



“Thumbs Up or Down” Learning Object

Link to online version: <https://fl-rda.org/thumbs-up-or-down-learning-object/>

Title	Thumbs Up or Down
1-sentence summary	A simple process that uses one's hand to indicate agreement, disagreement, or uncertainty related to a topic
Time to implement	A few seconds to gather everyone's input, plus additional time for processing
Purpose of tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rapidly assess team members' feelings related to an aspect of a project• Provide a low-confrontational way for all members to express their opinions and provide opportunity for follow-up discussion
The steps	<p>This process can be used at any moment during a team meeting, whether the meeting is being held in-person or virtually. Any member can call for a “thumbs up/down” from other members during the meeting, which pauses the activity and gathers a quick temperature read of the group before moving on. It is especially helpful when a decision needs to be made, such as whether to proceed with a new topic or continue discussing a topic at hand.</p> <p>Find the simple instructions for enacting this process below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. A facilitator or member of the group calls for a “thumbs up/down” related to a topic under discussion. For example, this person may say <i>“Can I get a thumbs up or down related to how everyone's feeling about the objectives we just discussed?”</i> or <i>“I'm sensing some uncertainty related to this discussion of objectives, can everyone please give me a thumbs up or down related to how they're feeling?”</i>2. Next, every member of the group shows a thumbs up or down to indicate “yes” or “no,” respectively. (A “thumbs middle” is also permitted and can be used to convey uncertainty.)3. If all thumbs are up, then the meeting should proceed having confirmed everyone's agreement on the issue at hand, ending this process after just a few seconds.4. If not all thumbs are up, then the meeting should pause and additional engagement of members with respect to their feelings should be explored. For those who responded with a thumb down or thumb middle, they should be invited one by

	<p>one to express their concerns or uncertainty. For those who responded with a thumbs up, they may also be invited to express their feelings on the topic.</p> <p>5. By the end of the discussion, it is the goal of this process to get all members on board with the next step so the team can proceed together. This discussion step can take several minutes to implement to ensure all team members with concerns can express them. An additional poll of thumbs up/down can be taken at the end of the discussion to confirm agreement. The group can decide how much agreement is needed to proceed (e.g., all thumbs up, all thumbs middle or higher, etc.).</p>
The outcome	Concerns or uncertainties among members are addressed and the team moves forward together.
Example use case	<p>Uncertainty in Virtual Meetings</p> <p>It is a common experience in virtual meetings as topics are discussed that tentative head nodding by one or more participants is interpreted as a queue to move forward with the agenda. However, the head nodding of a few individuals may not be indicative of agreement by all members. This process of calling for a thumbs up or down, where all members are asked to indicate their level of agreement with their hand positioned visibly in their video screen, provides an opportunity for every member to consider their feelings related to the topic at hand and opens the door for additional discussion. It is especially useful on teams with quiet members who may not feel empowered to speak up with a verbal interjection but feel comfortable expressing their uncertainty with a thumb down or in the middle.</p>
Q&A:	
- When should this be applied?	This process can be used early and often within a team, moving through agenda items, when decisions need to be made, or when uncertainty among members appears.
- When <i>not</i> to use this?	<p>In general, this process should not be used as a “majority rules” voting tool. Having three members at thumbs up and two at thumbs down indicates a need for pause in the flow of the conversation, and generally should not be cause for moving on because a majority of members are on board. It is typically the primary goal of the process to get <i>everyone</i> to a thumbs up (or at least to thumbs middle, if the team agrees to this standard) by the end of the discussion.</p> <p>Additionally, once a thumbs up/down is obtained from each member, this process needs to be continued to the end. Each member who did not indicate a thumbs up should be called on to share their questions or concerns. If the process is stopped at the thumbs</p>

	<p>up/down stage, it loses its full impact of resolving issues before moving on, leaving some members behind.</p>
<p>- What should I do next?</p>	<p>As noted above, this process can be used as frequently as is useful for the team to facilitate discussion and consensus, and is unlikely to be effective in enhancing communication among members if it is used just once.</p> <p>While this process provides a quick and timely temperature check of the team, it may also be helpful to have a means for members to express, perhaps anonymously, feedback on other aspects of the collaboration that they may feel shy to voice in a meeting or that may be difficult to fit into scheduled team conversations. A survey tool, such as a brief Team Temperature Read, can be used to collect anonymous feedback on team progress. See the last question below for ideas about the aspects of a team to gather feedback on and track over time.</p>
<p>- What evidence or sources is this based on?</p>	<p>This thumbs up/down tool was shared with us by Dr. Bethany Laursen, a team science scholar and consultant. It is inspired by Samuel Kaner's Gradients of Agreement tool and practices from experiential education.</p>
<p>- What if I want to learn more? What are other complementary tools?</p>	<p>There are many other ways to track team status by gathering feedback from members related to various dimensions of the team. Dimensions may be how well members think the team is handling conflict, managing project tasks, and reaching objectives and overall vision. For these more detailed assessments, a survey or other tool can be helpful, especially if the goal is to collect this feedback anonymously so that members can feel comfortable being honest.</p> <p>Find below some resources for considering what team dimensions to evaluate as well as how to use a Trello board to monitor team health.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team Temperature Read • Team Health Monitor Template • Team Process Scale: Mathieu, J. E., Luciano, M. M., D'Innocenzo, L., Klock, E. A., & LePine, J. A. (2020). The development and construct validity of a team processes survey measure. <i>Organizational Research Methods</i>, 23(3), 399-431. • Psychological Safety Scale: Edmonson, A. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. <i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i>, 44(2), 350-383.