

## Paired comparisons

*“Another possible source of guidance for teenagers is television, but television's message has always been that the need for truth, wisdom and world peace pales by comparison with the need for a toothpaste that offers whiter teeth and fresher breath.” Dave Barry*

### The big idea

Paired comparison is a technique that originates from some of the earliest psychometric tests and has been used by psychologists for many years (Fechner, 1860; Mueller, 1986). It is now a well-developed method for considering a range of different options and it simply involves pairing each item with each of the other items in the set. All you then have to do is make a choice between two items. The result of these paired choices is a set of items, rank-ordered in terms of which items you have chosen more often.

### Purpose

The purpose of paired comparison analysis is to allow you to determine the relative importance of a number of options. It works particularly well when these options are quite different in nature. It is designed to help you set priorities where there are conflicting demands on limited resources.

### The tool

Follow these steps to do a paired comparison analysis:

1. Print off the attached grid or mark up some flip chart paper
2. List all the options you want to compare and give each a letter
3. Block out those cells where you will be comparing an option with itself or duplicating an option

4. Now in the remaining cells compare the option in the row with an option in the column. Decide which of the two options is more important to you and mark down the letter of that option. Now give it a score from 0 to 3 (with 0 being no difference and 3 being a major difference between the two)
5. Add the total values for each option; you can then convert them into a percentage. This should give you your preferred option/s

## Take the next step

List the activities you want to do in the next 12 months. Map them on the comparison grid and determine your priorities. Is this the ranking you expected? What difference might this approach have made if you had used it at the beginning of last year's activities?

## Top tips

- Use paired comparison when your priorities are not clear
- It is particularly useful where you do not have clear data to base your decisions on or the options are very different in nature, like comparing 'apples and pears'
- Use the technique to set priorities where there is disagreement about the use of your resources

## References

Fechner, G., T. (1860). Elemente der Psychophysik. Leipzig: Breitkopf and Hartel.

Mueller, D., J. (1986). Measuring Social Attitudes: A handbook for researchers and practitioners. New York: Teachers College Press.

Options	A	B	C	D	E	F
A						
B						
C						
D						
E						
F						

Option	Total	Percentage	Rank
A			
B			
C			
D			
E			
F			
<b>Total</b>			