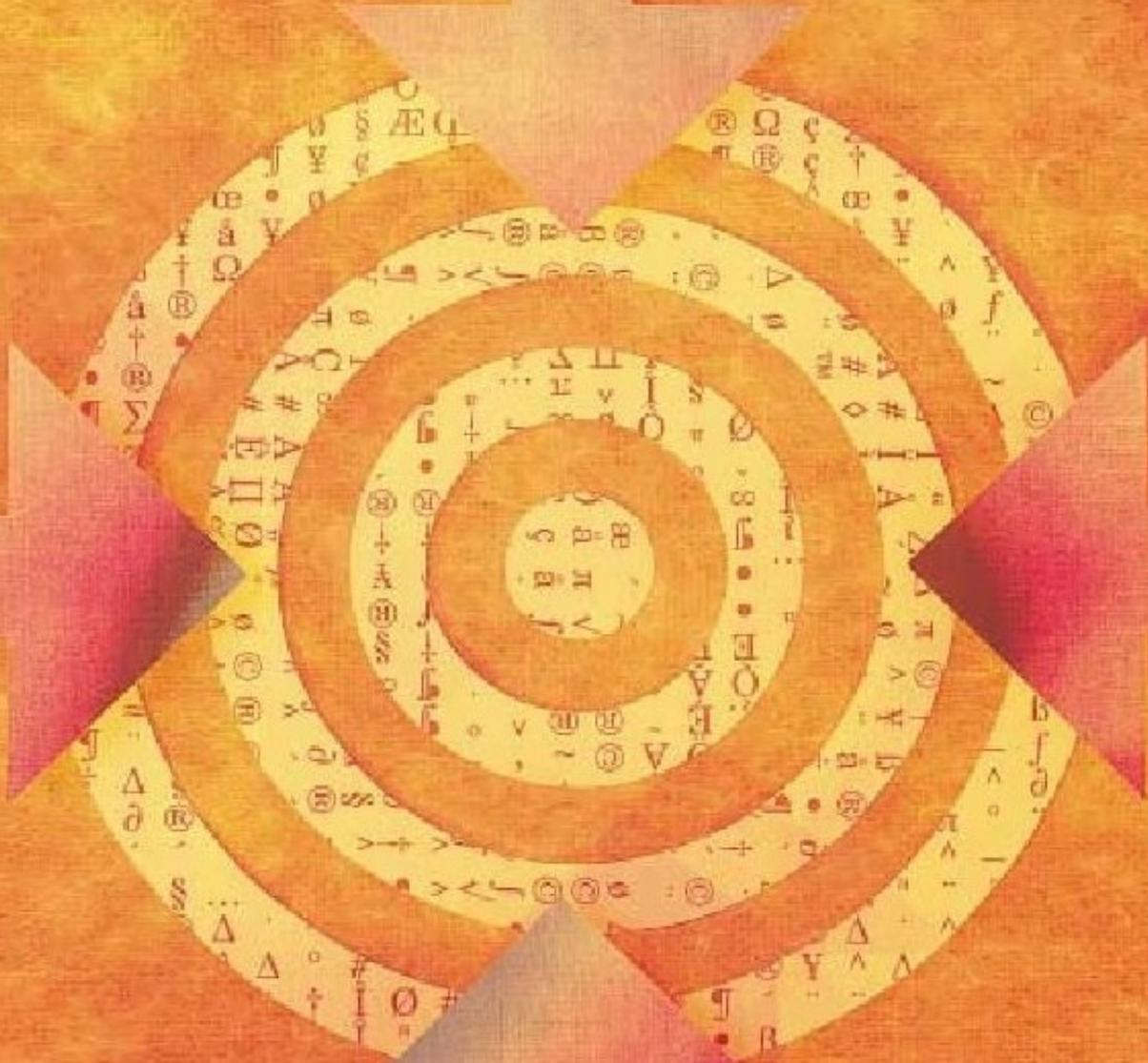


MIND TOOLS

Essential skills for an excellent career



Brainstorming Toolkit

Essential skills for an excellent career

Brainstorming Toolkit

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Version 1.1

Brainstorming Toolkit

Welcome to the Mind Tools Brainstorming Toolkit!

Most of us have taken part in brainstorming sessions – but they're not always as productive as they could be. And if you and your team use this format often, you may be finding it harder and harder to come up with fresh ideas.

So we've pulled together all of Mind Tools' brainstorming resources to help you use this excellent technique as effectively as possible – and keep the creative juices flowing session after session.

Here's to your next brainstorming meeting!

About MindTools

Each year MindTools.com helps more than 6.7 million visitors from around the world learn the "essential skills for an excellent career!" Online since 1995, we publish the practical, proven skills and techniques that help managers and professionals achieve high personal effectiveness, become exceptional leaders, become successful... and be happy at work and in life.



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Brainstorming

Generating Many Radical, Creative Ideas

Brainstorming is a popular tool that helps you generate creative solutions to a problem. It is particularly useful when you want to break out of stale, established patterns of thinking, so that you can develop new ways of looking at things. It also helps you overcome many of the issues that can make group problem-solving a sterile and unsatisfactory process.

Used with your team, it helps you bring the diverse experience of all team members into play during problem solving. This increases the richness of ideas explored, meaning that you can find better solutions to the problems you face.

It can also help you get buy in from team members for the solution chosen – after all, they were involved in developing that solution. What's more, because brainstorming is fun, it helps team members bond with one-another as they solve problems in a positive, distraction-free environment.

Why Use Brainstorming?

Conventional group problem-solving can be fraught with problems. Confident, "big-ego" participants can drown out and intimidate quieter group members. Less confident participants can be too scared of ridicule to share their ideas freely. Others may feel a pressure to conform with the group view, or are held back by an excessive respect for authority. As such, group problem-solving is often ineffective and sterile.

By contrast, brainstorming provides a freewheeling environment in which everyone is encouraged to participate. Quirky ideas are welcomed, and many of the issues of group problem-solving are overcome. All participants are asked to contribute fully and fairly, liberating people to develop a rich array of creative solutions to the problems they're facing.

“Brainstorming 2.0”

The original approach to brainstorming was developed by Madison Avenue advertising executive, Alex Osborn, in the 1950s. Since then, many researchers have explored the technique, and have identified issues with it.

The steps described here seek to take account of this research, meaning that the approach described below differs subtly from Osborn's original one.

What Is Brainstorming?

Brainstorming combines a relaxed, informal approach to problem-solving with lateral thinking. It asks that people come up with ideas and thoughts that can at first seem to be a bit crazy. The idea here is that some of these ideas can be crafted into original, creative solutions to the problem you're trying to solve, while others can spark still more ideas. This approach aims to get people unstuck, by "jolting" them out of their normal ways of thinking.

During brainstorming sessions there should therefore be no criticism of ideas: You are trying to open up possibilities and break down wrong assumptions about the limits of the problem. Judgments and analysis at this stage stunt idea generation.

Ideas should only be evaluated at the end of the brainstorming session – this is the time to explore solutions further using conventional approaches.

Individual Brainstorming

While group brainstorming is often more effective at generating ideas than normal group problem-solving, study after study has shown that when individuals brainstorm on their own, they come up with more ideas, and often better quality ideas, than groups of people who brainstorm together.

Partly this occurs because, in groups, people aren't always strict in following the rules of brainstorming, and bad group behaviors creep in. Mostly, though, this occurs because people are paying so much attention to other people's ideas that they're not generating ideas of their own – or they're forgetting these ideas while they wait for their turn to speak. This is called "blocking".

When you brainstorm on your own, you'll tend to produce a wider range of ideas than with group brainstorming - you do not have to worry about other people's egos or opinions, and can therefore be more freely creative. For example, you might find that an idea you'd be hesitant to bring up in a group session develops into something quite special when you explore it with individual brainstorming. Nor do you have to wait for others to stop speaking before you contribute your own ideas.

You may not, however, develop ideas as fully when you brainstorm on your own, as you do not have the wider experience of other members of a group to help you.

Tip:

When Brainstorming on your own, consider using [Mind Maps](#) to arrange and develop ideas.

Group Brainstorming

When it works, group brainstorming can be very effective for bringing the full experience and creativity of all members of the group to bear on an issue. When individual group members get stuck with an idea, another member's creativity and experience can take the idea to the next stage. Group brainstorming can therefore develop ideas in more depth than individual brainstorming.

Another advantage of group brainstorming is that it helps everyone involved to feel that they've contributed to the end solution, and it reminds people that other people have creative ideas to offer. What's more, brainstorming is fun, and it can be great for team-building!

Brainstorming in a group can be risky for individuals. Valuable but strange suggestions may appear stupid at first sight. Because of this, you need to chair sessions tightly so that ideas are not crushed, and so that the usual issues with group problem-solving don't stifle creativity.

How to Use the Tool

You can often get the best results by combining individual and group brainstorming, and by managing the process carefully and according to the "rules" below. That way, you get people to focus on the issue without interruption (this comes from having everyone in a dedicated group meeting), you maximize the number of ideas you can generate, and you get that great feeling of team bonding that comes with a well-run brainstorming session!

To run a group brainstorming session effectively, do the following:

- Find a comfortable meeting environment, and set it up ready for the session.
- Appoint one person to record the ideas that come from the session. These should be noted in a format that everyone can see and refer to. Depending on the approach you want to use, you may want to record ideas on flip charts, whiteboards, or computers with data projectors.
- If people aren't already used to working together, consider using an appropriate warm-up exercise or [ice-breaker](#).
- Define the problem you want solved clearly, and lay out any criteria to be met. Make it clear that the objective of the meeting is to generate as many ideas as possible.
- Give people plenty of time *on their own* at the start of the session to generate as many ideas as possible.
- Ask people to give their ideas, making sure that you give everyone a fair opportunity to contribute.
- Encourage people to develop other people's ideas, or to use other ideas to create new ones.
- Encourage an enthusiastic, uncritical attitude among members of the group. Try to get everyone to contribute and develop ideas, including the quietest members of the group.
- Ensure that no one criticizes or evaluates ideas during the session. Criticism introduces an element of risk for group members when putting forward an idea. This stifles creativity and cripples the free running nature of a good brainstorming session.
- Let people have fun brainstorming. Encourage them to come up with as many ideas as possible, from solidly practical ones to wildly impractical ones. Welcome creativity!
- Ensure that no train of thought is followed for too long. Make sure that you generate a sufficient number of different ideas, as well as exploring individual ideas in detail.
- In a long session, take plenty of breaks so that people can continue to concentrate.

Taking Your Brainstorming Further...

If you're still not getting the ideas you want, try using these approaches to increase the number of ideas that you generate:

- [The Stepladder Technique](#) - This improves the contribution of quieter members of the group, by introducing ideas one person at a time.
- [Brainwriting](#) - Brainwriting uses a written approach to brainstorming to generate and develop ideas. This helps you get ideas from all individuals, and develop these ideas in depth.
- **Brain-netting** - This is similar to Brainwriting, but uses an electronic document stored on a central server.
- [The Crawford's Slip Approach](#) – The Crawford's Slip Approach helps you get plenty of ideas from all participants in your session, and gives you a view of the popularity of each idea.

The techniques below help you in specific brainstorming situations:

- [Reverse Brainstorming](#) – This is useful for improving a product or service.
- [Starbursting](#) – Starbursting helps you brainstorm the questions you need to ask to evaluate a proposal.
- [Charette Procedure](#) – This procedure helps you brainstorm effectively with large groups of people. (Conventional brainstorming is cumbersome and increasingly ineffective when more than 10 to 12 people are involved.)

Where possible, participants in the brainstorming process should come from as wide a range of disciplines as possible. This brings a broad range of experience to the session and helps to make it more creative. However, don't make the group too big – as with other types of teamwork, groups of 5 to 7 people are often most effective.

Key Points

Brainstorming is a useful way of generating radical solutions to problems, just as long as it's managed well. During the brainstorming process there is no criticism of ideas, and free rein is given to people's creativity (criticism and judgment cramp creativity.)

This tends to make group brainstorming sessions enjoyable experiences, which are great for bringing team members together. Using brainstorming also helps people commit to solutions, because they have participated in the development of these solutions.

The best approach to brainstorming combines individual and group brainstorming. Group brainstorming needs formal rules for it to work smoothly.

Reverse Brainstorming

A Different Approach to Brainstorming

Related variant: "Negative Brainstorming"

Reverse brainstorming helps you solve problems by combining [brainstorming](#) and [reversal](#) techniques. By combining these, you can extend your use of brainstorming to draw out even more creative ideas.

To use this technique, you start with one of two "reverse" questions:

Instead of asking, "How do I solve or prevent this problem?" ask, "How could I possibly cause the problem?"

Instead of asking "How do I achieve these results?" ask, "How could I possibly achieve the opposite effect?"

How to Use the Tool

Clearly identify the problem or challenge, and write it down.

1. Reverse the problem or challenge by asking:
2. "How could I possibly cause the problem?", or
3. "How could I possibly achieve the opposite effect?"
4. Brainstorm the reverse problem to generate reverse solution ideas. Allow the brainstorm ideas to flow freely. Do not reject anything at this stage.
5. Once you have brainstormed all the ideas to solve the reverse problem, now reverse these into solution ideas for the original problem or challenge.
6. Evaluate these solution ideas. Can you see a potential solution? Can you see attributes of a potential solution?

Tip:

Reverse brain-storming is a good technique to try when it is difficult to identify solutions to the problem directly.

Example

Luciana is the manager of a health clinic and she has the task of improving patient satisfaction.

There have been various improvement initiatives in the past and the team members have become rather skeptical about another meeting on the subject. The team is overworked, team members are "trying their best" and there is no appetite to "waste" time talking about this.

So she decides to use some creative problem solving techniques she has learned. This, she hopes, will make the team meeting more interesting and engage people in a new way.

Perhaps it will reveal something more than the usual "good ideas" that no one has time to act on.

To prepare for the team meeting, Luciana thinks carefully about the problem and writes down the problem statement:

- "How do we improve patient satisfaction?"

Then she reverses problem statement:

- "How do we make more patients dissatisfied?"

Already she starts to see how the new angle could reveal some surprising results.

At the team meeting, everyone gets involved in an enjoyable and productive reverse brainstorming session. They draw on both their work experience with patients and also their personal experience of being patients and customers of other organizations. Luciana helps ideas flow freely, ensuring people to not pass judgment on even the most unlikely suggestions.

Here are just a few of the "reverse" ideas:

- Double book appointments.
- Remove the chairs from the waiting room.
- Put patients who phone on hold (and forget about them).
- Have patients wait outside in the car park.
- Discuss patient's problems in public.

When the brainstorming session runs dry, the team has a long list of the "reverse" solutions. Now it's time to look at each one in reverse into a potential solution. Well, resulting discussions are quite revealing. For example:

"Well of course we don't leave patients outside in the car park - we already don't do that."

"But what about in the morning, there are often patients waiting outside until opening time?"

"Mmm, true. Pretty annoying for people on first appointments."

"So why don't we open the waiting room 10 minutes earlier so it doesn't happen?"

"Right, we'll do that from tomorrow. There are 2 or 3 staff working already, so it's no problem".

And so it went on. The reverse brainstorming session revealed tens of improvement ideas that the team could implement swiftly and easily.

Luciana concluded: "It was enlightening and fun to looking at the problem in reverse. The amazing thing is, it's helped us become more patient-friendly by stopping doing things rather than creating more work".

Key Points

Reverse brain-storming is a good technique for creative problem solving, and can lead to robust solutions. Be sure to follow the basic rules of brainstorming to explore possible solutions to the full.

Random Input

Making Creative Leaps

Random Input is a lateral thinking tool. It is very useful when you need fresh ideas or new perspectives during problem solving.

As explained in the introduction to this chapter, we tend to think by recognizing patterns. We react to these patterns based on past experience and extensions to that experience. Sometimes, though, we get stuck inside them. Within a particular pattern there may be no good solution to a particular sort of problem.

Random input is a technique for linking another thinking pattern into the one we are using. Along with this new pattern comes all the experience you have connected to it.

How to Use the Tool

To use Random Input, select a random noun from either a dictionary or a pre-prepared word list. It often helps if the noun is something that can be seen or touched (e.g. 'helicopter', 'dog') rather than a concept (e.g. 'fairness'). Use this noun as the starting point for [brainstorming](#) your problem.

You may find that you get good insights if you select a word from a separate field in which you have some expertise.

If you choose a good word, you will add a range of new ideas and concepts to your brainstorming. While some will be useless, hopefully you will gain some good new insights into your problem. If you persist, then at least one of these is likely to be a startling creative leap.

Example

Imagine that you are thinking about the problem of reducing car pollution. So far in thinking through the problem you have considered all the conventional solutions of catalytic conversion and clean fuels.

Selecting a random noun from the titles of the books in a bookcase you might see the word 'Plants'. Brainstorming from this you could generate a number of new ideas:

- Plant trees on the side of roads to convert CO₂ back into oxygen
- Similarly, pass exhaust gases through a soup of algae to convert CO₂ back into oxygen. Perhaps this is how an 'air scrubber' in a space craft works?
- Put sulfur-metabolizing bacteria into an exhaust gas processor to clean up exhaust gases. Would nitrogen compounds fertilize these bacteria?
- Another meaning of 'Plant' is factory. Perhaps exhaust gases could be collected in a container, and sent to a special plant to be cleaned? Perhaps you could offload these gases at the same time as you fill up with fuel?

These ideas are very raw. Some may be wrong or impractical. One of them might be original and the basis of some useful development.

Key Points

Random input is an excellent way of getting new perspectives on a problem. It often leads to startling creative leaps.

It provides an easy way of breaking out of restrictive thinking patterns. It helps you to link in whole ranges of new solutions that you would not otherwise associate with the problem.

The best words to use are concrete nouns, which may come from areas in which you have some expertise. Nouns should not, however, come from the same field as the problem you are considering, as the whole idea of Random Input is to link in new thinking patterns, not to stay inside old ones.

Brainwriting

Getting More from Your Idea Sessions

Many of us have taken part in brainstorming sessions. These are commonly used to generate ideas, and to come up with a creative solution to a problem. What can often happen during a brainstorming session, however, is that key players on the team speak up and express their ideas. Everyone else then enters the discussion about those few ideas, and they reach a consensus on the solution – without considering many other ideas that could have been generated.

This can be one of the drawbacks of the brainstorming process. Some members of the group may not speak up because they're shy, or are afraid that their suggestions may be rejected. Others may say nothing at all because they fear their ideas are simply too outrageous or bold. People with stronger personality types may loudly push and defend their ideas, without listening to others' suggestions. And 'conservative' people may tend to propose only safe alternatives.

Yes, brainstorming can be effective in getting people to think laterally about a problem. However, if you're faced with obstacles like those we have just mentioned, how do you overcome them?

Enter the brainwriting technique – an idea-generating process that enables EVERYONE in the group to participate in a nonthreatening way. This approach can often generate more potential solutions than traditional brainstorming.

Why? One reason is because traditional brainstorming sessions allow only one person to speak at a time. By the time each individual has spoken (and the group has finished the discussion), most participants have edited, discarded, or simply forgotten their own ideas. This is called 'blocking,' and it can reduce creativity and productivity in these sessions. Brainwriting can help to eliminate this problem.

In this article, we'll show you what brainwriting is – and look at how you can start using it with your team.

What Is Brainwriting?

Brainwriting is similar to [brainstorming](#) – they're both methods for generating ideas and solutions for a problem.

Brainwriting, however, gives everyone equal opportunity to participate, and it enables all group members to think without any 'blocking.'

Here are the steps of a brainwriting session:

1. Seat group members at a table, with a sheet of paper in front of each person. At the top of the page, ask them to write down the problem that everyone is trying to solve. (Note: They should NOT write their names.) Appoint someone to be moderator, and time each round.
2. Give the group three minutes to write down three ideas for how to solve the problem. They should not edit the ideas, or try to perfect them. Allow them to write in 'free form.' Do not permit any discussion.
3. After three minutes, move on to round two. Gather in the papers, shuffle them, and then pass them out. You may need to sort out cases where someone gets back a paper they have already written on. Ask everyone to generate three more ideas on the new paper they have just received. They can build on the first three ideas that are already written, or think of three new solutions.
4. The moderator decides how many rounds there are.
5. When all rounds are finished, collect the papers, and write all ideas on a whiteboard for everyone to see. Then begin discussing which ideas would work best for solving the current problem.

Benefits of Brainwriting

There are several advantages of using brainwriting in a group:

- Because there's no discussion during the initial idea-generating rounds, you can produce many ideas in a very short amount of time.
- All group members – even the quiet and shy people – have an equal chance of offering their ideas for consideration.

- Everything is anonymous – you don't know who wrote which ideas – so there's more freedom to be truly creative. Participants are often empowered to suggest solutions that they otherwise might have thought were too unusual, or would not be well received.
- Exchanging papers still allows group members to evaluate and build on other people's ideas, but in a much more concentrated, creative way.

When to Use Brainwriting

Brainwriting can be used to help solve almost any problem. The process is used often in marketing, design, and creative fields, but it's also gaining popularity in other areas.

Any time that you would traditionally use brainstorming to solve a problem, you could use brainwriting instead.

Key Points

Although brainstorming is the most common technique for generating ideas in a group, brainwriting can be much more effective, because it involves all participants on an equal basis. Both introverts and extroverts can participate, and you can produce more ideas in less time.

Starbursting

Understanding New Ideas by Brainstorming Questions

When a colleague suggests a new product or idea, and you're trying to understand it and how it works, a typical response is to bombard the other person with questions. What features would it have? How much would it cost? Where would we market it? Who would be responsible for it? Who would buy it? Why would they buy it? And so on.

Asking questions like these is a valuable way of understanding the new idea, and of challenging it to ensure that all of the relevant aspects of it have been considered before any work begins on implementing it. To get the most out of this approach, it's important that the questions asked are systematic and comprehensive. After all, there would be no point identifying every feature and the intended customers of a new product, and starting to manufacture it if you haven't asked how you would bring it to that market.

So it's worth going through a comprehensive, systematic questioning exercise every time you explore a new idea. The Starbursting technique is useful way of going about this.

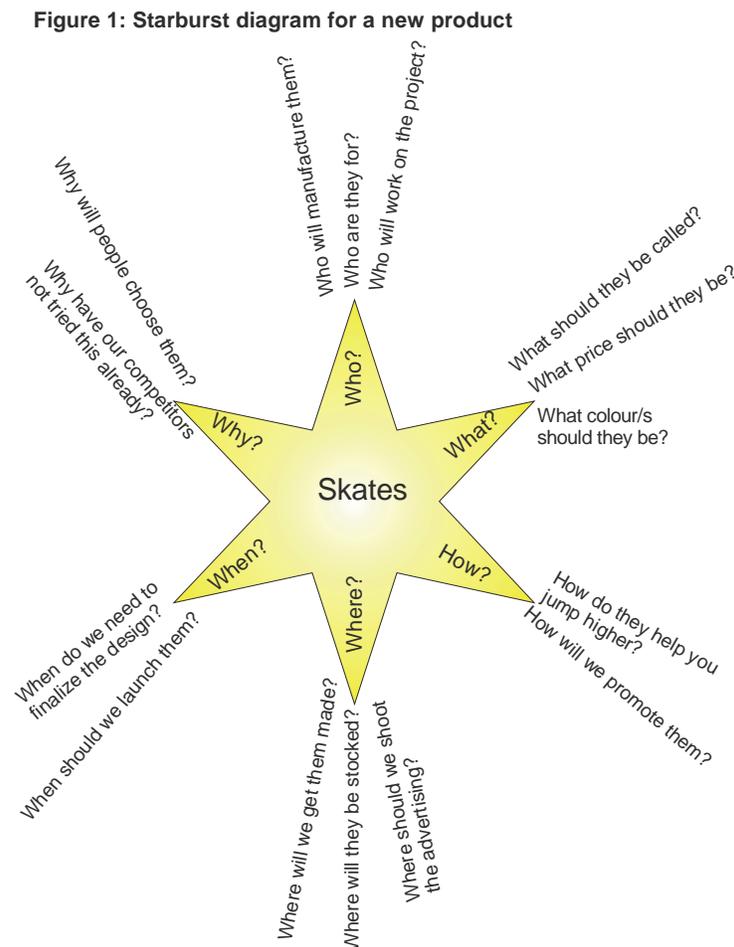
Starbursting is a form of [brainstorming](#) that focuses on generating questions rather than answers. It can be used iteratively, with further layers of questioning about the answers to the initial set of questions. For example, a colleague suggests a new design of ice skating boot. One question you ask might be "Who is the customer?" Answer: skaters. But you need to go further than this to ensure that you target your promotions accurately: "What kind of skaters?" Answer: those who do a lot of jumping, who need extra support, and so on. This would help focus the marketing, for example to competition ice dancers and figure skaters, rather than ice rinks that buy boots to hire out to the general public.

