deciding among competing options

Using paired comparison analysis to make sensible choices

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In brief

The paired comparison process

Paired Comparison Analysis is a useful tool when a choice has to be made amongst a number of competing options. It is simple to use and works well with both individuals or teams.

In the attached example, a marketing team needs to apply a limited budget to the best of 7 options: (a) launch a newsletter, (b) redesign the company website, (c) publish an E-Book, (d) advertise in the press, (e) undertake a direct mail campaign, (f) hold a seminar or (g) undertake a search engine optimisation of the existing website.

Each option is assigned a letter. As you will see in the template, where an option would be compared with itself, the box is blocked out. The group then discusses the relative attraction of each option when compared to each other (on a 0 to 3 scale).

In the example on the next page, when A (newsletter) is compared with B (redesign website), A is preferred with a relative importance of 3. Write in the letter of the preferred option and score it for its relative importance, in this case A3.

When all options have been compared, add up the total for each and put the score in the Total column. In the example, A is mentioned 4 times and scores a total of 10.

The percentage column shows the how much importance is attributed to each option. (The percentages can be used to give rough direction to the allocation of resources or funding where this is required).

Where a clear preference is the aim of the exercise, the ranking column will show the preferred course of action. In the example, that option is A (the newsletter). Try the process yourself. A blank template is on p.3.

Paired comparison

Worksheet example

OPTION	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	TOTAL	%	RANK
A: Newsletter		A, 3	A, 2	A, 3	A, 2	F, 1	G, 2	10	31.25	1st
B: Redesign Website			B, 1	B, 1	E, 2	F, 1	G, 2	2	6.25	=5th
C: E-Book				C, 2	E, 1	F, 1	G, 2	2	6.25	=5th
D: Press Advertising					E, 1	F, 1	G, 1	0	0	7th
E: Mailout						F, 1	G, 1	4	12.50	4th
F: Seminar							F, 1	6	18.75	3rd
G: Website Optimisation								8	25.00	2nd
								32		

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Paired comparison

Worksheet

OPTION	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	TOTAL	%	RANK
A										
B										
C										
D										
E										
F										
G										

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Hi, I'm Alan Hargreaves. I specialise in simplifying complex business problems. In over 35 years as a business executive, I have never found an issue that cannot be addressed through identifying the essential but simple steps required to make any problem manageable. It might be your career, your firm, your team or your strategy. It doesn't matter. All hurdles can be lowered through dispassionate analysis, and all executives can embrace simple processes to take them forward.

Using these techniques, I have helped hundreds of people through the various stages of their business or career development. It may be the challenge of taking on new responsibilities; it could be the task of managing a business you have created yourself; it may be handling a difficult team in the midst of major change. I use a straightforward combination of key principles to get results: collaboration, adaptation, simplification and action. You can contact me anytime at alan@alanhargreaves.com.

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