

QuickTip - Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a method for generating many creative ideas in a short period of time, making it a divergence activity. Participants call out their ideas as they think of them, so that each person has an opportunity to build on the ideas of others.

The goal of brainstorming is to stimulate creative thinking. Follow these guidelines:

1. Don't criticize or evaluate the ideas – just record all of them
2. Encourage wild ideas
3. Hitchhike – combine, modify, and build new ideas on the ideas of others
4. Encourage quantity



When

Use brainstorming when:

1. When a broad range of options is desired.
2. When creative possibilities and ideas are needed.
3. You need to capture input from a variety of people

How

Review the guidelines of brainstorming (above) with the entire group. The leader ensures that the group understands the objective of the brainstorming session and the process to be used, then presents the situation in the form of a question. The question should use wording that encourages specific, tangible ideas, not opinions or vague concepts. Often it is best phrased as a “why,” “how,” or “what” question.

Then use one of the following brainstorming procedures.

Free Wheeling

1. Allow several minutes of silence for everyone to think about the question, then start the brainstorming.
2. Group members call out ideas spontaneously.
3. Facilitator or scribe records ideas as they are suggested.

Round Robin

1. Allow several minutes of silence for everyone to think about the question.
2. Facilitator asks each member in turn for an idea.
3. Facilitator or scribe records ideas as they are suggested.
4. Participants may pass on any round.
5. Session continues until everyone has passed during the last round.

Slip Method

1. Facilitator asks participants to write down their ideas individually. There is no group interaction.
2. The ideas are collected and organized.

Technique	Pro	Con
Free Wheeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spontaneous • Most creative results • Encourages ideas built on input from several people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loudest participants may dominate, discouraging quieter people • Can get confusing, resulting in lost ideas
Round Robin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involves participants more equally • Tends to focus discussion • Allows ideas built on input from several people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some loss of energy while participants waiting for turn • Less able to build on ideas from others • Reluctance to pass when out of good ideas
Slip Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anonymity allows sensitive topics to surface • Can be used with very large groups • Gathers ideas from quiet participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not interactive - can't build on ideas of others • Difficult to clarify or get context for ideas • Slower

Tips

1. Record ideas where everyone can see them during the session to encourage building on them.
2. Judgment and creativity cannot occur simultaneously. That's the reason for the rules about no criticism and no evaluation.
3. Record ideas on flip charts or large pieces of paper. When ideas overflow to additional flipchart pages, post previous pages around the room so all ideas are still visible to everyone. If you write directly on a whiteboard you will have to do a lot of copying after the session (or take a photo).
4. Encourage unconventional thinking. Crazy ideas often come from a different perspective and can lead to great solutions by sparking someone's imagination.
5. If brainstorming will be followed immediately by an affinity exercise, consider recording the brainstorming ideas directly onto cards or stickies.
6. You can "seed" ideas by taking a few minutes at the start for each participant to write down some initial ideas that he can throw into the session at the appropriate time.
7. The skill of the facilitator has a large influence. Practice or call in an expert.
8. For large groups, have a facilitator AND one or more scribes so that the rapid flow of ideas is not impeded.
9. The scribe should try not to rephrase ideas. If an idea is not clear or is too long to capture, ask the person who suggested to rephrase it in a way that can be recorded and that everyone can understand.

10. Karl Albrecht's *Brain Power* suggests phrases that the facilitator can use to spur ideas. "How can we: "
- a. put to new uses
 - b. adapt
 - c. find similar things
 - d. magnify
 - e. eliminate
 - f. make smaller
 - g. substitute
 - h. rearrange
 - i. combine
 - j. blend

For further information, see the ASQ article on brainstorming at <http://asq.org/learn-about-quality/idea-creation-tools/overview/brainstorm.html>

Excerpted from Synergy's Project Tools and
Techniques Guide, p. 11-13, rev. 201022