

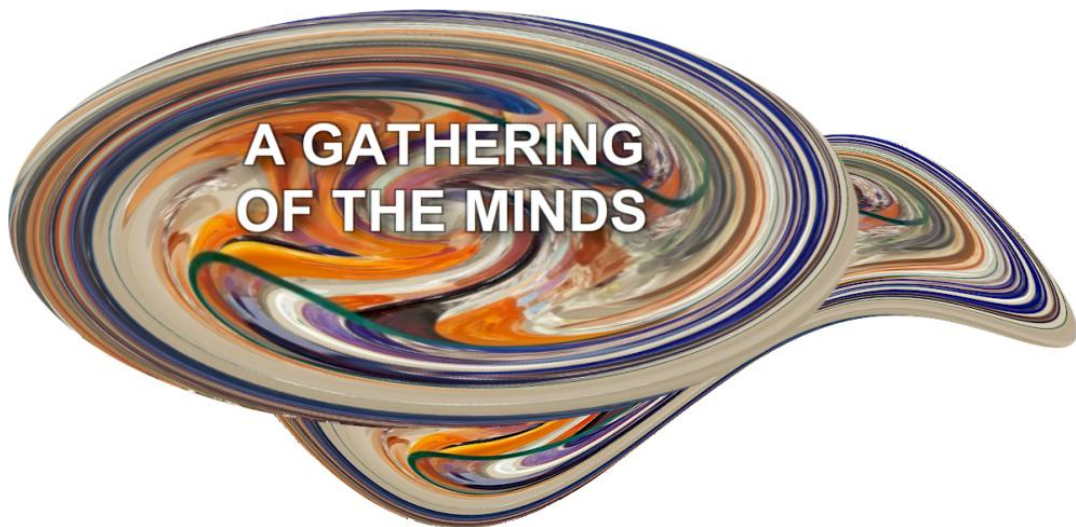


COWORKING

by Corro

A community to help you grow, scale and thrive.

Collaborative Brainstorming



Collaborative brainstorming is – a gathering of minds, an exchange of ideas, a marathon of resourceful thinking. We can be inspired to build upon the ideas of others, to envision new perceptions, new assumptions, insights, and breakthroughs. There is no better way to create something unique and wonderful, achieve the impossible, or solve any problem, than through an organized gathering of minds, who generate ideas, energize each other, and inspire other gatherings and new rounds of thinking and exchanging ideas.

Collaborative Brainstorming

Did you know that when Johann Gutenberg developed his printing press, he combined a wine press with a metal punch that was used in making coins? He advanced innovation in the use of an oil-based ink and softer paper. When he introduced his printing technologies to Europe, news and books advanced quickly across Europe, feeding the Renaissance and scientific revolution.

Alberta Einstein changed our understanding of time and space by fantasized about people going to the centre of time to freeze their lovers in a century-long embrace. He visualized a woman's heart leaping and falling in love two weeks before she has met the man she loves. His originality lead to intellectual achievements that proved pivotal to science. However, he viewed them as mere stepping-stones for the next advance.

We can believe in the genius of both men for visualizing something so groundbreaking. We can imagine both Gutenberg and Einstein alone in their thinking. Yet, we also know that both men collaborated with others whose skills, experiences, fresh perspectives, or fantasies helped them to expand their thinking or unlock new angles to envision something revolutionary. Gutenberg first worked with other goldsmiths, gem cutter, and metallurgists, and later he pooled resources with his business partners. We know Einstein started a small discussion group in 1902, which met regularly to discuss science and philosophy and he received a great deal of help from his first wife (also a physicist) as well as friends and colleagues, many of whom never rose to prominence.

Men like Gutenberg and Einstein – or more so, the growth of their ideas, and the evolution of their achievements – exemplify creative thinking. Most certainly, since then, generations of creative thinkers collaborated to taken Gutenberg's technology and Einstein's theories to extraordinary new levels. Today, multitudes of innovative ideas have a direct relationship to Gutenberg and Einstein, demonstrating that ideas are in motion.

A Gathering of Minds – a Marathon of Resourceful Thinking

These two examples illustrate how we can be inspired to build upon the ideas of others, to envision new perceptions, new assumptions, insights, and breakthroughs. There is no better way to create something unique and wonderful, achieve the impossible, or solve any problem, than through an organized gathering of minds, who generate ideas, energize each other, and inspire other gatherings and new rounds of thinking and exchanging ideas.

That is what brainstorming is – a gathering of minds and an exchange of ideas. The term brainstorming used to evoke images of a room full of people tossing wild ideas back and forth. Today, it can also evoke an image of a wall full of post-it notes.

What has not changed since the term brainstorming was coined in 1939 is its basic concept: It essentially relies on a group of people coming together with their prior knowledge and research to gather ideas, listen to each other, build upon and explore those ideas through experimental thinking to find a solution for a specific problem or create something new. In a gathering of minds, each person gains strength, energy, or encouragement from the ideas of others. When they pool that strength and exploit that energy, individuals engage in deeper thinking, merge ideas, and branch out in new directions. That is the essence of creativity, and that is the power of brainstorming.

Collaborative brainstorming has been the cornerstone of the creative industry for decades and veteran facilitators proved its effectiveness in other industries like commerce and trade. As experience and learning developed over the last seven decades, several interesting and inspirational approaches to brainstorming have evolved to adjust for different situations, to support different styles of thought and expression, and accommodate different workflow preferences, remote workers, and the ever-changing needs of global populations. As ideas are always in motion, brainstorming is always evolving, and that is one reason the brainstorming approach to resourceful thinking works so well and has proven to have value in most industries.

In this guide, we will discuss the rules of brainstorming and how to plan for and kick-start an effective session of resourceful thinking. We will also explain the mechanics of facilitating a group through the phases of brainstorming and the various approaches that have proven useful.

Collaborative Brainstorming

(in this guide)

A Gathering of Minds – a Marathon of Resourceful Thinking

Brainstorming Prevails

Brainstorming is not Old-Fashioned

Brainstorming is not a Tool

Phases of Brainstorming

The Five Rules of Brainstorming

Key Considerations in Planning Effective Group Brainstorming

- The need for an effective facilitator

- The need for preparation

- Framing the question

- When do you provide the participants with the question?

- Who will attend?

- How much time does a brainstorming session take?

- Choose a brainstorming approach

- Choose a setting

- Does it have to be a room?

- Determine how ideas will be captured

Kick-Start the Brainstorming Session?

Making it Happen

- Start with silence

- Prompts to generate fresh ideas

- How are ideas captured?

- The closing moments

- The follow-up

Choosing a Brainstorming Approach

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Rapid Ideation | 10. Star Bursting |
| 2. Flip the Playing Field | 11. Charette |
| 3. SWOT | 12. Challenger |
| 4. Collaborative Brainwriting | 13. Round Robin Brainstorming |
| 5. Reverse Thinking | 14. What If |
| 6. Trigger Method | 15. Step-Ladder Technique |
| 7. Role Play | 16. Delphi Technique |
| 8. Drivers Analysis | 17. Mind Mapping |
| 9. Gap Filling | 18. The Five Why's |

Individual Brainstorming and the Spider-Web Technique

Expand your Discovery Network to Improve Idea Generation

Brainstorming Prevails as Valuable

There is one simple truth that makes brainstorming essentially valuable. Brainstorming has never been about knowing. It is about putting judgment on hold and harnessing the power of the team's combined creative energy to explore a challenge through a marathon of resourceful thinking.



Today, the workplace has never been more appealingly diverse, and the problems of businesses so challenging. The culture of the workplace has been evolving to where differences of opinion are encouraged and healthy debate is the norm. This open constructive mindset is an ideal atmosphere for problem solvers to access a wide knowledge base in some form of brainstorming. When bright diverse, highly skilled individuals with different personalities, backgrounds, and work styles collaborate and brainstorm on an intellectual and emotional level their skills, experience, and differences combine for meaningful brainstorming opportunities.

