Innovation Training Module

How Smart Groups Think

The Delphi Way

Introduction: Why Groups Don't Always Think Smart

Group work is everywhere – in classrooms, sports teams, school clubs, and even families. Yet, students often notice something strange: **groups don't always make better decisions than individuals**. Sometimes the loudest voice wins. Sometimes everyone agrees too quickly. Sometimes good ideas disappear because no one wants to speak up.

So how do scientists, planners, and decision-makers make **good group decisions**—especially when problems are complex and answers are unclear?

One powerful approach is called the **Delphi Method**. While it sounds complicated, its core idea is very simple:

Groups think better when thinking is structured, fair, and reflective.

This module introduces students to **Delphi-style thinking**—a way of improving ideas step by step, together.

What Is the Delphi Way of Thinking?

The Delphi Method was originally developed to help experts make predictions and decisions about the future. But at its heart, it is not about experts – it is about how thinking improves through rounds of reflection and feedback.

In simple words, the Delphi way means:

- People think individually first
- Ideas are shared without names
- Everyone sees the group's thinking
- People revise and improve their ideas
- The group slowly moves toward better answers

It values thinking over talking and listening over arguing.

Why Ordinary Group Discussions Often Fail

Before understanding Delphi-style thinking, students must see what usually goes wrong.

Common problems in group discussions:

- One or two students dominate
- Others stay silent
- Friends agree with friends
- Ideas are judged too early
- The group rushes to a decision

This leads to:

- Groupthink (everyone thinks the same)
- Missed ideas
- Poor-quality decisions

The Delphi approach fixes this by **changing the process**, not the people.

The Core Principles of the Delphi Method (Student-Friendly)

1. Independent Thinking First

Everyone gets time to think **on their own** before hearing others.

Why this matters:

- Prevents copying
- Encourages original ideas
- Builds confidence in quiet students

2. Anonymity of Ideas

Ideas are shared **without names**.

Why this matters:

- No fear of judgment
- No pressure from popularity
- Ideas are judged on quality, not who said them

3. Feedback, Not Debate

Instead of arguing, the group looks at:

- Similar ideas
- Differences
- New perspectives

This creates a **learning environment**, not a competition.

4. Thinking in Rounds

The group thinks again—**with new information**. Each round improves ideas, like polishing a rough stone.

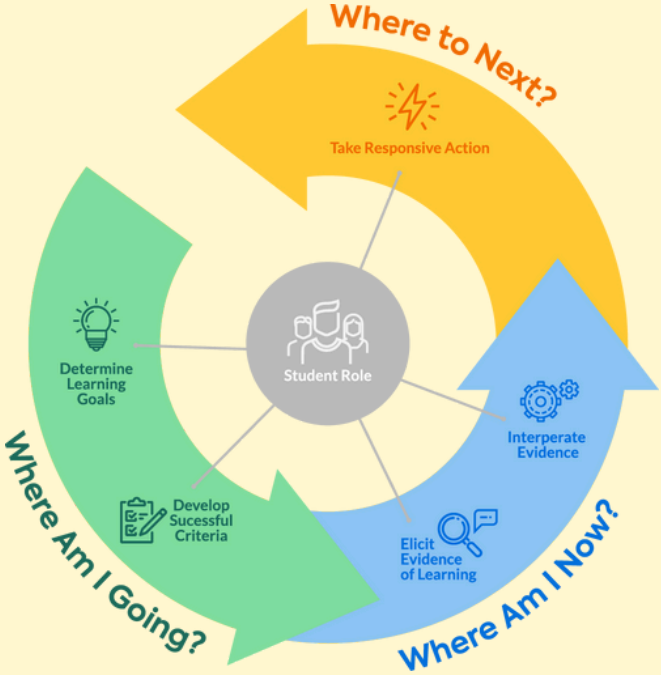
How the Delphi Method Actually Works (Simplified)

Step 1: The Question

A clear, open-ended question is asked.
Example: *"How can our school reduce plastic waste?"*

Step 2: Round One – Individual Responses

Each student writes their ideas privately.
No discussion. No influence.



Step 3: Sharing Ideas (Without Names)

The teacher or facilitator collects and lists ideas:

- On the board
- On a chart
- On a screen

Step 4: Reflection Round

Students read all ideas and think:

- What makes sense?
- What can be improved?
- What ideas connect?

They revise or add new ideas.

Step 5: Finding Common Ground

The group notices:

- Repeated ideas
- Strong suggestions
- Practical solutions

The goal is **better thinking**, not total agreement.

✏️ Activity 1: Mini Delphi in the Classroom

🕒 Time: 25–30 minutes

Problem: "What should our school priorities to become more eco-friendly?"

Round 1 - Students write 2-3 ideas silently.

Round 2 – Teacher reads out ideas anonymously.

Round 3 – Students refine or rank ideas.

Outcome

A shortlist of thoughtful, well-considered solutions.

💡 **Reflection**: *Did your idea change after seeing others' ideas? Why?*

What Skills Does the Delphi Way Build?

Using this method helps students develop:

- Critical thinking
- Patience and reflection
- Listening skills
- Respect for diverse opinions
- Better decision-making

Most importantly, students learn that changing your mind is not weakness – it is growth.

Real-Life Situations Where This Helps Students

Delphi-style thinking can be used for:

- Choosing class projects
- Planning school events
- Solving local problems
- Predicting future needs
- Group assignments without conflict

It also prepares students for:

- Leadership roles
- Teamwork in careers
- Democratic participation

✏️ Activity 2: Predicting the Future (Delphi Style)

🕒 Time: 20 minutes

Question: "What skills will students need most in 2040?"

Round 1 - Students list skills individually.

Round 2 – Ideas are shared anonymously.

Round 3 – Students revise their answers after seeing trends.

🎯 *Learning Outcome: Students see how collective thinking improves predictions.*

Delphi Thinking vs Ordinary Discussion

Ordinary Discussion	Delphi Way
Loud voices dominate	Everyone participates
Quick decisions	Thoughtful rounds
Emotional reactions	Reflective thinking
Pressure to agree	Freedom to rethink

Reflection Questions

1. How did anonymity change the way ideas were shared?
2. Did seeing others' ideas improve your thinking?
3. Where else can this method be used in daily life?
4. Why is it important to think before speaking?

Conclusion: Smarter Groups Are Made, Not Found

Good group thinking does not happen by chance – it happens by design. The Delphi Method shows students that when thinking is structured, fair, and reflective, **groups can be wiser than individuals.**