How to Use the Tool

The best way to see the power of this simple but effective technique is to think of a product, challenge or issue to work on, and follow these steps:

- Step 1 Download our free [worksheet](#) and print it out or take a large sheet of paper, draw a large six-pointed star in the middle, and write your idea, product or challenge in the centre.
- Step 2 Write the words Who, What, Why, Where, When and How at the tip of each point of the star.
- Step 3 Brainstorm questions about the idea or product starting with each of these words. The questions radiate out from the central star. Don't try to answer any of the questions as you go along. Instead, concentrate on thinking up as many questions as you can.
- Step 4 Depending on the scope of the exercise, you may want to have further starbursting sessions to explore the answers to these initial questions further.

Figure 1 below shows some of the questions you might generate in a short starbursting session on the skates mentioned above.



Key Points

Starbursting is a form of brainstorming that focuses on generating questions about an idea or challenge in a systematic, comprehensive way. It's a useful tool to support your problem solving or decision making processes by helping you to understand all aspects and options more fully.

The Charette Procedure

Brainstorming Multiple Ideas with Multiple Stakeholders

Have you ever tried to hold a brainstorming session with more than 10 or 15 people? Or tried to brainstorm ideas for two or more related issues? It's rarely pretty! These sessions quickly spin out of control, becoming chaotic and unproductive. What's more, they tend to be dominated by only a few people, with the majority remaining silent.

When an idea-generating session has numerous related issues or numerous stakeholders, simple brainstorming is often inadequate. This means that sessions are less creative than they might be, buy-in is undermined, and people disengage from the process. This is a serious problem if you need to achieve consensus.

However, brainstorming can still be effective if you take a slightly different approach to organizing the brainstorming sessions.

One such approach has a name: The Charette Procedure (sometimes spelled 'Charrette'). It involves organizing people into several small groups, each of which brainstorms ideas one-after-the-other until everyone involved has had a chance to contribute fully. Derived from the French word for wagon, it come from the practice of architecture students in the early 1800s, who used carts to rush their drawings from one place to another to get final approvals. In much the same way, when you use the Charette Procedure, you take the ideas generated by a group, and cart them over to the next group, for them to be built upon, refined, and finally prioritized.

The Charette Procedure allows for maximum participation in idea generation, without compromising the quality or effectiveness of the brainstorming. The benefits of the process include:

- Effective use of time because many issues can be discussed at the same time;
- Improved buy-in from stakeholders, who have the opportunity to contribute their ideas on each issue;
- Encouragement of high quality options because the most popular ideas are polished with each round of discussion;
- Elimination of stalled discussion, because new people can progress an issue on each round.

How to Use the Tool

The Charette Procedure is quite simple to apply. Depending on your situation you may complete the various group discussions in one day, or they can be held over a series of days or weeks. The system you choose will be based on the logistics involved and the magnitude of your project.

1. Agree on a set of issues that need to be discussed.
2. Divide your larger group into small groups that are conducive to brainstorming. As with many types of group interaction, a group size of seven participants plus the recorder is ideal. Here again, the specifics of your situation will dictate the size of your groups. When planning the groups, consider the following:
 - If you have a set deadline, make sure the number of groups and iterations can be accommodated.
 - Think about the mix of people within the groups. Groups with a diverse mix of skills, background and experience are generally more creative than those of similarly skilled people.
 - Make sure the number of groups is equal to or greater than the number of issues to discuss.
3. Assign an issue to each group. If there are more groups than issues, then assign some issues to more than one group.
4. Have each group elect a recorder. You may also suggest this person facilitates the group discussion as well.
5. Each group brainstorms an issue.
 - Record all ideas, as for regular [brainstorming](#). Click the link to find out more about the regular brainstorming process.
 - Set a time limit for discussion. This will depend heavily on your overall schedule as well as the complexity of the issues being discussed. Strike a balance between too short a session that might not uncover enough detail, and longer discussions that might lose focus
6. When the group's time is up, the recorder moves to the next group.
 - The recorder reviews the issues and current state of the brainstorming list with the new group.
 - Brainstorming begins again, with each group now discussing a new idea or issue. The new group builds on the existing ideas and generates new one.
 - Repeat this step until each group has discussed each issue once.
7. In the final group session, allow time to organize and draw together the ideas into key ideas, themes or strands. If several groups have been working at the same time on the same issue, this is a good time to bring together the different streams of ideas.
8. Once the final session has finished, reconvene the whole group and have the recorders present their lists. This is a good time to work with the group to prioritize issues or approaches, if this is appropriate. Techniques that can help you with this are:
 - [Nominal Group Technique](#).
 - [Multi-Voting](#).