Brainstorming thrives because people are exposed to the ideas of others. On that basis alone, organizations give brainstorming, or some form of it, high priority, and it will prevail as the cornerstone of problem solving and innovation.

In this guide, we will expand upon the basic rules of brainstorming, and how to engage your group using various strategies.

Resourcefulness is the ability to think creatively, to generate ideas, and to identify alternatives. Resourcefulness is also imagination, the ability to visualize how something could be achieved when there is nothing there but the vision.

Brainstorming is not Old-Fashioned

There has been considerable debate about the power or value of brainstorming. Great brainstorming maximizes idea generation but it is one of the most misunderstood approaches to innovation. Many people say they know how to brainstorm. Yet, few do it really well. You might know the rules of a game and be able to survive athletically at the annual company picnic, but can you play at a more competitive level?

Like anything else, it has its shortcomings. However, in dismissing its value, the naysayers miss some important facts:

- The opinion that it is old-fashioned ignores the fact that various brainstorming methods in every conceivable setting have evolved in the last seven decades, making it extremely adaptable to today's needs. Every day, a veteran in the field comes up with a way to take mainstream brainstorming to the next level. Software companies continue to develop programs to streamline the processes. Trainers, facilitators, and programmers work with organizations to help their employees incorporate brainstorming techniques into their repertoire of acquired skills.
- Arguments that brainstorming fails because it does not work for introverted thinkers, fail to address the fact that today the organization can choose from several approaches to brainstorming that support different style of thought and expression while encouraging anyone and everyone to participate in myriad ways, from anywhere in the world.
- Saying brainstorming inhibits the creative process because participants have to refrain from criticism, ignores the fact that brainstorming is a process that channels creativity while wisely exploiting other skills to optimize the opportunity.
- Many people think brainstorming can only be done one way. Single-mindedness limits effective brainstorming.
- People fail to recognize the skills required to optimize the brainstorming process. Ineffective application of those skills can impede brainstorming.
- Everyday some form of brainstorming is used to solve a problem somewhere. Many breakthrough ideas have come through effective brainstorming.

How can something become old-fashioned when it continues to evolve and remains as an applicable solution to problem-solving? The good news is, no matter what level you are at, you can always up your game to learn how to brainstorm or facilitate brainstorming. It is an art form.

Brainstorming is not a Tool

There can be no consensus on which brainstorming technique works best. Each situation is different. But, we ask why is there a discrepancy between those that criticize brainstorming and those that are die-hard believers in the power of it? What the dissenters have in common is that they view brainstorming as a tool. However, brainstorming is not a tool it is a skill that is used to help people get their creative juices flowing to obtain a solution. Tina Seelig, from Stanford University is a well known and often quoted expert on the subject of brainstorming. She provides us with a succinct explanation of how we should approach brainstorming.

“Brainstorming is NOT a tool, like a hammer or can opener. It is a skill like chess, baseball, or playing the piano. All of these endeavors have rules as well as strategies for success. And, it’s impossible to become a master without effective training and practice.

Just like chess or baseball, the rules of brainstorming are straightforward and relatively easy to remember. However, they are really challenging to implement. For example, a key rule of brainstorming is to “defer judgment.” That is, don’t criticize others’ ideas. How hard is that? In the same way, it’s easy to state that the goal of baseball is to hit a ball out of the park. It is nearly impossible to do so, but we don’t say that baseball doesn’t work.

It’s crazy to expect meaningful results from a brainstorming session when the group is filled with amateurs who haven’t been trained and haven’t mastered the skills. This would be like picking a random group of people and asking them to play professional basketball or to perform a ballet.

*If you want to become a master brainstormer, able to generate really bold and innovative ideas, there are a few basic rules and **many strategies that require practice.***

Seelig stresses the effective use of brainstorming strategies. She goes on to say, “The key is to ‘Practice Practice Practice’ in order to learn and master the nuances of effective brainstorming, you must practice like a violinist who wants to make it to Carnegie Hall.” Tina Seelig’s expertise has resulted in several well-defined examples of brainstorming strategies. We will quote those examples throughout this guide.

Most people do not get opportunities to practice group brainstorming. Still with the help of some basic rules and a focused leader or facilitator to keep the process flowing anyone in our organization can participate in a brainstorming session. Plan and execute brainstorming sessions when you have secondary problems to solve. Do it simply for skill practice. The more sessions you organize the better each participant will become and then when you need bold and innovative ideas for a major issue or project your team will be experienced and ready.

In this guide we explore brainstorming as a skill.

Brainstorming Starts with a Question

Every brainstorming session is kick-started by a question and need for a solution. The wording of the question is critical. It must be concise to your purpose.

Again Seelig has a inspiring example: Are you asking for ideas for a new umbrella or a new way to stay dry in the rain? Are you asking for a better suitcase or a way to have the things you need at your destination?

Set a clear intention. You must decide ahead of time if you are looking for very feasible “we-can-make-this-happen-this-month” ideas or are you looking for “never-been-done-before” ideas? Make sure your desired outcome is clear before the session begins.

If you prepare participants by providing them with too much detail, you risk having too much influence on their input and the final outcome. On the other hand, no preparation can leave participants in an awkward silence.



Two Phases of Brainstorming

There are two phases in the brainstorming process – the exploration phase and the exploitation phase. Each phase takes time and adherence to the rules

1. **The exploration phase** is the freewheeling phase, when a myriad of creative ideas are unleashed. Participants are encouraged to share anything and generate as many ideas as possible. All the ideas are noted as short statements without any inkling of evaluation because all ideas have the potential to grow into something remarkable or inspire even more ideas. In this phase, the participant has one job to share ideas – any idea.

**Brainstorming is an opportunity
for anyone and everyone to
help make any idea better.**

2. **The exploitation phase** is where participants constructively discuss and evaluated each idea, after which decisions are made and resources are committed.

There should be a clear separation between the two phases for the simple reason that you do not want your group to judge or eliminate ideas too early.

The Five Rules of Brainstorming

Brainstorming does not entail any complicated rules. The rules are important.

Every participant must follow the rules; there can be no exceptions.

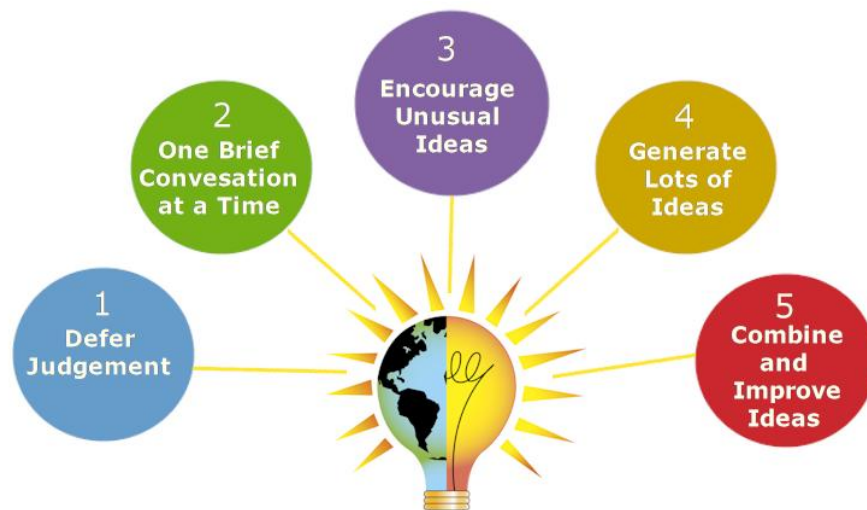
Rules 1, 2, and 3 are encompassed in exploration phase.

Rule #4 is the exploitation phase.

Rule #5 is reaching a collaborative decision

Rule #1 – Defer Judgment

There are no bad ideas. Participants should only focus on adding to the list of ideas and put judgment on hold until a later “critical stage” of the process. Participants are expected to embrace all ideas. No one criticizes an idea no matter how outrageous, inspiring or trite it might appear to be. Everyone avoids evaluating (criticism or praise), commenting upon, lobbying for, or rewarding any idea. The premise is that all ideas have merit when viewed through a frame of possibility. When people no longer fear criticism, they are more likely to not only share



5 Rules of Brainstorming

Judgment and analysis at this stage stifles idea generation and creativity. When people are allowed to make judgments, they have a tendency to latch onto an idea (often their own) or they converge on the first few ideas that are brought up. This prevents the team from being innovative or moving on in new directions. Deferring judgment is a big challenge for most people because they feel a need to evaluate ideas as they are generated. Not in brainstorming! Evaluating, criticizing, or worse yet ridiculing an idea will quickly kill a brainstorming session.

The key is to understand that you will have plenty of time to evaluate the ideas after the idea generation.

Rule #2 – One Brief Conversation at a Time

One person speaks at a time. Everyone is brief, by headlining the essence of the idea and not going into details.

The key is to maintain the momentum as a group by avoiding long winded versions of an idea and saving the side conversations for later.

Rule #3 – Encourage Unusual Ideas

It is intuitive for people to think about what they should do, and about what is right or logical. From an early age, we learned from parents, teachers and textbooks to have the “right answers”. Not in this exercise! There is no pressure to come up with ‘good’ ideas. This is a freewheeling experience to encourage wild, stupid, shocking or silly ideas. The freedom to think impulsively and outrageously releases tension and it can be fun. It pushes people to go beyond the obvious answers and unleash ideas that they might never have thought of or shared.

Using this strategy early in the brainstorming session is a good technique to get people to stop focusing on what initially impresses them and get them in the mood to defer judgment or criticism.

This aspect of the exploration phase can become very interesting because each idea, no matter how unusual can inspire other ideas and every suggestion has the potential to grow into something unique and remarkable when its possibilities are explored. Inspiration can strike when it is least expected. Even the list of “not so great ideas” can be re-evaluated by brainstorming how they can become good ideas, often turning them into something brilliant.

The key is there are no restrictions and no separation of ideas at this stage – the unusual ideas are right next to the conventional or breakout ideas. The group is not creating a detailed business plan.



Rule #4 – Generate Lots of Ideas

Participants should focus on expanding the inventory of ideas. The goal of this aspect of brainstorming is to strive for quantity. It may not become the outcome, but it will be noticed, build upon, used for inspiration. The more ideas the bigger chance of producing a radical and effective solution.

Working on the premise that all ideas have merit when viewed through a frame of possibility, participants build upon each other's ideas to expand the pool of ideas or spread it out in innovative directions. This forces everyone to pay attention to everyone's ideas. Listening to the ideas of others and building upon them is one of the most valuable aspects of group brainstorming.

People do not have to state a rationale to add a suggestion to the list; they are still just suggesting new ideas. Brainstorming is an opportunity to anyone and everyone to contribute an idea.

The key is to aim for volume. Keep generating ideas until the group has exhausted the supply of new thoughts. When they are physically exhausted, they might still be capable of just one more idea or three. Give them a break and let them mull over the exercise and they will come back with more ideas.

Usually, all ideas are restated and written as short statements so everyone has a chance to hear them and see them. Any one idea can spark a new idea.

Rule #5 – Combine and Improve Ideas

At this juncture, no one idea is imperfect or perfect. No idea should be eliminated without exploring its plausibility. Each idea is one possibility that the participants exploit from a variety of angles. Through a process of association, the participants build on each idea, suggest improvements, and manipulate it to determine how they can implement it as the new solution. They take each idea to another level to explore its feasibility. Only through extensive exploitation of any idea, can the participants of a brainstorming session imagine it in all its forms, and evaluate the idea to determine whether it is interesting enough to pursue, usable, achievable, best suited to accomplish their goal.

They might also explore combining concepts to create new solutions. This is an opportunity for anyone and everyone to help make any idea better. Ideally, the participants are not only keen to develop their own ideas.

**Brainstorming is an opportunity
for anyone and everyone to
help make any idea better.**

Imagine a factory. You see precision perfect engines, chassis and drive trains sitting there ready for use. The components are perfect and each represents a great idea. Suddenly someone comes up with the idea of fitting the components together to build a car. Then someone suggests the idea of forming an assembly line to build lots of cars.

The participants visualize something positive, workable, and effective. Yet this stage of brainstorming is contemplative, the time when their creativity and freedom of thought must make room for reason and objective, strategic reflection.

Once the decision is made, the participants can deconstruct the vision into a series of small, manageable steps; assigning responsibilities for implementation.

Key Considerations in Planning for Effective Group Brainstorming

You are wasting everyone's time if you already have a solution in mind. It is so important that a brainstorming session does not have a predetermined or preferred outcome.

You have read the rules. They seem easy enough. But you need more than rules. You get the best results by proper preparation, carefully choosing the participants, choosing the brainstorming method that will best suit your problem and your participants, and skillful guidance. No matter which technique you choose to employ there are some key considerations that lead to successful brainstorming:

- Planning and preparation
- The need for an effective facilitator
- Framing the question
- When do you provide the participants with the question?
- Who will attend?
- How much time does a brainstorming session take?
- Choosing a setting
- Does it have to be a room?

The Need for Planning and Preparation

Planning and preparation are important. Securing a time, location, choosing a facilitator and participants, are necessary to prepare for an effective session. The brainstorming technique and tools may be determined by the situation and influenced by the facilitator's experience. You may be required to invest in tools or supplies or technology.

The Need for an Effective Facilitator

For brainstorming success you need to consider other strategies that will make the rules meaningful for different situations, and to provide better opportunity for brainstorming success.

Most of the time, people tend to pay more attention to their own ideas. When people do that, brainstorming fails. A rushed exercise, inhibited participants, a group that didn't follow the rules – any one or all of these can undermine the process and limit the outcome. They are all signs of a weak brainstorming session, and will not produce the best results.

Every brainstorming session requires a facilitator, someone who effectively manages the process and keeps participants focused on their task. The facilitator's responsibility is to guide the generation of ideas, channel the group to build upon other people's ideas and encourage them to come up with additional ideas. The facilitator prompts them with questions or scenarios to challenge participants to look at the problem from different points of view and expand their thinking to maximize the number of ideas the group can generate. Ideally, participants should not feel like they are being led in a specific direction because then they become self-conscious about giving the "right" answer.

An effective facilitator follows the rules, while guiding participants toward a more effective outcome in several ways:

- Ensures only one conversation should be happening at a time.
- Encourages participants to break free of the conventions and principles of problem solving or analysis to allow their creativity the opportunity to flow more freely, but at the same time keeps bad behaviours from creeping in.
- Ensures the group does not get sidetracked from its original purpose.
- Helps participants feel safe, so as to reduce social inhibitions.
- Keeps track of all the ideas and makes sure that these ideas are visible to every participant. A skilled facilitator translates the idea into a short statement that is like a newspaper headline.
- Ensures every idea is noticed, used for inspiration and built upon to generate more ideas and stretch thinking in different directions. When there is no facilitator to guide a brainstorming group, innovative ideas are often eliminated too early. It is critical to give novel ideas a chance to flourish
- Takes notice when new options or combinations of idea may be emerging or converging through discussion and knows when to follow a thread that seems promising, and when to shift gears and offer a whole new question to build upon.
- Ensures that the process is fluid. When someone comes up with an idea, it is the responsibility of the facilitator to encourage other participants to build on it, and also recognize when it time to switch intensity to building on another idea or approach. A good facilitator can keep people focused on building on ideas. Seelig says a good flow of ideas can feel like a dance.
- Focuses on the outcome and has the ability to adjust quickly when something is not working.
- Knows when to say something funny.
- Encourages people to move around, pace and play.
- Knows when to stop idea generation and start evaluation and narrowing the selections.



- Knows when to prompt the participants with surprising and provocative questions or observations that will help the group push past their assumptions and challenge them to look at the problem and the possible solutions from different points of view. Feeling questions help people explore the emotional associations of the situation. Bizarre questions can get participants into the freewheeling mood, but they can push the participants to make unexpected and unconventional associations between the situation and other information going on in their minds.

These prompts can lead to innovative answers:

- What happens in this situation if you only have one dollar to spend.
- What happens if you have a million dollars?
- What if you suddenly had superpowers?
- What happens if a bunch of cats start running around in your situation?
- What if you were in a different country, universe, dimension?
- What would your grandmother do in this situation?
- What if time travel took you to 100 years in the future?
- What if you were a different gender, age, or an iconic figure?

A good brainstorming session should not be rushed. There must be time for silence and breaks to allow participants time to think. The facilitator recognizes when a participant needs to tune out to explore an idea alone. He or she also knows it's best to end a brainstorming session on a high note, leaving everyone feeling they have accomplished something, but still wanting to prolong the experience because of how good they feel. They want more because few things feel better than a robust brainstorming experience.

Can you be “that” Facilitator?

If you are not a suitable fit to be a facilitator, who in your group has the skills to keep the group motivated and on task? Remember it is not only participants who need to practice their skills.

The facilitator is key to the process. When people leave a brainstorming session, they should come away with that great feeling of team bonding in accomplishing something worthwhile. They should feel validated as they witnessed others build upon their ideas. They should feel re-energized by the experience. If they do not feel these things, the facilitator did not do his or her job well.

You may need to engage with someone from outside your team. If you are looking for recommendations, ask participants about their experience.

Framing the Question

You should start any session with a question, but sometimes you might not know the right question to ask. How you frame the question is a critical decision. Your question has to be **concise** to your purpose.

During your preparation it is important to give attention to framing the question.

Set a clear intention. We will repeat what we said earlier: Are you looking for very feasible, we-can-make-this-happen-this-month ideas, or are you looking for never-been-done-before ideas? Make sure your desired outcome is clear before the meeting begins. Say it is someone's birthday. Do you want a celebratory party or to occasions memorable. The way you ask the question dramatically changes the tone and scope of the answers. You want to be careful to word the question so the participants feel pressured to think in only one direction.

Should we plan a birthday party?
How can we make the day memorable?
How can we make the day special?

Your brainstorming session can focus on the party. If you frame it as simply wanting to make the occasion memorable, or make the day special, a party might be one response. Going out for lunch, buying a concert ticket, making a donation to the person's favourite charity, or throwing a pie in the face of the birthday boy might also be suggested.

Providing a concise question to your participants beforehand relieves you of the urge to provide too many details to the participants and gives them thinking time to come up with some ideas to start the session. The group can add to and modify them to make them even stronger.

Without the right question
at the beginning, your brainstorming session could
flounder and end up doomed.

In reframing the question, you might determine there are several questions that need to be asked. Actually "Reverse Brainstorming" is a technique, discussed in this guide, where team members are encouraged to think of as many questions as they can about the topic rather than brainstorming to find and discuss solutions.

When do you Provide the Participants with the Question?

Naturally, in some situations, participants need advance notice to commit and they need to know what problem they are solving before they can commit.

If you are organizing an in-house brainstorming session, preparation allows participants to write down ideas in advance. This is helpful in brainstorming sessions where only one participant may give an idea at any one time because a person can forget an idea while he or she wait for their turn to speak. For some participants it can be a challenge if their train of thought is interrupted or blocked – they were going to contribute, or lose focus on sharing it because they see it as less important or relevant. On the other hand, giving participants too much lead-time with the specific question, can limit the brainstorming session. People can enter the session with too many preconceived notions. They may dwell on one idea (their own) for too long or even lobby other participants for support of an idea. Participants should at least know the topic, if not the exact question.

Who will Attend?

Consider who will attend the meeting. If the same team brainstorms together all the time their ideas can get stale and they regurgitate the same ideas. A room full of like-minded people will not generate as many creative ideas as a cross-section of experience from a diverse group. Inviting a fresh perspective shakes things up. Try to include people from a wide range of disciplines, and include people who have a variety of different thinking styles. Choose novices as well as experts.

Give consideration to inviting two or three people who have no direct experience with the problem and whose cognitive style or worldview is starkly different from yours. If they have no investment in the status quo and they have no fixed way of thinking about the problem, they are more likely to ask compelling or uncomfortable questions. You know the ones that are obvious, but controversial and no one dare mention because it makes at least some of the others uncomfortable. You want uncomfortable questions to spark better ideas.

The individuals with the best ideas may not get to make the final decision on which ideas are going to be implemented, but their point of view and ideas can be incredibly valuable to the generation of innovative and useful ideas.

Don't make the group too big. Size is an issue because you need numbers to glean ideas from several points of view, and you need one conversation where everyone contributes. In what size group is there the least tension, fewest distractions, and optimum collaboration? You might want to consider Amazon's adoption of "two- pizza teams" which worked very efficiently. No team was bigger than could be fed with two pizzas. Once a team got larger than that, it was broken in two. Six to eight people is a good guideline for brainstorming. With less than four you run the risk of not having enough stimulation for creative thinking. Any more than eight may not give sufficient time for everyone to contribute.

Don't leave anyone out: If you are on the threshold of eight people and your department or company only employs ten or twelve people, do not leave anyone out. Make the larger number work by employing a brainstorming method that best accommodates your group. It is a great way to motivate everyone to take responsibility for the project and keep them engaged going forward.

Keep in mind that certain situations call for a large problem to be broken up into small segments. Smaller groups may assemble for initial brainstorming and afterward come together with a larger group to share information and later break up again into different or the same smaller groups to carry onto the next stage. Also, the brainstorming group may not be the same group of people who will make the final decision.

How much Time does a Brainstorming Session Take?

The scope of the problem and the brainstorming technique must be determined before you can decide how much time to set aside for your brainstorming session. If the participants know each other, they can dive right in. If they do not, you have to allow time to let them get comfortable so they feel free to communicate. There are different viewpoints on how long a face-to-face brainstorming session should last. In a face-to-face session, the key is to make it long enough to get beyond the early wave of ideas.

One school of thought is that forty-five to sixty minutes yields better results than fifteen minutes. But, for a minor problem a short session may be all that is required. Longer sessions should be broken up into smaller segments by injecting various prompts along the way in order to keep the discussion fresh and everyone engaged. It is generally very challenging to keep the energy needed for productive brainstorming going for more than about an hour without having a break.



Another school of thought is that "the old-fashioned brainstorm never lasting long enough. A half-hour session may seem like a quality block of creativity, but really all it does is limit the brain capacity needed to summon new ideas. It's typically after all the original ideas are exhausted that the true creativity begins to show." Experienced brainstorming experts say the exhausted brain can push its processing power for subconscious ideas that normally would not float to the surface. The best rule of thought is: go for quality.

In extended sessions, brainstorming with breaks can last for hours. The session starts with a blitz of sharing ideas, after which the participants are given time to reflect, followed by a periods of time to reassemble and share new revelations or get together in groups to explore the ideas. Significant problems may require two days. One day for exploration and one day for exploitation and decision making.

Decide on what Brainstorming Approach will be Best

You want to choose a brainstorming method that encourages everyone to contribute in a way that works best for him or her. You also need to accommodate the schedule of the facilitator and the participants. The approach you choose may allow the option for participants to contribute within their own time frame, in which case a brainstorming session can be spread out over a few days, rather than minutes or hours.

We provide a section in this guide that explains 18 different brainstorming techniques. Any one of these approaches that can be utilized, including where participants gather in one space or contribute from remote locations.

Choose a Setting

What does the room look like? Your choice may be a dedicated room or a very informal space. You may want your group assembled in a round table discussion or at several tables. The option of standing or sitting accommodates the different thinking styles of your participants. You need to consider how the space works for the use of any materials the participants may need to handle or what access to technology may be required. It is critical that every participant can see all the ideas that are captured at all times. Consider lighting. Your choices depend on what you are aiming to accomplish.

You must consider the space for both comfort and inspirational thinking. Some participants can be uncomfortable or stifled by a restrictive environment within which a person has no choice but to sit or stand. How well do you know your participants? You may require one where your participants have the option of sitting or standing or moving around or touching things. You may need space for the person who wants to go off in a quiet corner to think. You may need divisions or content in the room that accommodates the style of the participants or the topic.

According to Seelig, the most important consideration is having space for people to move around. She points out this is not a trivial choice because brainstorming should be done standing up. By standing up instead of sitting, the group can be much more energetic and engaged. She says, her research shows standing also allows for quick changes in the flow of people and ideas.

The room should be filled with things that will stimulate the discussion. If the group is discussing a new product, the prototype should be there for inspiration. If the group is brainstorming the marketing of a new hat, everyone should be able to wear and handle the hat. The room should be filled with all manner of head apparel, toys or gadgets or anything else relevant that could spark the imagination. You may need a table covered in cardboard, tape, scissors, rubber bands and anything else that a person who “builds to think” can use to create a quick mock-up.

Does it Have to be a Room?

Instead of the typical boardroom or office space, you might want to consider gathering your team in a place that doesn't feel like "work".

Online Brainstorming: The room looks different with online brainstorming. The flexibility to work from anywhere has spurred remote work and virtual teams to become more the norm and online brainstorming to become a major part of any organization's problem solving strategy. Through emerging technologies, all team members can easily bounce ideas off each other in real time or make important contributions on their own schedule if they are spread around different time zones and cultures. The company can choose from several approaches to harnesses that collaborative mentality to create content ideas, strategies, and more at a distance?

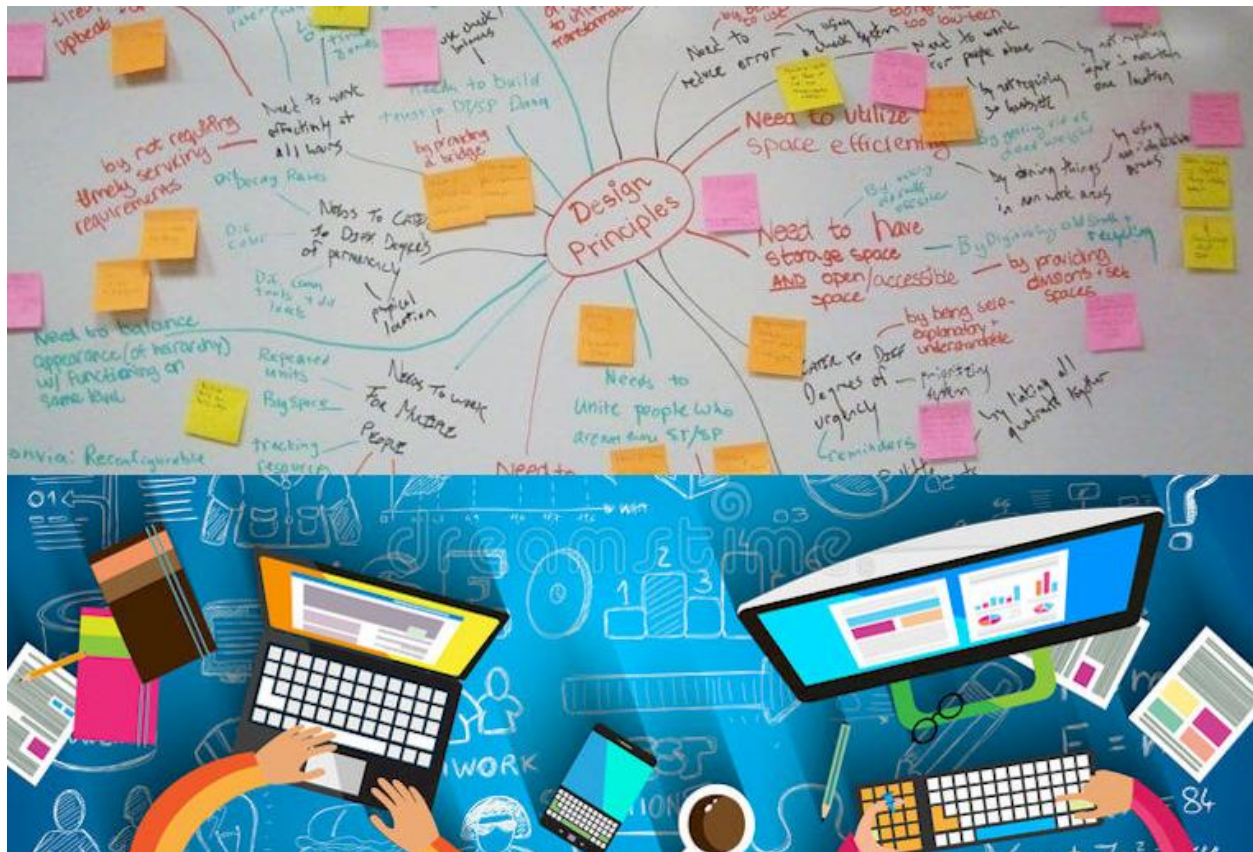
Take your think tank to the streets: Physical space influences how employees work think and feel. Brainstorming in the same room with the same people may feel tiresome. Choose some place different to collaborate – the park, a countryside bridge by the water, or beneath the final landing approach path at the local airport – with a change of scenery people become more curious and aware of their surroundings. It can be more invigorating and help people think differently.

- Climbing into a van that holds more than five people and taking a twenty-minute drive is a good transition phase from the office mindset to brainstorming mode.
- More often than not the problems we have to solve are complex and multifaceted. Online research and boardroom discussion can lead to inspirational thinking, but going into the field and seeing the situation or the product in use, will be more informative and inspiring.
- You could simply make it a longer drive, set up a recording device and let the team brainstorm buckled up for a scenic trip.
- Take a walking brainstorm. Walking healthier than sitting, and with the increased blood flow and movement your group can boost energy and create a more relaxed atmosphere that promotes the sharing of ideas and collaboration.
- Feed the brainstorming creative process and building camaraderie with biennial retreats or expeditions to some favourite company hideout.
- Consider the fresh perspectives gained from bright energizing co-working spaces designed specifically for group collaboration.

Brewstorming: If everyone is of age and agrees an afternoon "brewstorm" can be a good way to generate new ideas around common challenges. Of course, this type of brainstorming has to be approached cautiously. Alcohol can help breakdown some of the social inhibitions one can encounter in the workplace, but it can also "loosen the tongue" in unfavourable ways too. You may have to have a designated driver that is also adept at keeping notes on all the brainstorming ideas. A notable author is quoted as saying, "I write drunk and revise sober". Wise words for brewstorming, too.

Determine How Ideas will be Captured

There are the traditional and reliable methods like paper and pen, flip charts, or white boards to capture all ideas along the way. The technique you use may dictate none of the above. You can use of sticky notes on walls or windows, data projector, dedicated software, laptops, etc. If you have one person designated to write down ideas, ensure they are able to capture every idea. Make sure everyone has easy access to a pen and paper, markers or sticky notes so they make notes in real time.



It is also very helpful to plan to capture all that happened through photos or a video, and saving the materials that can be saved. You will get a massive collection of diverse ideas that can be mined for the decision makers as they pursue a final decision or as time goes by to explore another idea that had promise. If so make sure participants are aware of your intentions.

Plan Ahead for Follow-up

Make sure you organize time to filter the ideas and also to structure implementation. It is also critical that you follow up to let participants know the results of their contribution.

Kick-Start a Brainstorming Session

People who arrive for brainstorming have usually have spent the previous days or hours in work mode, focused on the execution of their tasks, following protocols and the strict boundaries of logical thinking. Because the mindset for brainstorming is different, you may need a free play transition activity or warm-up exercise to help the participants shift gears. When the participants are not familiar with each other an ice-breaker is also very important to help the individuals get acquainted and comfortable with each other.

You introduce a kick-starting exercise for other reasons:

- Free play stimulates whimsy, imagination or vision, which in turn leads to amplifying the creative process.
- Your participants get their creative juices flowing while generating meaningful and lively discussions.
- It is a fun way to quickly begin communication and make introductions more interesting and personal, rather than having each person reiterate their resume.
- It can set the tone for the rest of the brainstorming session. It forces the participants to engage differently than normal, which will be useful as they begin the brainstorming process. The kick-started exercises forces the individuals to work collaboratively.
- During a an icebreaker, the participants may not be able to see each other smile, or establish eye contact, but when they have some fun they can certainly hear laughter. A little laughter creates an open and relaxed atmosphere that is critical for any form of idea generation.

Warm-up exercises or ice-breakers can be almost anything that is not work related. They need to be speedy. After all, you need enough time to focus on the assigned challenge. Most of the following can be accomplished in fifteen minutes.

More than Simple Introductions

For individuals who may be strangers to each other. Ask participants to state their name and share from one of the following topics:

- One accomplishment you had before you turned eighteen.
- Three facts about yourself – one will be a lie and two will be true.

For groups or teams where the participants are more familiar with each other.

- Have everyone write a unique, strange, or unexpected fact about them on a piece of paper. Then, put the pieces of paper into a hat and mix them around. Pull from the hat and read each fact. Allow the team to try and guess who wrote it. After they guess, ask the employee who wrote the fact to identify themselves and give any further context if necessary. This could be a great way to get to know surprising new things about your teammates.

Word Games

- Word Mine – choose a long word and ask participants to create as many words as possible using those letters. Words can be of any length. Give them five minutes.

entrepreneur
predictability
campground

- Use a silly or off-topic prompt to help them stretch their imagination muscles.

How would you design eyeglasses if we didn't have ears?
What would happen if bikes started breathing?
Which bug is the most loved, and why?

- Ask participants to think of the name of an object that begins with the same letter as their last name. Examples: C = Chameleon, M = moped, H = halo, S = scissors. Write the name of the object on a sticky note and place it on the forehead. Each participant looks at what someone else has written and combines their object with someone else's object to create something new or unique. It doesn't have to be logical.

Chameleon + moped = a bike that changes colors
Deck + Legos = an adjustable deck that can be dismantled and stored.

- Randomization Merging – provide each participant with two post-its or two pieces of paper. Ask each person write down one activity on one of the notes and one object on the other piece of paper. Next, they pass the activity to the person to the right and the object to the person sitting on their left. Give them a moment to think about the new ideas they hold. Their aim is to think about them in combination and explain how their new combination would still make sense.
- Alliteration – give the group a topic, such as golf, cats, or friend. Have them create an alliterative paragraph about the topic using the first letter of the topic. If you wish, you can borrow this example on the topic of "golf" for your next session group:

*About the game in general: A grand gathering for golf gets golfers galvanize
plans with gusto and groups of guys and gals grab golf garb and gear to
gladly gather for a game.*

Using Props

- Wire Hanger Exercise (you need wire hangers for this) – break the assembled participants into two groups. Each group brainstorms 3 things you cannot do with a wire hanger. The groups exchange their lists. Now each group finds a creative way to accomplish the challenges described by the other group. After which they share the results.

- The Brick (does not need to be a visible prop, but adds to the fun if you have one front and centre) – select a standard brick of any color (you can have one as a visible prop). Ask the group to think of as many different and unusual uses for the brick. Once the obvious ideas are exhausted, the participants have fun with the more bizarre used.
- Geometric Shapes – randomly divide the group into two teams. Give each group a printout of a geometric shape. The aim of each group is to brainstorm and record all the things the shape could represent, and then select the three most creative ideas from their list to share with the entire group.
- Marshmallow Spaghetti Tower (introduced on TED Talks) – you can break the group into teams of 2 or 3 people. Provide each team with 20 sticks of dry spaghetti, one meter of string, one meter of tape, and one marshmallow. The challenge is to build the tallest free-standing tower using only the materials provided. Set the time for 10 minutes. When the timer is up everyone studies the structures, each team outlines their approach to the activity.

Big Screen Incentives

There are excellent software choices, electronic white boards, and other technologies that allow participants to see their kick-starter creations develop in real time and on a big screen. Mind you these next suggestions can be done face to face as well.

- Round Table Story – begin with a short story introduction. Then go round the group so that each participant gets to add one short sentence to the story. It is a fun and creative way to use your imagination and see where the story takes you.
- Word Association – choose a topic and have the participants create a list of words related to it. In this example, the topic is “holiday”.
- Reverse Branding – create a list of made-up brand names and ask participants to think of products or businesses that the name could represent.
- Form the participants into smaller groups and ask them to come up with 10 things they have in common. Again, they share their ideas afterwards. Regardless of the answers, it will help in getting the group to bond, generate discussion and laughter while getting the participants to get into thinking creatively.
- Ask each participant to name their favorite of some chosen particular thing. If they are online, they might respond by uploading an image. This icebreaker game is useful because it can be adapted to align with the meeting goal, work environment or something more personal.
- Imagine an alien spaceship has landed on Earth and wants to learn about your organization. But since you do not share a language with the aliens you need to explain it with symbols or pictures. Ask each participant to share three simple images that best describe and communicate your organization’s culture, relationship with clients, products, or values. Then get the group to recognize the common themes.

Making it Happen

Start with Silence

Once the introduction and warm-up exercises are completed, and it is time to get the official session underway. Give the group a moment of silence before you state the question and get started.

Prompts to Generate Fresh Ideas

There are several strategies that help to get the creative juices flowing. That is the goal. In brainstorming you edit for quality later.

- One approach is to remove the most obvious solutions from the pool of responsibilities so that the group is forced to think of something out of the norm. Seelig uses this example: “If you are brainstorming about ways to make it easier to park your car in a busy city, the expected answer is to add more parking spaces. If you eliminate that possibility, then other, less obvious answers will emerge.”
- Another approach is to focus on a new idea for inspiration to generate more ideas. It is important to build on the ideas presented by others. It helps people pay attention, and it pushes them to stretch their thinking. This is when participants show their true creativity and fill the treasure chest with ideas, from which some jewel will eventually shine bright. The participants are more likely to be more committed to an approach if they were involved in developing it.
- One exercise that helps participants to understand the problem thoroughly is to compose ten metaphors that describe the problem. The metaphors do not need to be in existence, you create ones that are relevant to your problem, even if they have no logical connection. By breaking the rules of logic in this way, metaphors can open up the creative side of the brain – the part that is stimulated by images, ideas, and concepts. By associating an unfamiliar idea with one that is commonplace, you can spark better understanding of your problem, especially if it is a complex one. It helps you “think outside the box” – and that is a metaphor for brainstorming for sure.
- Another approach is to introduce surprising and provocative comments or questions to get participants to imagine themselves in a different situation, place and time, so they are forced to use their imaginations. See examples above in “Facilitator” section.
- Use trigger comments or open ended sentences to provoke responses. For example, “Client issues always seem to come up when _____,” or “The best way to solve client problems is to pass the problem along to someone else.”

Ensure Every Idea is Captured?

Whatever method you have selected to capture ideas, make certain that absolutely every idea is captured and visible. An experienced facilitator knows how to do that. At the end of the session, the room should be saturated with ideas. There should be words and drawings covering the walls and prototypes on the tables. It should look and feel as though the subject has been fully explored, providing a rich collection of material.

The value of sticky notes. Ideas that individuals have written down on sticky notes can quickly be added to a board or wall. Sticky notes also allow you to reorganize and cluster similar ideas together as patterns emerge. All this adds to the creative spirit of the brainstorming session.

The Closing Moments

If you thought any of the steps outlined above were demanding, the ending stages of any brainstorming session can be even more challenging. This is partly because you will have obtained such a wide range of ideas from so many perspectives. The eagerness and contribution of the participants must be acknowledged and the process must culminate in something meaningful.

The participants may not be the individuals who will decide which ideas to implement, but they still want an opportunity to express an opinion and vote for their top choices in several categories: quickest to implement, most cost effective, biggest impact to department, biggest impact for clients. It is helpful to know their preferences and why if you need their help in implementation. It is also useful information for future cooperation, as well.

Implementation and Follow up

Brainstorm serves a purpose, which is to foster new ideas or solutions. You need to follow up and organize whatever is necessary in order to bring these ideas to life. Then make sure you advise the participants about the decision and outcome. When a brainstorming group sees the benefit or results from their brainstorming session they are more likely to feel motivated to participate fully next time around.



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. 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.

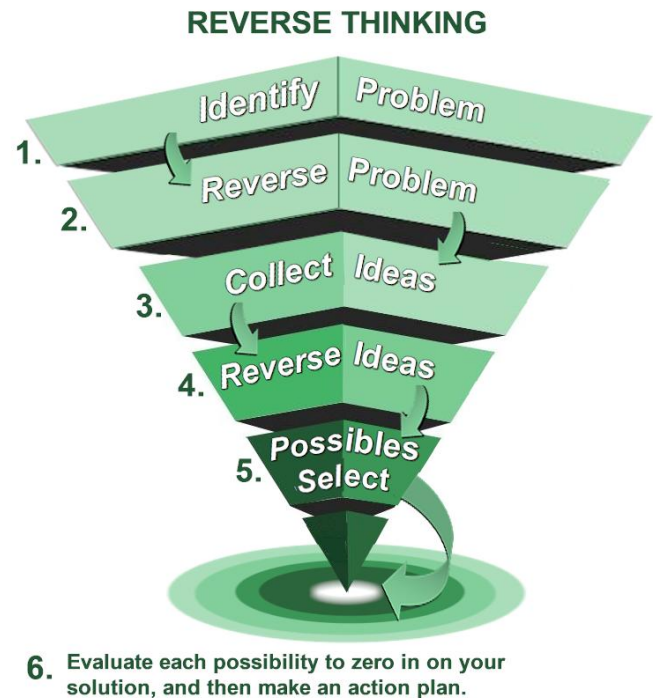
Fixed Period Brainwriting: Write the question or concern on a large piece of paper and post it in a prominent place, so that everyone from every department has an opportunity to read as well as contribute. Ask your team members to post their ideas when they are able, over the course of a designated period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

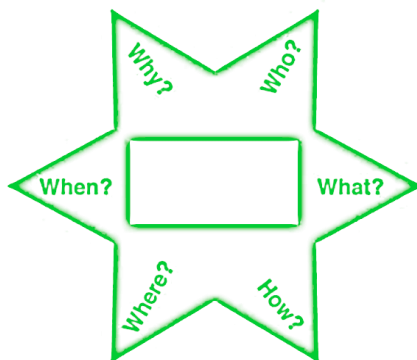
What do customers/clients/managers really want? What are the challenges we face internally or externally? Very often, those questions are best answered by clients (internal and external). Asking your team to imagine themselves as a user and act out a scene with team members pretending to take the other’s 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 Charette 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... it came from another planet?	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

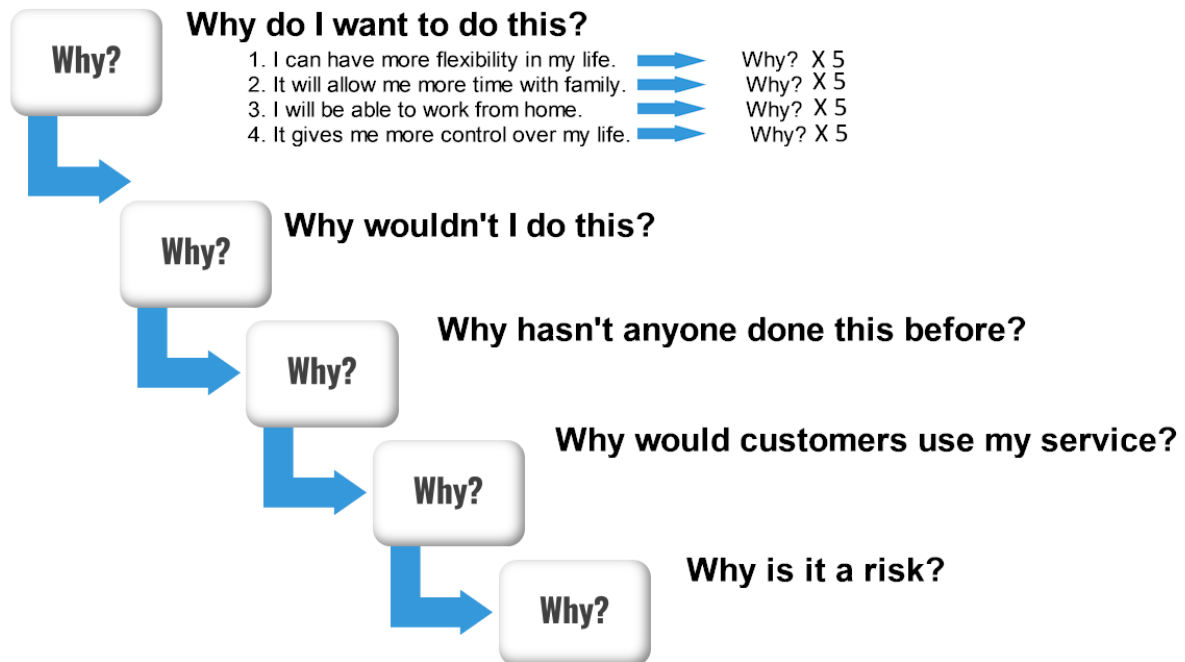
This technique of brainstorming is a visual approach to brainstorming. In essence, the participants see a visual representation of all of the ideas. It starts with the leader writing down a goal or challenge for the team members. The participants suggest different ideas that relate to the core issue 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.

Individual Brainstorming

For some of us, our best ideas occur in the shower. Yet, sometimes our solutions or strategies require more work, like mining for gold. When you need a flurry of new thinking, individual brainstorming can be effective. In some way, each of us has used brainstorming in a solitary situation.

Some experts claim it can be more effective than group brainstorming, because when you brainstorm on your own, you can be more free or more creative since you do not have to be concerned for another person's opinion, personality, or ego. When you explore a challenge on your own, you might develop an idea that you would not bring up in a group setting. However, you do run the risk of not developing ideas as fully when you work alone, because you do not have access to the wide experience or diverse perceptions that a larger group draws upon. Individual brainstorming is a useful method in creative writing, and extremely effective in problem solving. If you are an entrepreneur of a small business, brainstorming by yourself may be critical to your success.



The key is to brainstorm in more than one way. Typically, when we want to be conscious about the process we make lists of ideas that we cull for the best. We might use techniques like talking aloud to ourselves or drawing a diagram that visually organizes our thoughts. If it is visual, you are less likely to lose track of your thoughts. Hearing your ideas can cause you to think about it again in a different way.

Rather than brainstorm by thinking a problem through, you can freewheel by creating a diagram for yourself. Write down everything and anything that comes to mind. Connect ideas. The key is to write first. Be spontaneous. Build on each idea. Analyze and strategize later. When you have listed all your ideas, built upon each one and visualized each of them, you can hone in on what is sensible, what you like, what is right, what is practical, easy, cost effective, etc.

When you are mulling over what kind of diagram to use, the Starburst Technique is reliable. To gain new perspective or reverse your thinking utilize the “What if” approach outlined in the group technique section above. The “What If” approach will expand average ideas into excellent ones and help you eliminate the self-destructive self talk such as:

Yeah, but.
This will never work.
I can’t afford this.
I don’t have the manpower.
This is too complex.

Those kinds of thoughts, will ruin your brainstorming session, for sure. Reverse or challenge your thinking. Instead ask yourself the following questions and make sure you brainstorm several answers:

How can I make this work?
What can I do to make this affordable?
What do I need manpower for? Where can I get it?
What is not complex?
How can I make it less complex?
Can I get someone to help me with complex?

Brainstorming Techniques for Individuals

Several of the techniques outlined for groups can be adapted for personal use. We suggest that brainstorming be done when you are alert, not exhausted. When you need stimulation and cannot get it from others, you can get find it by picking up a book, going for a walk, doing something different, looking at and touching the inspirational things you’ve saved over the years, or maybe try a long shower.

Spider-Web Technique

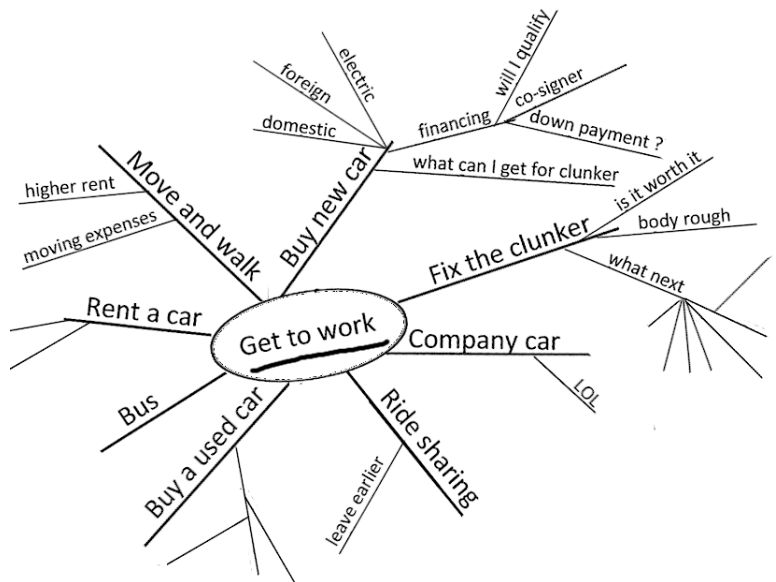
This Spider-Web technique is one method that was not on the group list on the previous pages. We saved it for this section because it is a favourite among individuals and easy to employ.

This is a visual note-taking technique that diagrams your thought-processes. One idea will stimulate many other related ideas. This method can be comparable to mindmaps.

- Write the topic or the problem in a circle in the middle of a page.
- Draw lines out from the circle for subject headings. You could number each line. These subject headings become just possible ideas for solutions to the problem. Here is an example. Say you have a transportation problem, and your main priority is going back and forth to work. Your subject headings might be:

1. Ride sharing
2. Buy new car
3. Buy used
4. Rent a car
5. Take public transportation
6. Company car
7. Move closer to work and walk
8. Fix the car you have

- Next draw new lines out from the subject headings and write an idea — any idea — related to these subject headings.
- Continue to create more layers as needed as you write freely to follow any train of thought without criticism. The idea does not have to make sense. Do not even think about whether your spider web is lopsided rather than symmetrical.
- Remember to follow one simple rule for individual brainstorming. **Write first, analyze later.**



Want to get inspired? Want a do-it-yourself approach to decision-making and problem solving? Try conscious brainstorming. Brainstorming is both practical and creative when you want to come up with new ideas, explore assumptions and possibilities or open up new avenue for achievement. It can take a little time, but it can be fun. Who knows where brainstorming will take you next.

Expand your Discovery Network to Improve Idea Generation

Ideas are like building-blocks and the more you have of them, the greater the chance of finding innovative ways to combine them into something new. That might mean getting ideas from people who are not similar to you, who possess knowledge you do not have.

As a small business owner you should assess whether you are sourcing enough good ideas from outside your immediate think group. Make a list of the top ten people you would speak to about a new idea. How many of them have very different backgrounds to you? How many are from another country? How many are under 20 years-old, how many over 75 years-old?

You can gain insight and knowledge through customers or end users. You can keep current through industry group conferences, professional associations, trade journals and even suppliers. You can watch the competition. Inspiration can come from many sources outside your immediate industry, too.

Discovery Network of New Ideas and Thinking



How can you be more discovery-driven? There are specific actions you can take to improve your chances of generating novel ideas:

- **Create a Discovery Network:** Consider expanding your network to tap into unique sources of information: universities, independent entrepreneurs, investors, inventors, scientists. Exchange ideas with people from different activities, age and social groups. In building your discovery network, aim for perspectives no resources. Aim for diversity, not just numbers. You want to find events where you can intersect with different disciplines to get to know experts and generalists, people of varied background, experiences, and expertise in diverse fields, because they can make connections where others may not see a link.

- **Join Groups and Volunteer:** You can also join local business organizations that have networking events, such as your chamber of commerce. Local opportunities to volunteer with sports, art, or community groups that expose you to a variety of people. You can do that when you take classes. You may want to consider starting your own think tank, non-profit group, or advisory board and invite keen minds to join. Your purpose may open new avenues.

No matter how you make new connections the key to building relationships has to involve mutual benefits. That starts with being attentive to other people's opinions, challenges and needs. When you attend networking events, you will not build a quality relationship when you are there strictly to promote yourself or your business. You have to offer value to others. When you volunteer your time to local charities, advisory boards, or community projects, you establish a different type of rapport with people who get to know you apart from business.

- **Change the Range of Magazine Choices:** Magazines give you diverse perspectives to gain fresh ways of seeing the world. Read two or three magazines that are the exact opposite of what you might typically read to actively seek out knowledge across a broad range of other fields. Change it up every month.
- **Attend Conferences, Workshops:** Aim to delve more into subjects completely unrelated to your field of expertise. Watch Ted Talks.
- **Ask More Questions:** Ten or 100 times more questions. Be like a child that asks 300 or more questions a day. Translate statements into questions. Read and ask questions. Keep a questions notebook - log the questions you make, and review periodically to see what types of questions work best (What if? Why? Why not? How might?).
- **Get Out of Your Office:** Go to where your customers live or work. Schedule regular excursions to observe them in their environment. It may only take half an hour to go see how they use your product or service. They may already be doing innovative things with your product and could give you ideas for better features, better performance, more options, and so on.

Research shows that innovators show a far higher degree of experimentation than other people. You may have to experiment with different avenues of enlarging your discovery network. When you combine your skills of observing and questioning with the what you can derive from your discovery network it creates a potent mix for unearthing new ideas.

Inspired and Committed, We Celebrate Your Journey

At Corro, we believe in the power of people. We are inspired to expand humanity's capacity for wisdom, compassion, and courage.

In our commitment to helping you achieve long-term personal development and use your organizational platform for positive impact, we celebrate the journey of lifelong learning while fostering an all-inclusive community driven environment of meaning, personal connection, and fun.

Corro is not just a Work Space – Our Aim is Helping the Community Thrive through People Success