

Collective Problem-Solving, Part 1: Agenda Setting

CS-234: Technologies of societal self-organization, Fall 2019

NOTE: If you have **any questions regarding this assignment**, please **do not hesitate to contact us** by starting a [discussion on Moodle](#) so that (1) we can help you and (2) your classmates who might potentially have the same questions benefit from our answers. You **can also always contact the CS-234 staff** at: *cs234@groupes.epfl.ch*

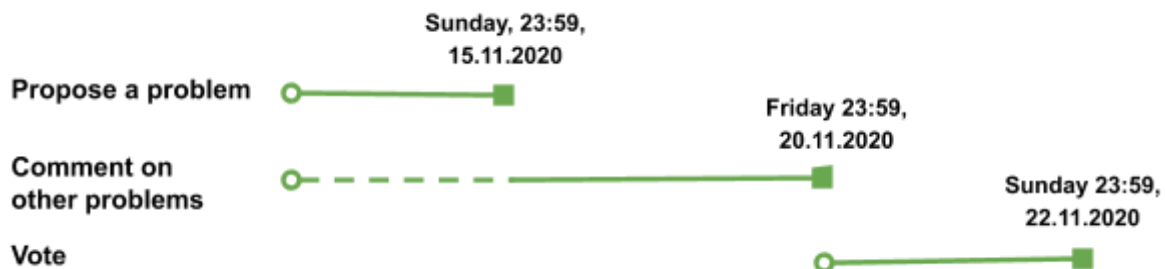
Introduction

Deliberation is a process of thoughtful weighing and careful consideration of possible options. This can be related to choosing the best candidate in an election or picking a possible solution to a problem. In the following three weeks, you will practice collective deliberation in agenda-setting (Part 1), gathering information for solution proposals (Part 2), and cross-validation and solution consolidation (Part 3) over issues or open problems related to EPFL that you have identified during your studies.

- Part 1 (Agenda setting): Identifying the existing problems at EPFL that are potentially worth discussing, in particular in this pandemic period we are all living in; followed by narrowing them down to focus on the single most important one. This identification will consist of three stages: problem proposal, discussion, voting. The outcome of this part is a single identified problem that will be collectively studied and tackled in the next parts. **Note that this document is solely about Part 1. The guidelines for the next parts will be available in the following weeks.**
- Part 2 (Information Gathering / Initial Recommendation Proposals): Gathering information (*e.g.* interviews, expert counseling, case studies, literature research) to come up with a proposal for solving the previously-identified problem. Note that this part must be conducted in complete compliance with the rules of EPFL and of the canton Vaud about the pandemic. In particular, remote work must always be prioritized.
- Part 3 (Recommendation Cross-Validation / Voting on the Final Proposals): Comparing the recommendations proposed by the student groups, deliberating over their advantages and shortcomings, consolidating recommendations and, finally, doing an approval voting over all the proposals.

To facilitate efficient collaboration with your peers, you will use a decision-making software, called Loomio, to which you have already registered.

Timeline of Part 1



Problem Proposal

To make deliberation relevant, we ask each student to suggest **one issue** currently present at EPFL that you have identified and consider crucial to be addressed. This issue might concern education, university infrastructure, sustainability policies, student life, bureaucracy, diversity, foreigners vs. Swiss citizens, this course, courses in general or anything else directly related to EPFL. The issues **do not** have to be unique among all the students (different students might be concerned about the same problem) but you need to come up with your own unique supporting argumentation.

Technically, each issue must be submitted as a new thread in the “EPFL CS-234: Technologies of Societal Self-Organization” organization on Loomio. Give your issue a concise but informative title, *e.g.*, *Rise and Fall of the BC cafeteria: Monopolization of EPFL’s Food Supply*. Then, provide one paragraph describing the issue you are bringing up in more detail **and** two concise paragraphs of arguments why this issue is of importance. For example, you could briefly explain that all the cafeterias at EPFL have the same owners and that it affects food quality. The arguments could mention the importance of competition for maintaining quality and of fine food for student’s productivity. Other students will use your description and arguments as a starting point of discussion in the next stage.

We emphasize that each student needs to suggest **exactly one problem**, *i.e.*, create one thread within the course organization. Recall that the issues **do not** have to be unique. The deadline for posting your problem on Loomio is **Sunday, November 15 @ 23:59**.

In the following stages of this assignment, you are going to deliberate on the suggested issues to later collectively decide on which one is the most crucial.

Discussion

This is the stage of active deliberation. As a true patriot of your future alma mater, you are going to ponder the problems that have been raised by your fellow classmates and argue either in favor of or against their relevance/importance **in the context of EPFL**.

Specifically, you have **two tasks** during this stage. First, you must comment on **at least three** issues that are raised by other students (*e.g.*, the issues that you can relate to the most) with elaborate arguments that either add to the importance of the issues or question it. We will assign one other student to each of you, whose issue you must comment on. You can freely choose the other 2+ issues. Second, you must engage in discussions with students commenting on your issue, *i.e.*, provide counter-arguments to or agree with the questioning points.

As you go through the proposed problems, you might realize that there is another proposal that is similar to yours. For instance, you might have brought up the issue of not having enough bike racks on campus, and another student might have pointed out that Point Velo is understaffed and their opening hours are not convenient. In this case, you can start a discussion with the other student and after deliberating over your distinct-but-related proposals, you can decide to merge your proposals under “EPFL is not bike-friendly enough”. Note that merging proposals **IS NOT MANDATORY**; you can still engage in a discussion with the other student but keep your proposals separate. However, if you choose to merge your proposals, leave a comment under the thread “Request for Merge” in Loomio. In your comment, put (1) the names of the authors of the proposals that are merged and (2) the new title for the merged proposal (*e.g.*, EPFL is not bike-friendly enough).

The goal of this stage is **NOT** to defend your issue or trash the issues brought up by other students but to collectively deliberate which issues are the most crucial.

The discussion starts immediately after the assignment is released, *i.e.*, you do not need to wait until the problem-proposal deadline to start commenting, and ends on **Friday, November 20 @ 23:59** when voting silence begins.

Voting

Now that you have deliberated over the problems that are plaguing EPFL, the time has come for you to choose the one and only! In this stage, you are going to collectively decide on a single problem that you believe to be more important or to require more immediate action compared to the others. To make this decision, you are going to vote on the proposals using — yes, you’ve guessed it — your new best friend Loomio.

Once the discussion stage is over, we are going to collect all the proposed problems (some of which might be merged if requested by their authors) and create a poll in Loomio with these proposals being the candidates. Specifically, we will create a multiple-choice poll with each proposal being an option, and you will be able to vote for as many proposals as you like. In other words, picking an option means voting in favor of the corresponding proposal and skipping an option means voting against it.

The deadline to cast your votes is **Sunday, November 22 @ 23:59**. The outcome of the voting is a single problem that everyone in the class is going to work on in the following two weeks.