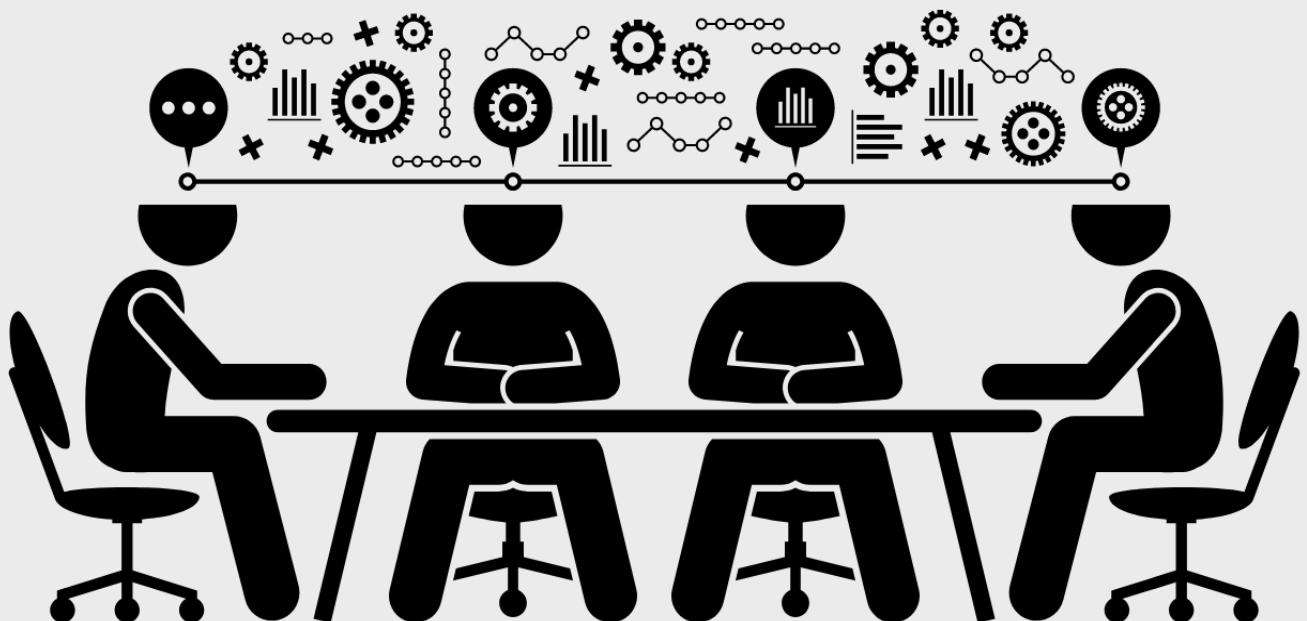


DR. CYNTHIA HOWARD

BRAIN- STORMING

Power Up Thinking



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Think Up: Introduction to Brainstorming

Brainstorming was invented by businessman Alex Osborn in 1938. He called it, “Think Up.” He recognized that traditionally organized meetings were not amenable to generating ideas; he wanted to avoid group think. Imagine even back then, meetings were not always helpful!

His four rules, no criticism of ideas, go for quantity vs quality of ideas, build on each other’s ideas, and encourage wildcard ideas are still applicable and the foundation of a brainstorming session.

Think of brainstorming as a gentle way to get people out of stuck, status quo thinking by encouraging wildcard ideas. This is why people should avoid criticizing or drawing conclusions during the idea generation phase of brainstorming. The goal in this phase is to generate as many ideas as possible and to break apart any assumptions, people are operating under.

Analysis of the ideas and judgment comes in another step. Ideas are evaluated at the end of the session.

There are a variety of approaches to get people in a state of mind for successful brainstorming. The best sessions happen when people:

- Are in a relaxed mindset and have time to go through the process
- Feeling positive about the challenge being evaluated
- Have a safe environment where they can share out of the box thinking
- Care about the outcomes (they are invested in the process)

WHY USE BRAINSTORMING?

Problem solving can be undermined by certain behaviors that show up in groups such as rigid thinking, dominance by one member or idea and analysis paralysis. While a structured, analytical process is important for the framework of problem-solving, it will limit creativity when applied to all phases of the process.

