

Support for Decision by E-mail

<http://www.dsv.su.se/~jpalme/ietf/JPMADS.html>



by:

Jacob Palme

e-mail:

jpalme@dsv.su.se

web:

<http://www.dsv.su.se/~jpalme>

Are decisions made by email?

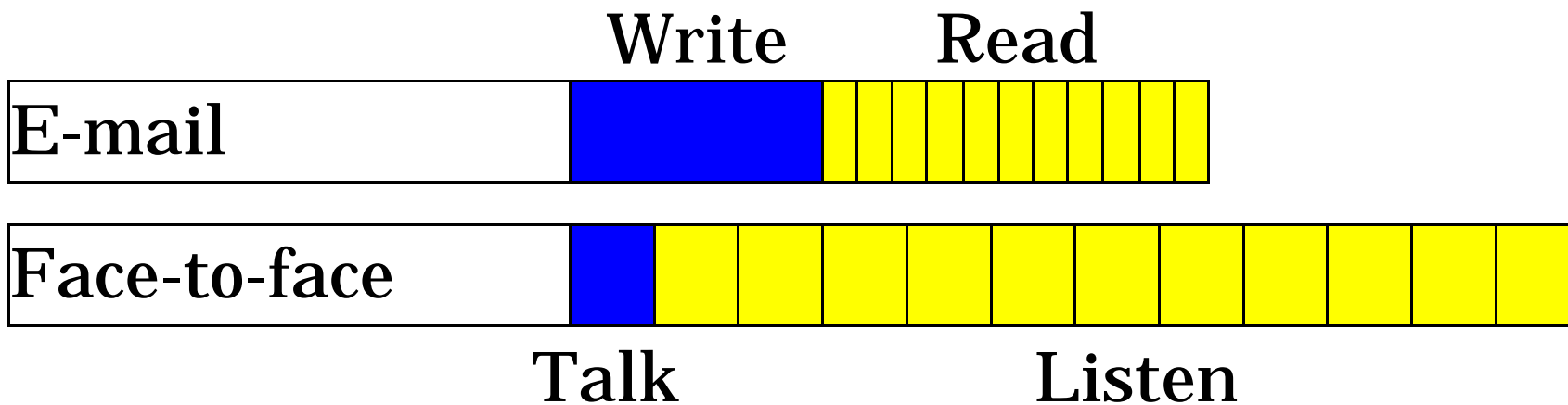
Yes

In most decision-making, communication is included: To gather facts, get different views, clarify the issues, find agreements and disagreements, getting acceptance and support for the decision.

Sometimes decisions are formally made by e-mail (example: IETF, Internet Engineering Task Force). But even when decisions are not formally made by e-mail, much of the communication is often done by e-mail

Decisions by e-mail: Advantages

- Save travel costs and time.
- Can raise an issue immediately.
- Can think and comment next day.
- Faster (with more than five participants), because you read faster than you write and decide yourself how long time to spend on reading a particular message.



Decisions by e-mail: Disadvantages

- More difficult to clarify complex issues.
- More difficult to persuade people.
- More difficult to reach agreement.
- Sometimes discussions take too much time, repeating the same arguments over and over again.

Why?

- Lack of body language, and voice inflection.
- Slow interactivity.
- Not good graphical overview.

Can e-mail become better at supporting decisions?

Yes, with the right methods and tools.

A simple example: Decide on a time for the next same time (face to face or chat) meeting:

Propose five possible dates. Ask all participants to indicate which of these dates are OK for them.

Is voting by e-mail the solution: **No!**

Example: Decide whether to build a bridge for pedestrians, bikers or cars. One third wants each kind of bridge. Result: 2/3 majority against building any bridge at all.

There are more advanced voting algorithms, but no algorithm will always give the best result.

The goal in many working groups is not to have a majority win over a minority, but to find consensus, or at least a solution acceptable to all or most participants.

Are all participants equal?

No!

Example 1 (from IETF):

- ⇒ How many of those present have read the draft?
- ⇒ How many of those who have read the draft since we should make this amendment?

Example 2 (also from IETF):

- ⇒ Voting by “humming”.
- ⇒ You hum louder if you are more sure of your opinion.

Those whose competence is more widely accepted have a stronger voice.

Queries instead of voting

Simple voting

- Choice 1
- Choice 2
- Choice 3
- Choice 4

Advanced query

- Very bad Bad Acceptable Good Very good
 - Very bad Bad Acceptable Good Very good
 - Very bad Bad Acceptable Good Very good
 - Very bad Bad Acceptable Good Very good
- I am sure I am an expert

Issues in query system:

Results tabulated by name or anonymous.

Each person can add a comment to his reply.

Continuous data collection; a person can change his view at any time.

Formulation of query is very important.

Who are allowed to participate?

Query form on the web or sent by e-mail?

Plain text e-mailed query:

```
! State Your Views!                ID: 123456789
!  
! How to reply: Send a reply to this message to  
! OptionRate@cmc.dsv.su.se. Remove the "! ", ">!" or  
! "> !" in front of your evaluation of each choice.  
!  
! Issue: Which of these places would you like as a  
! venue for future IETF meetings?  
!  
! Options:  
! A Danvers  
! very good  
! good  
! acceptable  
! bad  
! very bad  
! abstain  
!  
! B Chicago
```

State Your Views

State Your Views?"

If this message does not contain a form, which you can fill in, this may be because of restrictions in the e-mail software you are using. In that case, either use the plain text version which is also included in this e-mail, or view this message with a web browser, using a command like "Open in Browser" in your e-mail software.

Issue Which of these places would you like as a venue for future IETF meetings?

Options

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| <input type="button" value="Your evaluation"/> | Danvers |
| <input type="button" value="Your evaluation"/> | Chicago |
| <input type="button" value="Your evaluation"/> | San Jose |
| <input type="button" value="Your evaluation"/> | Los Angeles |
| <input type="button" value="Your evaluation"/> | Memphis |
| <input type="button" value="Your evaluation"/> | Dallas |
| <input type="button" value="Your evaluation"/> | Washington D.C. |
| <input type="button" value="Your evaluation"/> | Munich, Germany |

Your comment:

Here you can write a comment about the issue (not required, your comment, with your e-mail address, will be shown with the results of the query):

Who is asking?

This query was sent by
 Name: [Jacob Palme](#)
 E-mail: jpalme@dsv.su.se
 Phone: +46-8-16 16 67
 Fax: +46-8-783 08 29
 Postal address: Skeppargatan 73, SE-115 30 Stockholm, Sweden

Who can respond?

Anyone, through a form on the web.
 All who get this form by e-mail, it is sent to the mailing list: ietf@ietf.org.
 All who get this form by personal e-mail.

When can you respond?

Your response must be sent before 10 August 1998. You can change your mind, by sending in a new response before this date.

When will results be available?

Results will be available from 1 August 1998.

Where are results shown?

[Results will be shown on the web.](#)

Results will be sent by e-mail.

What results are shown?

Every individual response is shown with name of the respondee (Open Ballot)

Only totals, no individual responses will be shown (Secret Ballot)

More information:

[More information about this query.](#)

[More information about the query service.](#)

[Who are providing this service?](#)

[legal.](#)

Send your response:

Structuring an e-mailed discussion:

