



COWORKING

by Corro

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Brainstorming Techniques

There are several methods that can be used for group brainstorming. The uniqueness or demands of the situation may dictate what approach works best. Many people who promote techniques of brainstorming in their business activities use more than one approach to keep everyone's creative juices flowing while also supporting different styles of thought and expression.

Approaches to Brainstorming

There are several methods that can be used for brainstorming. The uniqueness or demands of the situation may dictate what approach works best. You also want to choose a method that encourages maximum participation and input. Each person has strengths and perspective. The approach you choose should encourage everyone to contribute in a way that works best for him or her. Another consideration is accommodating the schedule of those individuals who are cramped for time, or the needs of those who do not wish to share ideas through a public forum. Many people who promote techniques of brainstorming in their business activities use more than one approach to keep everyone's creative juices flowing while also supporting different styles of thought and expression.

1. Rapid Ideation (silent generation of ideas)

In this simple effective technique, you ask individuals to share as many ideas as they can in a given time limit. The thrust of the approach is that the person does not have time to over think the issue, but rather relies on his or her wits. You decide before hand if each person then shares the ideas aloud or you collect the responses. You can ask each person to write each idea on a post-it note. You will get a repetition of ideas that are the most obvious, but often you also get some revolutionary gem. This is phase one. After the ideas are gathered you can build one each idea in turn before discussion and evaluation.



2. Flip the Playing Field

Break with convention. Instead of asking the group for the best ideas they have, start by asking for the worst possible idea, the silliest, most exaggerated, or the craziest? This process relaxes the participants, boosts their confidence and input and stokes their creativity. When they examine these ideas it challenges their assumptions and they gain insights to great ideas.

3. SWOT Analysis

Create a table to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) to your current problem, situation, or question. This helps you see your process in a more analytic way and logically decide if there is a more effective way to arrive at a solution.



4. Collaborative Brainwriting

Brainwriting is a relaxed technique and a way to silence all the chatter from gathered group. It still emphasizes getting a broad range of ideas circulating, but it does it through writing. Once ideas have been generated, the individuals come together to build on the ideas. This is a silent form of brainstorming that allows the more reserved or silent members of the team to raise their voice when it matters. There are different approaches to brainwriting.

The Best Ideas aren't Necessarily
the Loudest Spoken Ones

Assembly Brainwriting: Participants write their problem-solving ideas on a piece of paper. Each sheet of paper is passed to another person who reads the ideas, builds upon them, and add new ideas of their own. This still allows for the sharing and building of ideas, without the face-to-face pitfalls of having to simultaneously listen, think, collaborate and respond. This helps quiet individuals to contribute and keeps people from dominating the discussion.

Slip Writing or Anonymous Brainwriting: This technique involves having each participant anonymously write down ideas. One idea per index card or post- it note or slip of paper. The ideas can be generated over a period of time or in the early part of a session. The leader or facilitator randomly shares each idea with the group who spends time building upon it, supporting it, or questioning it in discussion. This technique of brainstorming falls under the category of quiet brainstorming that is a confidence booster among teammates.

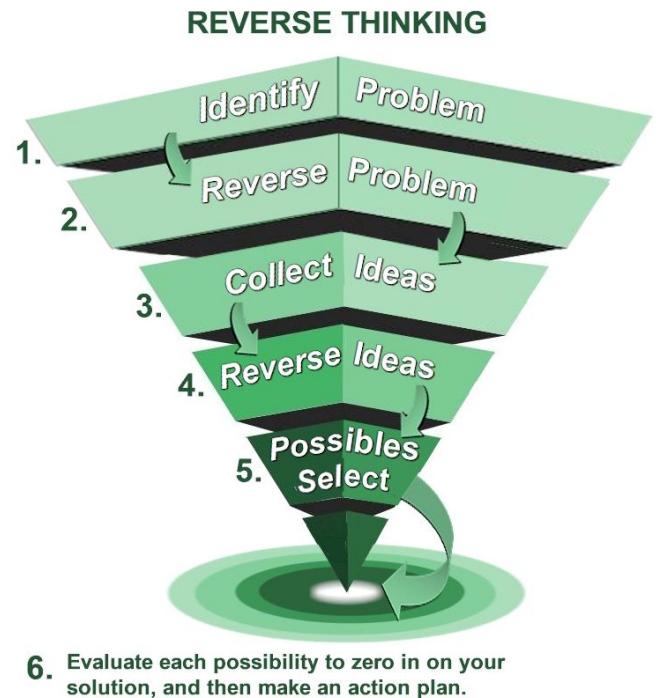
Fixed Period Brainwriting: Write the question or concern on a large piece of paper and post it in a prominent place, so that everyone from every department has an opportunity to read as well as contribute. Ask your team members to post their ideas when they are able, over the course of a designated period of time. The scope of the problem and the number of individuals should guide you in how long a period.

