

## What is Brainstorming?

### Brainstorming Basics

Brainstorming is a creativity method, which aims at getting as many ideas as possible in a limited amount of time. Brainstorming is a group method, meant to take place in meetings or sessions. Traditionally the settings for a brainstorming session are a meeting room with a blackboard and a group of people. There are no constraints on the number of participants in a Brainstorming session. However there are some considerations that are good to have in mind. To keep the Brainstorming dialogue alive, you usually need at least 3 people, where one is writing down. On the other hand it is not feasible to have more than 6-7 participants, in order for everyone to have their say.

The session starts with choosing a topic and assigning a facilitator to organise the events and write down ideas on the blackboard. Then it moves into the actual idea generation. At this point all members must have in mind the basic principle of brainstorming: **The Principle of Suspended Judgement**. While generating ideas no criticising is allowed. The purpose is to let the ideas flow, valuing quantity over quality. When the session has ended, the ideas are recorded for evaluation, selection and further development.

The method can be used for idea generation regarding practically anything. You could be looking for a new product idea, new process idea or improvement of something you already have.

### How does Brainstorming work ?

In its most simple form, brainstorming is releasing all your judgement and preconceptions and letting your mind wander about a given subject. In order for a brainstorming meeting to stay on the subject's path it is essential that the session is given an appropriate name. A carefully chosen name gives focus and allows out-of-the-box thinking at the same time. It needs to be narrow enough to keep us within the right scope and yet open enough to allow crazy and out-there ideas. At the same time everyone is given 'permission' to open themselves for crazy ideas

Most of what goes through our minds when wandering, only makes it to our ultra short-term memory. That is why it is essential that every idea is written down, as it comes forth. Numbering the ideas at the same time gives us the extra opportunity of relating each idea to a specific number and thereby remember it better when going over the session at a later time.

Sometimes we need to dig deeper into specific ideas. That can be done by brainstorming more about them, or we could try using other creativity techniques.

## How do other Creativity Techniques work and how can they help me ?

Brainstorming is not the only creativity technique. There are tons of alternatives, each with its own applicability and pros and cons. These techniques can be compared to tools in a toolbox. In a typical toolbox you need a hammer, different screwdrivers, and so on. In much the same way we need different creativity techniques for different problem solving purposes.

We have chosen to use the brainstorming setting as fundamental and pull in other techniques as needed. We have tried to put together simple, representative techniques that cover the most common needs. In other words: the basic tools.

These tools can add input to the sessions. Random Input Methods for example represent a very simple way to encourage lateral thinking. They help you discover new connections and ideas. This often seemingly out of nowhere.

## What is Negative Brainstorming ?

Negative, or reverse, brainstorming is another way to brainstorm. The same basic rules apply as in regular brainstorming, but here you try to see things in a different light. For example in a regular brainstorming session you could be trying to figure out how you would solve a problem, whereas a negative brainstorm you could be letting your mind wander on how you would absolutely not solve the same problem. Or instead of pondering on how to design a new product, imagine how you would NOT design it. This can give interesting angles, and certainly give rise to new ideas. We often focus on the negatives and are usually quite good at finding downsides, faults and flaws, so why not try to use it to our advantage.

A 'negative brainstorming' session could start out with figuring out a good name for a regular session and then reversing that name. Or first turning the problem upside down and then figuring a suitable name.

## < Guidelines for Brainstorming

### *"Rules"*

- Suspend judgement
- Every idea is accepted and recorded
- Be silly and have fun

### *Preparation*

- Have a good and friendly space
- Build good atmosphere
- Have a warm up
- Have someone assigned to write down all the ideas as they occur
- Use the right mix of people, background
- Assign a facilitator to help enforce the "rules" and facilitate the proceedings
- Select criteria for an idea to be considered good

### *Actual Brainstorm*

- Define the problem explicitly
- Make a clear problem statement and use as a headline
- Get as many ideas as possible
- Encourage people to build on the ideas of others
- Encourage way-out and odd ideas
- Have numbers on all the ideas
- Don't write everything down - Don't lose yourself in detail
- Stop when the idea flow slows down

### *Follow-up*

- Go through the results of the meeting
- Evaluate and criticise each idea with respect to each criteria chosen in the preparation
  - for example using Six Mood Cabs
  - Remember that some ideas may fail to be evaluated according to the chosen criteria. Don't discard any ideas on account of this. Rather put them under a 'special ideas' category and try to evaluate them on their own premises.
- Think of ways to connect ideas
- Select the ideas with the best total potential and build on them

## Advanced Brainstorming

The more you brainstorm, the more comfortable you will become with using the method. The guidelines above are intended to be a starting point for new brainstormers. More experienced users should build their own rules and guidelines to best suit them.

For more information visit our website:

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