



Computer-Aided Decision Support

As part of its informed decision-making and analysis capability, the INL Systems Analyses and Engineering (SA&E) organization provides electronic meeting support using structured collaboration software, called ThinkTank, and proven systems engineering principles to help teams engage and to enhance organizational brainstorming and decision-making. ThinkTank is hosted on a Web-based, FISMA-compliant server and accessed through remote desktop or laptop terminals via the Internet.

Improved Meeting Efficiency

Research shows that electronic meetings help organizations think better, create better and decide better by engaging and empowering organizational

resources through the use of group intelligence technology. When used in coordination with trained facilitators, ThinkTank can improve the content and outcome of a meeting by allowing participants to simultaneously input ideas and comments into a shared database, categorize ideas into common areas of emphasis, rate the relative value of ideas, and further develop ideas into a viable path forward.

Using INL's ThinkTank capability, meeting objectives can be reached in about half the time and with richer and more detailed content than can be achieved through traditional meeting methods. The electronic meeting technology encourages the equal participation of all team members and focuses the meeting on

the subject matter content through the use of anonymous participation.

ThinkTank Capabilities

ThinkTank is ideal for brainstorming, organizing and commenting on ideas to various levels of detail. It also includes extensive means for idea reduction, selection, or alternative analysis using several voting methods, including rank order; 4-, 5-, and 10-point scaling; multiple selection ranking; and agree / disagree statements. Reduction / selection results are immediately available for discussion by participants, thus allowing for real-time clarification and correction of results. The system can also be used to create customized surveys to assess participant

Continued next page

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attitudes and accumulate detailed information prior to or during a meeting.

Proven Applications

The INL's ThinkTank system has been used successfully with both internal and external customers in the Nuclear Science and Technology (S&T), Energy and Environmental S&T, and National and Homeland Security directorates. In all instances, a strategic Systems Engineering approach was applied to the application of ThinkTank to support mission and organizational development, requirements identification, research gap analysis, project alternative analysis, brainstorming of innovative solutions, and document review and revision.

Meeting Process

ThinkTank meetings are requested and coordinated through the INL SA&E Department. The ThinkTank meeting is then carried out in three phases:

1. An INL facilitator and ThinkTank technographer meet with the meeting host in advance of the scheduled meeting to establish meeting objectives and determine which ThinkTank tools are most appropriate to meet those objectives. The time required is dependent upon the complexity of the session being planned. The technographer then configures the ThinkTank capability to fulfill the meeting objectives.
2. The technographer sets up the meeting location and assists meeting participants

in logging onto the ThinkTank system using their own or borrowed laptops. The meeting is conducted as planned by the facilitator, ThinkTank technographer, and meeting host using proven systems engineering principles.

3. The facilitator and technographer generate a meeting report containing all of the information input into the ThinkTank system by the meeting participants.

There are two primary advantages to this process. First, the meeting host can participate as a content contributor and decision-maker, rather than focusing on the details of facilitating the meeting. Secondly, a significantly greater number of ideas and discussion points are captured and reported

from the meeting than what is typically captured using traditional meeting methods.

Meeting Options

The INL ThinkTank capability is available through the Web and can be accessed using an Internet browser from any desktop or laptop computer world wide. The capability allows for a leader station and up to 24 client stations. This configuration allows for ThinkTank sessions to be conducted virtually anytime, anywhere with participants in numerous remote locations.

Costs

Costs for using the INL ThinkTank capability fund the session facilitator and technographer in preparing, conducting and reporting the session, and support use and maintenance of the ThinkTank system.