Online Brainwriting: This involves brainstorming on the Internet. The leader sets up a system to allow individuals to share their ideas privately, but then collaborate publicly. There are software companies that specialize in just such types of systems. This is an especially helpful approach for remote teams to use, though any team can make use of it.

5. Reverse Thinking

Instead of asking a group to brainstorm ideas that would work, the group brainstorms all the ways that they could cause a plan to fail.

This technique works well because sometimes it is easier to critique and see gaps in a plan instead of the strategy for success. Once the group has this list, they can look at each of the specific examples and figure out ways to achieve the opposite. Each scenario opens up more questions and new ideas. This allows the group to see and solve all the problems because they know what can cause potential issues in and current or future strategy.



6. Trigger Method

In this method, participants brainstorm on as many ideas as possible. You can set a goal of 101 ideas. Then select the best ones and brainstorm on those ideas as 'triggers' for more ideas. They repeat the process until they find the best solution.

7. Role Play

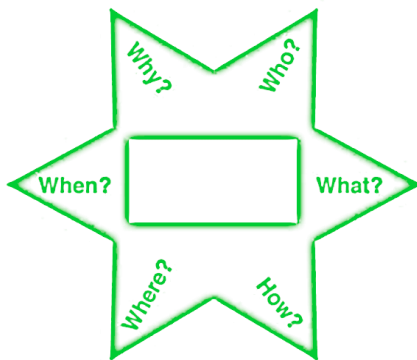
What do customers/clients/managers really want? What are the challenges we face internally or externally? Very often, those questions are best answered by clients (internal and external). Asking your team to imagine themselves as a user and act out a scene with team members pretending to take the other's point of view. This style of brainstorming often provides surprisingly potent insights into challenges and solutions. Your team gains a better understanding of their customers and the steps to create a product that users love. Two other pluses of role play are: it can help lower participants' inhibitions and it helps your team prioritize work.

8. Drivers Analysis

What are the forces that help drive you forward in your situation? What are the forces acting against you? Think about how you can magnify the former and reduce/eliminate the latter. What problem are you addressing? What is driving client loyalty to be lower? What is driving the competition momentum? What's driving a trend toward lower productivity? As you brainstorm to uncover the drivers, you begin to catch a glimpse of possible solutions?

9. Gap Filling

The goal of gap filling is to determine the missing part between two steps. The leader or facilitator identifies starting point “A” and the goal point “B”. Participants focus on the journey or the course of action from A to B and brainstorm the steps to fill the gap between the two. At the end of a session, the group has a vision for action. The journey can be divided into smaller parts. Say they want to a game plan to create and deliver a product users love. The segments can be design and functionality focused on desired customer outcomes.



10. Starbursting

In this technique, the group creates a six-cornered star. Spotlighted at the centre in writing is the issue or challenge. Each point of the star contains one of the following words: who, what, where, when, why, and how. With attention on each point, the group generates all the possible questions to solve the issue. Afterwards, the group focuses on each question to generate a productive discussion that converges on the solution.

11. Charrette

It can be a struggle and take an extraordinary amount of time to coordinate idea generation when you have a large group from different departments, say 30 or 40 individuals, all very eager to participate. You get viable ideas through the Charrette method which breaks the problem into smaller segments, with small groups generating ideas and discussing each element of the problem for a set period of time. Five segments, five groups. When a group has discussed one issue, their ideas are passed on to the next group who builds on and polishes them. Each group passes to the next until each idea has been massaged by each group. By the end of the session, the ideas have been discussed from several perspectives, ranked, and refined.

12. Challenger

The Challenger technique forces us to overcome assumptions that make us favour one idea over another. Assumptions are constraints that can limit us. It is much better to identify and define the assumptions and figure out the constraints before we make decisions. Assumptions may not end up being true or as feasible.

Make a list of your assumptions about your question or problem (customers, product, content, promotions, goal, etc. Then challenge them one by one. Be a harsh critique, play devils advocate. Think of worse case scenarios. You might think you already know the best way to do something, but we don't make progress by never questioning things.

This is a good technique to use with other methods. When your group has reduced their brainstorm list to a few quality ideas, introducing the challenger technique allows your team to critique different ideas to test how feasible they will be in execution.

Example: Grandma made the best cookies. You plan to open a cookie kiosk in the local mall selling cookies made from Grandma's cookie recipes.

Assumptions:

1. Product – cookies
2. Source – baked with grandma's recipes.
3. Location – local mall

Challenges:

- Does it have to be in a mall?
- Does it have to be just grandma's cookie recipes you use?
- Does it have to be just cookies, maybe grandma had other recipes for squares, cakes, pies.
- Can it be a bakery?
- Can it be an online store? Subscription delivery?
- Do you have to sell the cookies? Can it be a cookbook of all grandma's recipes? Or a series of cookbooks, or an Ebook.
- And so on...

13. Round-Robin Brainstorming

In a round-robin brainstorm, every member of the meeting participates by contributing one idea before anyone can contribute a second idea. In the meantime there is no criticize, elaboration or discuss on any idea. It is a good idea to give the team some time to prepare ideas before the brainstorm meeting. No is allowed to use the excuse that someone else already suggested their idea. If they brought a list they should choose from that or be given more time to think. Encourage them to think of something offbeat or silly. The round robin method is a great way to encourage shy (or uninterested) individuals to speak up while keeping dominant personalities from taking over the session.

14. What if

By simply asking “what if” you can spur radical creative thinking.

What if this problem came up 100 years ago?
How would it be solved?

What if Superman were facing this problem?
What if the problem were 50 times worse?
What if it were less serious than it really is?

Using this technique also gets people laughing and working together!

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. What if... .. | What if... it came from another planet? |
| 2. What if... it was bigger? | What if... it's a Pisces? |
| 3. What if... it was smaller? | What if... it was a candy bar? |
| 4. What if... it was thicker? | What if... it was a season? |
| 5. What if... it was thinner? | What if... it had a name? |
| 6. What if... it was taller? | What if... it had an apartment? |
| 7. What if... it was fatter? | What if... it had a hobby? |
| 8. What if... it was wider? | What if... it was an automobile? |
| 9. What if... it was slower? | What if... it was employed? |
| 10. What if... it smelled? | What if... it was in the yearbook? |
| 11. What if... you could see it? ... | What if... it had an attitude? |
| 12. What if... you could feel it? ... | What if... it played a sport? |
| 13. What if... it was flavored? | What if... it had a favorite food? |
| 14. What if... it made noise? | What if... it watched movies? |
| 15. What if... it was colorful? | What if... it was a movie character? |
| 16. What if... it had a texture? | What if... it listens to music? |
| 17. What if... it had a pattern? | What if... it was like a TV program? |
| 18. What if... you asked a Fool? ... | What if... it drinks? |
| 19. What if... it was broken? | What if... it has a bedtime? |
| 20. What if... it was a Super Hero? | What if... it was edible? |
| 21. What if... it was an animal? ... | What if... it orders pizza? |

15. Step-Ladder Technique

The step-ladder technique is a bit more complex and takes considerable time. However, it is a great way to make sure the group is not focusing on the first few ideas or being influenced by the loudest people in the room. Everyone gets to share their ideas with other colleagues and everyone will have their say.

- The facilitator introduces the brainstorming topic and challenges the team to come up with ideas for a solution.
- Everyone leaves the room except for two people. Those two brainstorm together for a few minutes.
- A third person comes back into the room. The third person shares some ideas with the two individuals before hearing the ideas that the first two discussed. After all three members have laid out their solutions and ideas, they discuss their options together.
- A fourth person enters the room to share his or her ideas before learning about the other three ideas.
- Repeat the same process for the fifth, sixth, and so on. Allow time for discussion after each additional member has presented his or her ideas.
- Outside the room, the other participants can write down their ideas. But they are not allowed to discuss their ideas with anyone until they are inside the room.
- Reach a final decision only after all members have been brought into the room and presented their ideas.

16. The Delphi Technique

The Delphi technique is more structured and usually the participants are a panel of experts on a particular subject. The Delphi method give people time to think issues through properly, critique arguments rigorously and contribute fully. Participants in the process do not meet, or even necessarily know who else is involved. All communication is anonymous. The facilitator controls the process, and manages the flow and consolidation of information from a panel of experts. The process takes longer, because participants must respond through written discussion. It works as follows:

- Participants are presented with a situation or a problem. They may be given a questionnaire, survey, or one question based on a specific subject. They are asked to respond in writing, sharing their answers along with an analysis on the subject, predictions, or whatever comes to mind that they believe is relevant. At this point it is a one sided dialogue.
- The facilitator receives the replies and organizes the information so the accumulation can be passed along to every participant. The discussion/argument/analysis remains anonymous.
- Participants study and explore what they received. The experts are encouraged to revise their earlier answers in light of the replies of other members of their panel. prepare a new response based upon the collection of new information and their expertise.
- The facilitator receives, organizes and circulated the next round of replies.
- The process is repeated through a number of cycles or until the participants reach a consensus or achieved stability of results.

17. Mind Mapping

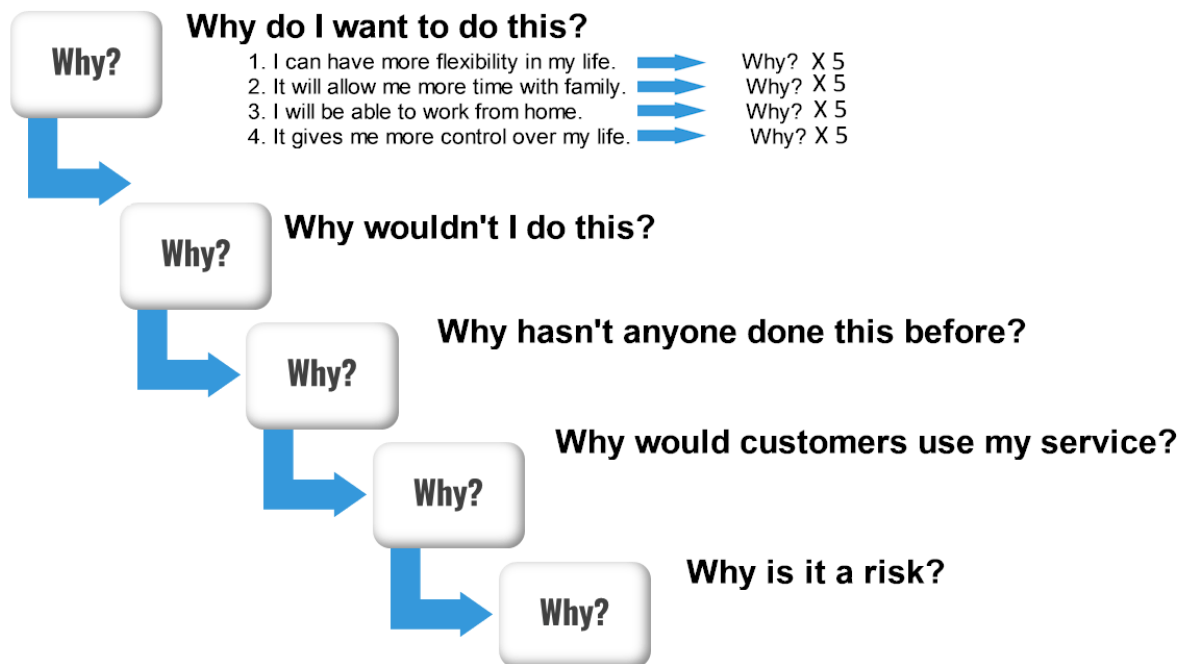
This technique of brainstorming is a visual approach to brainstorming. In essence, the participants see a visual representation of all of the ideas. It starts with the leader writing down a goal or challenge for the team members. The participants suggest different ideas that relate to the core issue and those ideas are drawn onto a map that connects all the ideas and these connections are discussed to solve the issue at hand.



18. The Five Whys

This technique is different. The group addresses the challenge by asking the five why's:

GOAL: I WANT MY OWN BUSINESS



Of course, the “five why’s” should be connected to their initial question and the group will determine the why questions. They will get some answers for each question. Then they ask “five why’s” of each answer. You continue this process at least five times and then you end up with a long collection of answers.

Explore these other Break Through Articles or Guides

[Individual Brainstorming Approaches](#)

[Expand your Discovery Network for Idea Generation](#)

[Key Consideration in Planning Effective Brainstorming](#)

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