Brainstorming can be used in many different ways and for a variety of applications. One of the key benefits is it helps to bring out the diversity of the group and encourages team members to keep pushing until they find ideal solutions versus the first best idea.

Brainstorming is a team building activity.

When the team uses this approach, there is greater buy-in since they were directly involved in the creating the solution. The session is fun, and this helps to bring team members closer as the focus on positive outcomes and the goal is to create something together.

What problems or challenges are you working on that would benefit from a few brainstorming sessions? Write them out:

Individual Brainstorming

While groups often have greater success in bringing about ideas and new ways of thinking, there are times when you might want to brainstorm as an individual.

With the right preparation you can have a great session. We highly recommend using individual brainstorming as an exercise in unleashing your own creativity.

As an individual you may come up with better quality ideas than if you did this in a group. First there is no one else influencing your thoughts, or pressure from the group to come up with the best idea, or pressure to conform.

Here are tips to help you with a powerful individual brainstorming session:

- 1.) Make sure you will not be disturbed.
- 2.) Sit in a chair with your feet on the floor so you are not tempted to fall asleep.
- 3.) Use a mind map approach versus an outline format so you can see associations and build on that pattern.
- 4.) Resist judging or editing any idea in the generation phase. You can go back later and expand on the ideas.
- 5.) When you feel like you are done, push yourself to come up with at least 3 more ideas.
- 6.) Designate a time period for the session. Set your timer.
- 7.) Put your mind map away and come back the next day and add to the map with additional ideas.
- 8.) Schedule a separate session to go back and evaluate your ideas.

What challenges would benefit from an individual brainstorming session? Write them out:

Group Brainstorming Step-by-Step Instructions

Step 1: Select group members

When selecting members for the group, select those that are both outgoing and a bit reserved. You want people from different backgrounds and skill sets to provide a wide-ranging perspective.

The caution when selecting members for the session is in attitude. You want people who provide thoughtful, positive feedback and will take this responsibility seriously and not derail the group with negative input.

Keep the group between 5-9.

Step 2: Select the environment.

Make sure that the room is well-lit, there is room to move around, and you are able to place the chart and table without being cramped. Have water, coffee, or tea available along with post-its, markers, pad pens and props to lighten the mood.

Tip: Too much food can dampen the brainstorming process by distracting people from the process.

Step 3: Assign a scribe

It is important to have someone dedicated to writing the ideas down. If you are using post-its and a flip chart the transcription can take place after the event. It is not enough to take a picture of the charts with your phone, you want all the ideas written down.

Step 4: Getting started

Begin with an icebreaker. Even if the group knows each other, it can be helpful to use an activity to warm people up. Consider something that does not require talking, it can be tossing a ball to different people, or moving about the room, playing a version of musical chairs.

5-minute activity to get people moving around.

Step 5: Present the Problem

The problem would have been selected prior to the group meeting. This may be decided on by a smaller group or by the manager. In this brainstorming session, clearly define the problem that you want to solve including any requirements needed to solve this problem.

Establish the goal for the meeting: Generate as many ideas as possible. Very simple you are going for quantity in this first pass.

Step 6: Give people 10 minutes at the start

After you have defined the problem have everyone write down as many ideas as they can in a 10-minute period.

Step 8: Have everyone share their ideas

Using post-its or calling the ideas out and having someone write them on the board, generate ideas and write them down. Choose the way in which ideas are shared and stick to that. It can get confusing and distracting if everyone is jumping up and doing something different.

Step 9: Build on others' ideas

Once ideas have been shared, guide a discussion to build on the ideas presented.

Preambles or lengthy explanations are not appropriate and should be redirected, because this can cloud judgment of force conformity. Evaluation of ideas comes in another session. as.

This part of the brainstorming session is powerful and will further develop ideas and increase creativity. Keep the flow going! Encourage everyone to contribute, especially the quiet people who often have the best ideas. Discourage any critiquing of ideas.

FACILITATOR TIPS:

If you are the Facilitator, you can share ideas, however your main role is to manage the group and keep the flow going. Keep discussions to one topic at a time and refocus as needed. Call on people as needed and ask those dominating to sit tight while others have a chance to share their thoughts.

This session is supposed to be fun, so keep the instruction light and to a minimal. Set up the group rules in the beginning. Use cue cards to remind people as the meeting is going on.

