



Case Study: Electing Leaders at Sheppard Moscow

Introduction

The exercise described below was not run by nef and did not follow the Crowd Wise process. It is included here because it is a very interesting example of the use of consensus voting, which is at the heart of Crowd Wise.

In August 2008, Sheppard Moscow, one of the world's most respected organisational consultancies, used consensus voting to elect a new pair of leaders for the coming year at its AGM. The electorate were its executive committee, which consists of 33 consultants.

The procedure was run by two retiring members of the Sheppard Moscow board; they facilitated the nominations and conducted the vote. nef and the de Borda Institute (the UK's leading centre on consensus voting) provided nothing more than advice and the software for recording and analysing the vote. The entire exercise was held under the control of Sheppard Moscow.

Stage 1: Developing the Options

The election was somewhat unusual in that it was decided to elect the two co-leaders from a choice of pre-determined pairs. (A different procedure could have asked those voting to choose individuals, and the two most popular persons would then have formed the successful pairing of co-leaders.) Before the vote, pairs of candidates were nominated: individuals were eligible to stand in more than one pairing.

Only six persons stood for the leadership, but of these six, only one stood in just one pairing. Two individuals were in two pairings, one was in three, and two were in four: there were eight pairings altogether.

Of these eight pairings, five were gender balanced, three were both women.

Stage 2: The Vote

31 members were present at the AGM and voted in person, while two individuals were unable to attend and voted electronically. Of the 33 votes, all were valid. 31 were full ballots, with eight valid preferences; and two were partial ballots, with both submitting six valid preferences.

Stage 3: Analysing the Vote

Where people voted for all the options, a first preference scored eight points, a second preference scored seven points, and so on. Analysing the votes produced the following table.

| Option | Total points |
|----------|--------------|
| A | 139 |
| B | 188 |
| C | 60 |
| D | 158 |
| E | 144 |
| F | 134 |
| G | 165 |
| H | 170 |

The **B** pairing, which was the winner by a reasonably clear margin of 18 points, was thus deemed elected. It was also very clear that the **C** pairing enjoyed no consensus at all, even though the partners in **C** were also partners in **E** (5th) and **G** (3rd); it was the combination of **C** rather than its individual membership which lacked support.

The way to gauge the level of consensus enjoyed by the winner is to calculate the consensus coefficient. This is the actual score of an option, divided by the maximum possible score. The score for option **B** was 188; the maximum possible score was 8 points (for a 1st preference) multiplied by 33 (the number of voters) which equals 264. So the consensus coefficient, $188/264 = 71\%$ (nef expresses the coefficient as a percentage, whereas the de Borda Institute would put it as 0.71). This is a relatively high score and indicates that most of those concerned supported the outcome.

What Sheppard Moscow thought of it

John McCann, one of the retiring members who acted as a teller, commented that, "The consensus vote produced a result that had a very high validity and was a genuine consensus of ALL the stakeholders. Even those who had not chosen the elected pair as their first choice were more than satisfied that the result had produced the right pair to be the leaders and that everyone in the new organisation knows that their leaders have the support of the whole organisation. Using this process also increased the understanding of the consultants and other stakeholders of what a genuine consensus was in reality and this may well filter through to other decision processes within the organisation."