



# **WhitePaper**<sup>TM</sup>

## **CSA Design and Facilitation Using Keypad Technology IIA CSA Conference Presentation**

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## Introduction: Keypads and CSA

*As an increasing number of IA departments use keypad technology in their CSA workshop processes, it becomes more important to understand how to get the greatest benefit from its use. This paper discusses how to identify traps and dangers, make the process simple enough to be reliable for all auditors, and understand how design creates the structure for a reliable process.*

As of the summer of 1997, over 70 audit departments around the world use the OptionFinder<sup>®</sup> keypad system as part of their CSA process and another estimated 20 or so are using some other brand. Because so many auditing organizations have turned to keypad technology, it is time to seriously look at what types of electronic meeting designs are effective or ineffective for auditors, and ultimately determine what can be learned from other processes that have utilized keypads for years.

At the time of this writing, interviews with facilitators who use keypads in their CSA workshops were underway to learn from their real-world experiences; the results were reported and distributed at the 1997 IIA CSA Conference in Las Vegas. However, there is plenty to be learned from other processes (non CSA) and the remainder of this paper summarizes some key lessons from elsewhere.

### **You are Not the Expert**

**Lesson:** The collective wisdom of the people in your workshop is *far* superior to yours when it comes to knowing what goes on in their workplace...your job is to develop and work through a process to tap that wisdom.

**Sub-lesson:** Even if you *know* the answer, *never* let on. Instead, see to it that your process gets the answer from the participants. Put another way, great facilitators never have any good ideas, but the participants in their workshops have lots of them.

Probably the most difficult task for anyone who facilitates meetings is to make the switch from *content expert* to *process expert*. For years now, we have been using this variation on an old story to make the point; we call it Knowing What to Tap.





A US Navy battleship was out of commission because its steam pressure system had choked (probably due to water trapped somewhere in its many miles of piping). After months of ineffective fixes by the Navy's best and brightest, someone recommended it was time to call in Old Bob, the retired shipyard guru who had even served aboard this ship.

Bob was commissioned to solve the problem. He took some time wandering about the ship, spent the majority of drinking a lot of coffee while talking with the maintenance crew. Finally, he went to a particular location and had his new crew buddies engage functions while they felt and listened to a few pipes. Someone noticed funny noises and vibrations in one of the pipes. Bob opened up his tool bag, handed the crewman a small hammer, and suggested he start tapping. The blockage released and got the system functioning again.

Bob's \$3500 bill for drinking coffee, talking with the crew, and providing a hammer to tap on a pipe made the officers furious, so they demanded a breakdown. He complied:

Tapping on pipe	\$ 00
Tapping the crew's wisdom	\$ 500
Knowing where wisdom resides	\$ 3000

There is an essay at the end of this paper that makes this very important point somewhat differently.

### **Reliable Methods**

**Lesson:** Use the software supporting the keypad activities as the *backbone* of a reliable method for your workshops (i.e., a process that is consistent across time & people).

A few years ago, when the Total Quality movement was in peaking, quality practitioners began using keypads to conduct Quality Self Assessments to see how their organizations stacked up against the criteria embodied in the Baldrige Award for Quality. These folks approached everything from the point of view of a systems engineer and one of their key concepts involved creating a "reliable method." A reliable method is a standard of consistency established after an organization adopts methods or systems that help the organization flourish. These processes must be reliable (i.e., consistent) even if the people who are making it happen change over time.

This concept is particularly germane to CSA workshops since the turnover rate of the facilitators is often high and many different auditors may be conducting CSA workshops for the same department. How can we be sure the process is fundamentally the same even when the auditors/facilitators are different people?

Many different processes (quality among them) use “canned” keypad exercises as the backbone of workshops, thereby leading to more reliable methods. For example, a workshop may have four keypad exercises embedded in it *to create four specific outcomes*:

- A set of fairly humorous warm-up polls *to break the ice and get participants to relax*.
- A self-assessment that creates a profile of strengths and weaknesses *to make it easier for participants to talk about sensitive issues*.
- A prioritization of recommendations created by participants to convert a “laundry list” into a “prioritized list” *to provide focus in the workshop as well as focus for subsequent implementation*.
- An overall evaluation of the information generated by the workshop to close the meeting and *validate the outcomes*.

Keypad exercises such as these, and the software that organizes and supports them, helps to create a reliable method because:

- The outcomes desired from each exercise are clearly defined.
- It is relatively easy to rehearse in advance of the workshop.
- The polling questions and exercise sequence “programmed” into the exercise provide on-screen prompts for the facilitator. As a result, forgetting to do something is much less likely.
- The exercise and the graphing of data make it easier to keep the audience focused.
- The immediate feedback of participant views is inherently engaging and interesting, making it easier for even a dull facilitator to keep the workshop energized.

## **KISS**

**Lesson:** Workshop participants *and* facilitators are more easily confused and distracted than you might think. Before you add another keypad (or other technology) component to your process, ask:

*Am I doing this to show off the technology (and my mastery of it) or because it will clearly strengthen the process and the outcomes it is intended to deliver?*

Incidentally, this principle applies equally to the use of almost any computer-based technology. Are your PowerPoint slides really more effective because of zippy clip-art, fancy transitions, complex builds and animation, or are you just showing off?

Everyone knows the guiding value of the Keep-It-Simple-Stupid mantra, but we all seem to fall into the complexity trap at one time or another. This seems particularly true when

people get a new gadget and feel compelled to discover all of its features and functions. Your new keypad system arrives and you find out it can do a *lot* more than you imagined (which it can). Next you start thinking about how you can modify your CSA process to exploit all these gizmos. You have just fallen into the trap of having a solution in search of a problem.

We see three things regularly happen when you lose sight of your primary purpose (e.g., the outcomes of the meeting or activity) and let the technology dominate:

- More gizmos means more complexity, thereby reducing the probability of a reliable method and increasing the probability of a method only a few “high priests” can successfully pull off.
- Your participants may be impressed, but, more likely, confused and distracted by events and exercises that seem to them unrelated to the main objectives of the workshop.
- You jump too quickly to a keypad exercise when some other “manual” method may be more effective for creating a particular outcome.

## ***Stay Focused on Desired Outcomes***

<p><b>Lesson:</b> The outcome of every workshop activity must be <i>necessary</i> to deliver the overall outcome desired for the workshop, and together the individual activities must be <i>sufficient</i> to deliver the overall outcome. If this test fails, the best facilitator in the world will probably fail or, at the very least, be exhausted.</p>
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When a workshop is well designed (exercises and timing carefully crafted to deliver clear outcomes) the facilitator’s job is fairly easy...the process itself carries the workshop; the facilitator makes the transitions from activity to activity and smoothes out any rough spots. However, when a workshop is poorly designed, the facilitator’s job becomes extremely difficult. The facilitator must now use force of personality to increase the energy of a lifeless audience, and rely on improvisational skills to deliver outcomes the process itself seems to take in other directions.

A polling exercise assesses company performance on a series of key factors, then displays the results sorted from *best to worst* so the initial focus is on what factors the company does best. Contrast this with the same exercise, but where the sort is *worst to best* so initial focus is on what factors the company does worst.

This seemingly simple change in design will cause very different things to happen in subsequent discussions about company performance, and will certainly alter the facilitation technique. These nuances in design have dramatic impacts on group dynamics (focusing on what we do well rather than what needs work) and there is very little even a great facilitator can do to “reverse the flow” if it is headed in a wrong direction.

If your facilitators are exhausted following their workshops, or if the outcomes seem muddled, it is likely your design needs work.

The process design should stay focused on delivering the outcomes you are after. If an outcome you are after early in a meeting is to make it easier for participants to talk about sensitive issues, keep your design eye on *that* ball, and that ball only when designing the activity.

Don't fall into the trap of the hammer in your hand making everything look like a nail. Here is the question you need to ask yourself: Are you...

- Starting with the outcome you need, then creating an exercise to deliver it (perhaps looking into your "inventory" of template exercises you know and are skilled at to find a near fit)?
- Starting with what you know and are skilled at and somehow reaching the conclusion the outcome it will deliver is just what the workshop needs?

Suppose you used a very successful process last week and because of its success in achieving last week's outcomes, you want to bring it into a different meeting this week. Thus, you ask yourself "How can I use this exercise to achieve something in my new workshop?" Reapplying the same design to a set of different outcomes is the most common design error among our users. Why? Because you already have a comfortable and effective process in mind which will lead you to believe you need the outcome it delivers whether you really need it or not.

