you have your first thought, draw a line and write it down. Follow this thought with connected ideas forming branches from the line.

If this thought stream runs out, pick another one and start again from the centre.

Don't worry if it looks dis-organised – at the end decide which ideas will be useful.

2: Thought – shower

The leader or writer for the session writes the topic (problem) on the flip chart.

The group contribute ideas using the following rules:

Suspend judgment *no comment should be passed on ideas suggested*

No inhibitions *contribute every idea you have regardless of whether it seems appropriate*

Freewheel *maintain the flow of ideas, do not dwell too long on previous ideas*

When all the ideas have been suggested the group need to decide on which are best (see *Stage 2 –* Closing Down).

The key principle is to search for quantity rather than quality of ideas.

Stage 2 – Closing Down

Once the ideas have been generated the team must decide which one(s) to implement.

It may be that all the facts are not known about all the options in which case individuals will need to go and research the option and feed back relevant information to the team.

The team should then discuss the options and the pros and cons of each.

The following technique helps make the voting procedure fairer:

Disposable Voting

Each individual in the team is given a number of votes (usually 10 for this exercise).

Individuals assign their available votes to the various options but cannot give all their votes to any one option. In some circumstances there may need to be a maximum number of options individuals can vote for.

Individuals dispense their votes amongst their chosen solutions (usually with tally marks)

The votes assigned to each option are calculated and the option with most votes wins.

This process will be speeded up if the group agrees to cross out some of their answers so that about 8-10 remain to be voted upon