Key Points

The Charette Procedure is an efficient and effective process for brainstorming and capturing ideas, when there are multiple issues and many people involved. It is a systemic and organized approach that allows everyone to contribute in a meaningful way. When you are faced with a complex, multiplayer decision, the Charette Procedure is a great way to harness ideas and priorities as the foundation of well-considered and widely accepted plans.

Crawford's Slip Writing Method

Generating Ideas from Many Contributors

How do you unlock the collective knowledge and ideas of your team, your department or even your whole organization? And how do you do this in a way that everyone (not just those with the biggest egos) gets heard?

The Crawford Slip Method is a simple yet effective type of brainstorming that gives the opinions of all team members equal weight, however quiet they are.

In fact, you probably will have encountered this way of generating ideas and solutions even if you haven't called it the Crawford Slip Method.

Invented in the 1920's by Dr. C.C. Crawford, Professor of Education at the University of Southern California, the method simply involves collating input from people on slips of paper (nowadays often on Post-It Notes®).

The benefit of using this type of group brainstorming is not only in the variety of ideas and solutions that can be triggered: It also helps people get involved and feel that their contributions are valued. Writing rather than speaking during the group brainstorming can have added advantages: It allows individuals' thoughts to flow freely on to paper without interruption, and it can also level the playing field between quieter and more outspoken participants, allowing people to contribute equally.

More than this, as peoples individual contributions are brought together into groups of similar ideas, it gives you a feel for the "popularity" of each idea within your team.

Tip 1:

The Crawford Slip Method and other creative brainstorming techniques focus on generating ideas and contributions, rather than how to use these to create a group outcome. If, however, your main need is to achieve consensus on a particular issue, consider using the Nominal Group Technique instead. This is a useful method for achieving a robust group consensus on difficult or subjective issues.

How to Use the Tool

Preparation

1. Before the session, think about how you'll present the problem to be solved to your team, how you'll analyze contributions, and how you'll give feedback to participants.

2. You'll need to be ready to give each contributor paper slips or Post-It Notes on which to write their ideas. Depending on the challenge, you will probably ask each person to contribute between 5-25 ideas each, so have a good supply of slips to hand!

Briefing and Facilitation

3. At the start of the meeting or workshop, introduce the issue to be brainstormed clearly. Be specific but keep it as simple as possible. Where appropriate use images, film clips or visual recordings to illustrate the problem to be solved and to get people thinking. Tell contributors how their input will be used and what feedback they will receive.
4. Ask contributors to write down as many ideas and suggestions as they can, with each idea or suggestion written on a separate slip of paper. Encourage people to keep contributing until ideas run dry, ideally getting between 5 and 25 ideas from each. You will know it's time to draw the session to a close when most people have stopped writing.

Analysis

5. Organize the contributions into logical groupings and similar ideas. How you do this will depend on the challenge to be solved.

For example, if you are looking for suggestion to improve customer service, you could map the key activities in the customer service process, and then organize people's suggestions according to these key activities.

And record the number of slips containing each suggestion, so you have an idea of the "popularity" of each suggestion.

Feedback

6. It can take weeks or even months to actually design and implement specific solutions based on the ideas generated. However, you should aim to feedback promptly at or soon after the session, to everyone involved.

Whether or not the ideas will ultimately be implemented, prompt feedback shows people that contributions are valued and being taken seriously. Remember to follow-up with more feedback when you do implement resulting solutions and improvements.

Tip 2:

It can be good to analyze results and present feedback during the workshop itself. Well-planned and rapid feedback can be very impressive and powerful, and so help the overall success of your workshop or event.

However, don't keep people standing around idly while you collate feedback.

Next Steps

Explore for More!

For more information on this and other key career skills areas, visit MindTools.com, and explore the many other free resources available to you!

Mind Tools offers in excess of 500 management, career and thinking skills resources, more than 250 of which you can use completely for free. (The remainder are available to members of our members' area, the Career Excellence Club, and are accessible for a first month fee of just US\$1*.)

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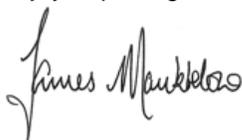
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