### ***Most Should Care Less about the Polling Data***

**Lesson:** Polling data is just so much data. It is the participants' interpretation of their own opinions that creates the rich information that workshops are designed to deliver. Stay cautiously aware, however, of the bias inherent in most organizations to focus on the numbers and discount the "soft stuff."

Keypad system users are usually surprised that the actual quantitative results (the results of the polls) is not where the real action is. The real value of keypad exercises lies not in the results of the polls, but in the discussion the results generate. The most effective polling activities use *quantitative* methods (e.g., graphs, averages, data) to produce the very rich *qualitative* information generated in the discussions.

Creating a clear outcome for each activity must once more be considered essential. Perhaps you simply want to compile the data into a diagnostic report summarizing ratings across several workshops. Remember, however, the reason that likely compelled you to choose a workshop model was to get something more. If quantitative information is what you are interested in generating, an e-mail survey would be a much cheaper and more acceptable (familiar) way to generate quantitative information.

Workshop approaches to information collection generally follow from *focus group* methods that market research practitioners have used for decades. They believe the dynamics generated when a *group* discusses something together yields substantially different and richer information than the same discussions held individually (as in one-on-one interviews). When market researchers add keypad activities to their focus groups, they do so to create even richer information that comes from the ensuing discussions. Their model is straightforward: first you *ask them what they believe*, you *show them what they believe*, you *ask them why they believe it* and finally, you *ask them what could or should be done about it*.

The *real* result you desire is the rich discussion; the polling and graphs simply make it easier to have richer discussions. In other words, the quantitative results are merely a means to the end of the rich qualitative information you seek. We find that most CSA practitioners understand this and do an excellent job of capturing the information in the discussions. However, graphs and data often have more credibility and velocity in the broader organization and the “softer” qualitative information coming from the workshops is sometimes overshadowed, or relegated to an appendix.



Incidentally, market researchers usually follow up the qualitative finding with quantitative surveys. The focus groups tell an organization which issues are important, or where to look for trouble spots. The surveys determine the extent to which the qualitative information holds up in the broader population; notice the between CSA workshops suggesting which issues or areas to evaluate and how traditional audit methods provide further, validating, or corrective information.

## ***Rehearse, Rehearse, Rehearse***

**Lesson:** *Novice* facilitators have to rehearse and usually do. *Experienced* facilitators know what they are doing and quit rehearsing. *Great* facilitators always rehearse.

Rehearsal goes without saying for most conscientious facilitators, but polling exercises embedded in the workshops create some special requirements. There are two primary reasons why this is true:

- You often have no idea how the polling results will turn out, and...
- Facilitation is a right-brain activity whereas computers, data & graphs are left-brain activities (it is more difficult for your brain to make the switch than you think.)

Unfortunately these two facts feed on each other, conspiring to confuse you...even to make you appear incompetent. Here are three rehearsal hints to avoid such appearances:

1. Consider all the ways the polling data can turn out and be prepared to deal with all possibilities. For example, suppose a polling exercise assesses company performance on a series of key factors, then displays the results as a “profile” of *average* ratings across the factors. The results could show:
  - All factors have more or less the same *high average ratings*. Does this leave me with nothing to talk about? Are they kidding themselves? Are they being honest? Do I have other information that leads me to believe this can or cannot be right? What if there is a minority giving a low rating to certain factors? If so, do they know something the others do not, and how do I get them to talk about it?
  - All factors have more or less the same *low average ratings*. Does this leave me with too much to talk about in the time allocated? Is there an overriding factor causing them to rate everything low (e.g., low morale due to rumors about layoffs)?
  - All factors have more or less the same *middle average ratings*. Are the averages indicative of individual responses or are they just the average of half giving low and half giving high ratings, and what do I have to do to find out which is the case? If the participants are polarized in their ratings, what should my approach be?
  - They *differentiated in their ratings*. The factors received high, middle, or low average ratings. Do I begin by discussing the high factors (strengths) or the low factors (weaknesses)? How do I approach the factors in the middle?

You should consider *all* of these possibilities in advance and be prepared to deal with each of them. No matter how smart or quick on your feet you are, it is extremely difficult to figure out what to do when *you* get surprised (especially when you have an audience watching). As you consider what you will do in each of the cases, keep the activity *outcome* you desire in mind; it will make your task much easier.

2. Become very familiar with the sequence of workshop activities by running through your design using simulated responses (as though your audience is there responding to the polls). In particular...
  - Pay attention to the sequence of events (when certain types of graphs appear).
  - Draw up an outline showing various activities; include wording you might use to introduce the activity or make a transition.
  - Write specific “scripts” for any instructions you will be giving to the participants, especially if it involves polling. If you give muddled instructions, your participants will quickly ask questions like, “Am I supposed to be rating my department, my division, or the whole company?”

- Simulate data that reflects how they might actually respond, until you can instantly understand the graphs. Decide how you will facilitate the discussion around the results.
3. Watch your timing because everything depends on what your participants do. Be very conscious that the default paradigm in most meetings is “Watch the presentation, please hold your questions to the end.” The minute you make a meeting truly participative, things take much longer.
- Some participants will want to discuss all kinds of ideas at length. It takes time to involve others in the discussion or get the discussion back on track.
  - Think about the *time* and the facts of the situation. You may have 10 participants, 10 discussions points, and want everyone to talk about each one. If you allow them 30 seconds each (which isn't much), it will take 3000 seconds or 50 minutes to complete the meeting...is it worth it?
  - If you create a “profile” by polling on 40 issues, it will require 20-30 seconds just to run the polls (say 15 minutes). If you want to hold discussions on all 40, it will take at least 2 minutes each even if there is very little to say (another 80 minutes) and much more if you get into anything sensitive, controversial or surprising.
  - You can mitigate these enemies of time by using the results of the polls to focus discussion on the factors your participants say need talking about the most (e.g., dimensions like most important or performing the worst on).

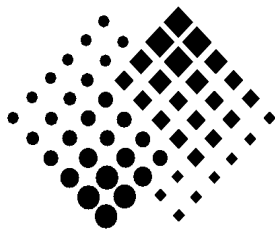
## Summary

Keypad exercises initially take more effort, but the evidence shows the return on investment is worth it.

## ***About the Author***

**Kimbal L. Wheatley** is founder and Chairman of Option Technologies. He is directly responsible for the conceptual development of OTI's keypad EMS -- OptionFinder. Mr. Wheatley has been a scientist, college professor, academic administrator, hospital administrator, consultant, marketer and entrepreneur. His ability to switch from concentrated detailed analysis to highly creative brainstorming has permitted him to work effectively with many different kinds of people in a variety of settings.

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**Risk Self-Assessment:** Increasing speed, quality, and focus in the Audit Planning Process. *Review and clarify the business strategy, identify and prioritize the risks to the company, benefits of the Self-Assessment approach.*

**CSA Design and Facilitation Using Keypad Technology:** Presented at IIA CSA Conference, 1997. *Reliable methods, KISS mantra, staying focused on desired outcomes, participants interpretation of polling data, rehearsal for facilitators.*

**The Genius Comes from Asking the Right Question:** Presented at IIA CSA Conference, 1998. *Keypads change the group dynamic, an outcome oriented way to design workshops, the Art of Asking the Right Question, Using Scales, what to do with the responses to those questions.*

**Advantages of Electronic Participation in Workshops and Other Meetings:** Presented at IIA CSA Conference, 1999. *What is the CSA/RSA movement trying to accomplish, What do management, participants think of CSA/RSA, what do CSA professionals like about electronic participation, how is electronic participation different from other forms of participation.*

**Complying with Medicare Guidelines: Lessons from the Auditors:** Lessons from the audit community, the self-assessment workshop, introduction of real-time, anonymous polling, CSA methods and healthcare compliance, changing the culture begins in the workshops and continues in a cycle of improvement and risk reduction, assessment data serves as evidence of due care, benefits felt throughout the organization.

**Good Things Come in Small Packages: Facilitated Meetings Using the OptionFinder System.** *Benefits of keypads in meetings, designing the OptionFinder System into a meeting process, facilitating with the OptionFinder System.* Original publication reference: Flexner, William A. & Wheatley, Kimbal L. (1997). When You Really Must Have Them; Face-to-Face Meetings Using Keypad Electronic Meeting Systems. In David Coleman (Ed.) , Groupware (pp.193-205). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

**Enhancing Your Presentations with the OptionFinder Audience Polling System.** *Understanding the technology, designing effective questions, timing of questions, characteristics of good questions, formatting questions, suggestions for preparing, asking, and discussing questions.*