

## INTRODUCTION

Conference members communicate using remote terminals through a central computer. The remote terminals are teletype-like machines by which the conference member may send information to the computer by typing it when asked for, and receive information by having the computer type it.

One computer may have several conference systems which are generally independent. One system may have several conferences running concurrently. To use a system in any way, a person must be added to it by the owner. He may then join one or more conferences by being added to them; and/or he may use those system facilities which do not require membership in a conference.

A system has:

- (A) Discussion: "messages" are sent or received to or from one or more persons in the system. Conference membership is not required, and as the messages are not stored once they are received, this facility should not be used for information pertinent to a conference topic. Messages can be sent to anyone in the system at anytime. They are always confidential and are automatically destroyed upon reception.

Alternately, "statements" are sent or received by members of the same conference, and are stored for the duration of the conference. Statements are always public. They are specific to a particular conference and may be retrieved at some future date.

- (B) Delphi: For the main part of the system, the delphi conference technique is used.

For delphi conferencing there are three types of conference members:

- (A) The chairman: initiates conference by adding it to a system. Only he can add participants or designers (below).
- (B) Designers: may examine a conference but may not contribute to it except through the discussion.
- (C) Participants: are those whose opinion is solicited by the conference.

A person may have more than one of the above capacities in any conference.

## THE GENERALIZED CONFERENCING SYSTEM

Memo's Generalized Conferencing System (GCS) is a multifaceted computer aided polling tool. There are three levels of system users:

1. **Designers** these people are the conference originators and as such take care of the data collected, analyze it and in general run the conference.
2. **Monitors** this group of people are the technical and support personnel that manage the system and maintain its many parts.
3. **Participants** these are the real users of the system. It is their opinions, projections and votes that are recorded and analyzed by the conference designers. (Designers may also participate in the conference but as participants, they have none of the privileges of designers.)

The Generalized Conferencing System as seen by participants represents a combination of structured sequential requests for judgments coupled with the ability to command the system to

perform some other function before it restates the request for a judgment. This diversion could be to review comments of other users or statistics gathered from other rounds, form a dialogue, or enter a comment, also has control over whether the system offers instructions, and whether the format of scales is long or short. The user can repeat the automatic feedback at the beginning of subsequent iterations of a round, or add comments about events - at any point in the program.

From the designer's point of view the system can be configured in 3 ways:

1. As a one shot poll,
2. As a Delphi (rounds of polls)
3. As a cross impact Delhpi.

Each of these conference types has available all scales that are currently in the system - plus any that the designers wish to create (New scales must be given to the monitors to be added to the system). Scales have both a long and short format. In the long format, detailed explanation of the scales are presented. The short format merely presents the scales. (The participant changes to long or short as he wishes)

Structurally, the system is designed to follow a three point cycle:

- 1 Present an event.

2. Present the scales

3. Take the response.

Each of these is under designer control. Events may be presented either in order or they may be presented randomly. Scales for any event can be presented in a specific order or presented randomly. The user response can be anything allowed by the designer. Complex issues can be attached from a number of points of view through careful design of scale presentation order and insertion of special mini rounds where necessary.

The dynamic aspects of conferencing are under control of the designer team. Analysis of the rounds' results may lead to re-writing of event statements, dropping of events, or breaking up events into multiple events. The designer can base his decision on comments gathered during the round or initiate a mini round just to decide the issue.

From a designer point-of-view there are no requirements that the scales used for one event need bear any relation to any other event.

## The "Party Line" Dialogue and "Discussion" Dialogue

The discussion system may be used to discuss topics over days or weeks.

The members of the discussion may get on the terminal whenever they wish to observe what comments have been added and to enter additional comments.

The Party Line function, on the other hand requires the group to coincide in time, i.e. be on the system at the same time.

It is in this property that the 'discussion' system differs from 'party line'.

The discussion file stays in the computer until the moderator (the one who started the particular discussion) or design team decides to delete it.

When every one has signed off the 'party line', the file of messages that has been stored in the computer disappears and only the individual terminal print outs remain as records.

The moderator(s) of the discussion also have the ability to shape a list of comments into a more compact set by either editing or deleting items. With code names or pseudonyms it may also be used for a Delphi type discussion. The discussion system is, in essence, a non-voting version of the Delphi conference system.

The seemingly straightforward concept of automating the conference call on a modern time shared computer system offers a unique ability to allow effective communication within larger groups that would not be possible in a telephone conference call. While the current version is arbitrarily set at a limit of fifty individuals per conference, it is feasible to include as many people as you want in such a conversation.

## PARTICIPANT WORKSPACE

This workspace contains all the programs that allow user information to be gathered and stored. It presents the events and scales as determined by the design team, but allows the participant control over the format, and information from past rounds.

The user can at any time call the dialogue program and talk real-time (or asynchronously) with other participants or the monitor team.

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## DESIGN WORKSPACE

In this workspace the designer can interact with a program that will create a conference to his specification. It is also in this workspace that conference statistics are gathered and analyzed, and the next round prepared. The access matrix in this workspace allows the designer to read the results from user's files (but not modify them) and to prepare summary results that are placed in the conference file.

Between rounds, the logic of the following round can be modified and the events re-written as the designers interpret user sentiment. Special "Quickie votes" can be taken on more ambiguous questions or additional rounds inserted to gether more information.

## TERMS

### One Shot Conference

Any number of events may be presented with any number of scales. Participant may not see others' results. (Used as a computerized Questionnaire. No information exchange normally takes place between users.)

### Delphi Conference

This term is used when adding the dimension of rounds. In this mode real conferencing begins to take place. Structured information exchange takes place in the form of feedback at the start of each round. The user can compare comments and statistics with previous rounds or enter into a less structured exchange of information by using the dialogue program. ~~Comments~~  
~~are got.~~

### Cross Impact Delphi Conference

This term refers to the specific formalization of cross impact. Events are stated and probabilities solicited from the participants; calculations are performed and the cross impact matrix used as the major analysis tool.



## Events

This term refers to the text first presented to the user. It may be a question, statement or instruction. Other alias terms: Item, Question, Statement.

## Scales

These are displays of choices. Text is displayed and the user may chose one by indicating a number, or if the scale is a question the response may be <sup>e</sup>text.