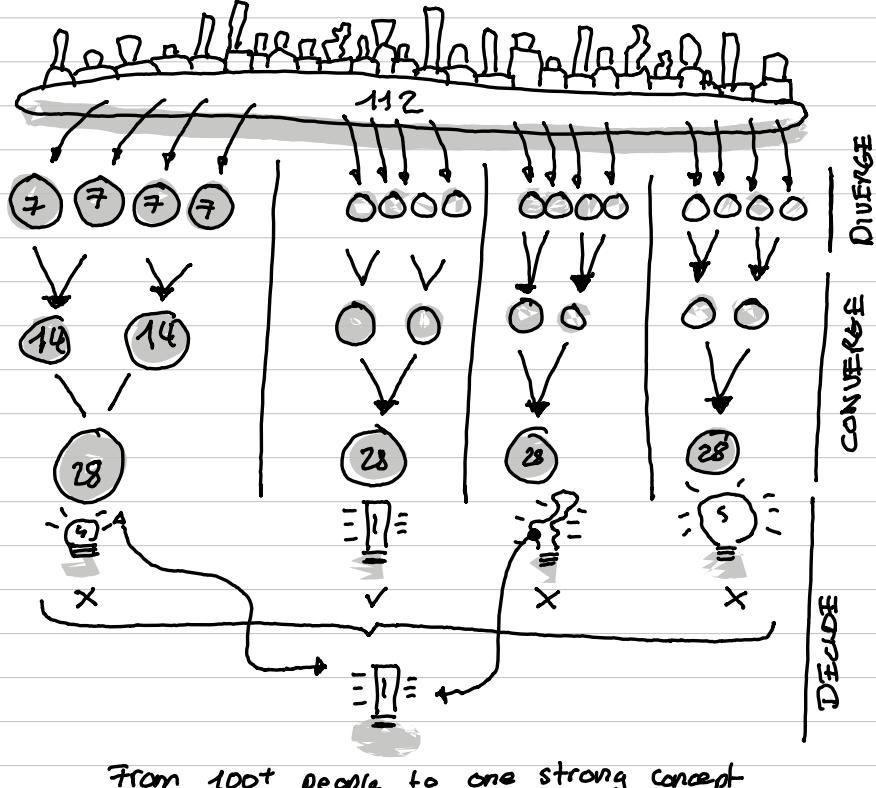


How can you align people in mass participation workshops?

In short: start by aligning small groups of 5-7 people. Once they are aligned within each group, merge two groups together, and again.



From 100+ people to one strong concept

The base idea: divide, align, merge.

When you have a shitload of people it's nearly impossible to have a conversation with 100+ people at a time.

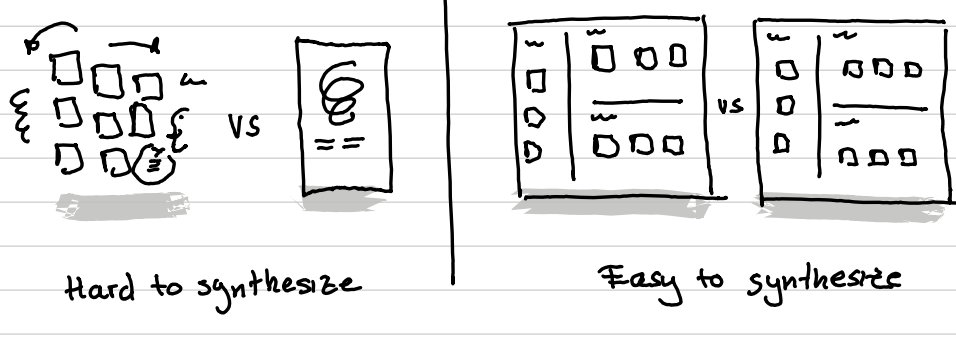
So the process I use looks like this:

Divide and align

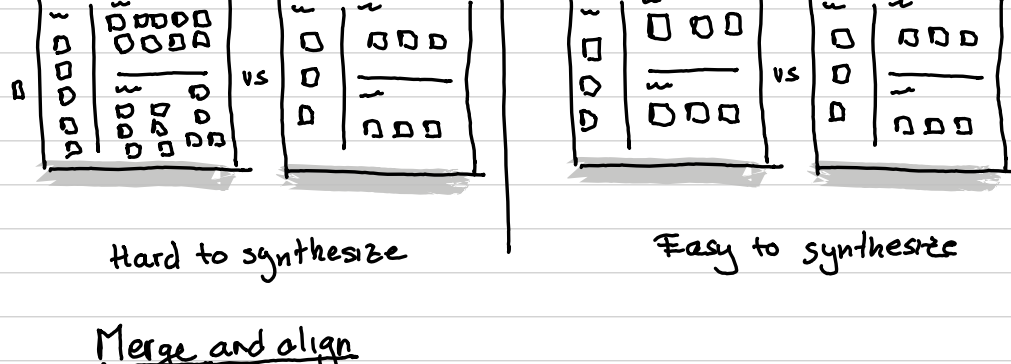
I make smaller groups of 5-7 people. These people get plenty of time to come with a good first draft.

One thing that is key at this stage is to do two things so that the rest of the process is possible.

First we need a sort of framework, container or canvas that structures the answer of the group. Think a tool like the Business Model Canvas or a custom made canvas. This makes it then easier to compare and debate later as people are comparing bananas to bananas and not bananas with poems.



Second we need a clear rule on the maximum of content that people can produce in their group. So that later when two groups meet it's easier to combine things together. Also, a maximum number of elements focuses the group and forces them to make decisions.

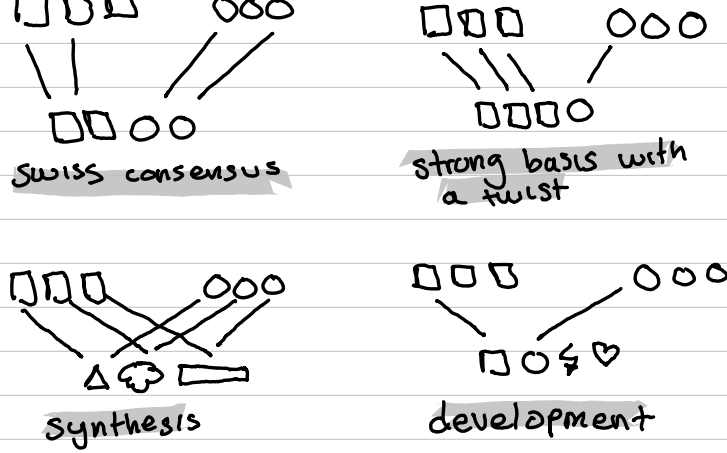


Merge and align

When people agree in their group, we then make them merge their work with another group.

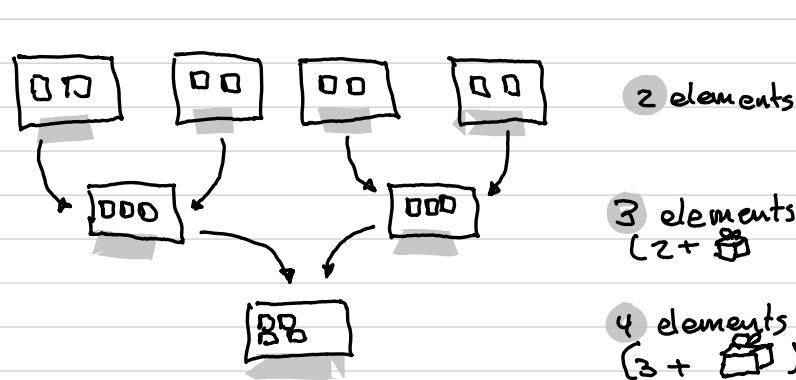
Here things that can help is to spot, while people are working, groups that have similar ideas so that they fight over the details not about the big ideas. Also that helps people to realize that they have common wishes even if they didn't speak together.

Another thing that helps a lot is to again give a maximum of elements. If in the little group the rule was "you need to get to 3 elements", the rule when combining could be: "you need to get to 4 elements". Because there is one additional element the synthesis feels less hard, and it's sure that even if the work of one group is taken as the basis, still the second group can save one element.



Different ways to combine

Once there is a clear alignment, here a bit of time pressure helps, we can repeat this step if needed to combine the work even further.

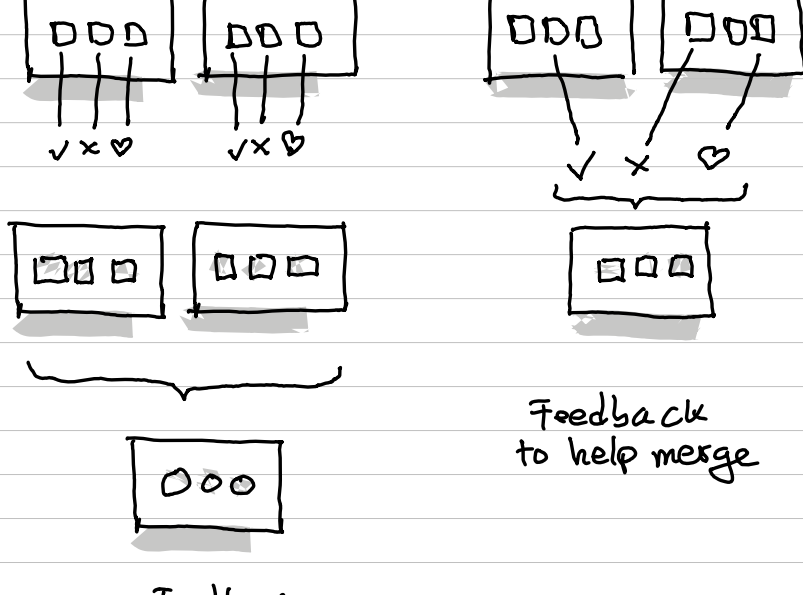


Merging with a gift each time

Deciding and feedback

Decision makers can boost such a process with two tools: decisions and feedback.

Between the steps decision makers can give feedback to help people see a blind spot, show where they see potential, etc. That either helps the group to improve the work before merging it with another, or it can help two groups have a direction in which to do the combination.



Another way decision makers can accelerate the process is by sharing decisions: which groups should combine their efforts and which of the final concepts gets selected and with which changes inspired by the other concepts.