When there is a lull, move on to the next topic, do not stay too long on a topic. The goal is to generate ideas, not find the perfect idea.

Do not drill down on an idea in great detail. Some members may want to take a “time out” so they can think more deeply, allow them to do so, but bring them back into the conversation.

Also take breaks, either to throw the ball around, use the restroom or have something to drink. Keep them short.

ADDITIONAL BRAINSTORMING TECHNIQUES

The following are ideas you can use either when ideas are not being generated or the quality of ideas are not that good.

Reverse Brainstorming

This technique is the opposite of finding solutions; it is identifying ways the problem will fail. This might be helpful if you have a negative group. You can use this initially and exhaust the negativity and then switch and have everyone think only of the positive solutions.

Question Burst

This approach has people think of questions that can be asked to further solve a problem. Think only of questions vs solutions. The idea behind asking questions is it helps to reframe the problem. This can be powerful. This happened on the world stage in the late 1990's when all psychologists were evaluating mental health and identifying the symptoms that went with each disorder to make identification easier. One psychologist (Seligman) came along and reframed the question and asked if healthy conditions or flourishing could also be measured and recognized with a set of identifying traits or conditions – and positive psychology was born.

Be sure to set out the rules for this Question Burst that only questions are accepted and if there are discussion, preambles or explanations provided they will be stopped so as to not interfere with the question generation phase.

- Taking on alternative personas can be helpful in a new perspective
- Questions like, “What’s working, what’s not” (descriptive questions) can move people to speculate, “What if, why not, what might happen if.”
- Not all questions are created equal.
- Keep questions open ended.

- Avoid antagonizing questions or those that are aggressive or designed to put people down.

Stepladder Technique

Allow ideas to be contributed by one person at a time. This may help quiet the super active members and allow time/ space for the more reserved members to share.

Brainwriting

This is when ideas are written out and not shared verbally. This encourages everyone to share and generate ideas without the influence of the group.

Role-storming

This is a great variation on brainstorming and especially helpful when there might be misunderstanding between departments or roles. In this variation, group members are asked to first take on the role of someone else before coming up with ideas.

Round Robin Brainstorming

Preparation:

1. Convene your group to use this approach.
2. Decide on the problem you want to solve.
3. Assign a scribe to write down the ideas.

Session: Step-by-Step

1. Have everyone seated at a table, preferably round or across from each other at a rectangle.
2. Discuss the problem.
3. Go around the table and allow each member to state one idea.
4. Write down each idea for further discussion.

Variations:

If you have an inhibited group or controversial topic: Have everyone submit their ideas in writing and then the scribe posts these on the flip chart or whiteboard. This is helpful if you have more introverts in the group or when the topic may be controversial.

Large Group: Divide the group into smaller groups. Have each group develop one idea. Write that on an index card and rotate the cards among the groups, so that each group is working on someone else's idea.

Key Points

Round-Robin Brainstorming is a tool to generate ideas among your team without being influenced or pressured by others in the group.

This brainstorming approach ensures everyone on the team gets an equal say in the ideas generated.

Variations on this approach are available to accommodate the size and context of the group.

There are some disadvantages to Round-Robin Brainstorming, so it is not applicable in all situations.

Organizing and Evaluating Ideas

Now that you have had an amazing session and you have lots of ideas – what is next?

It is time to organize the ideas and analyze them to find the best ideas.

USE AN AFFINITY DIAGRAM

When you use post-its to write out each idea, it is easy to sort these into groups. As you look at all the ideas, what patterns or themes emerge? Sort the ideas into those groups with a header. Let's use an example, let's say the identified problem is to "Developing a Continual Improvement model." Look at the Affinity Diagram below.

Headers	i.e. Groupthink	Lack of Planning	Lack of TQM Skills
Individual ideas grouped according to categories	We have always done it this way.	What comes first, the problem statement or the team?	No one has any skills in the process.
	Sacred cows	We have to get tis done by the weekend.	Too many projects, not enough priorities.
	They need to change, not me.	I do not know what is expected of me.	What data should we collect.
	Why bother, I do not trust this is working for me.	What is the desired outcome?	Not enough time.

Paired Comparison Analysis

In this process you compare the options to each other and find the one with the highest score and rank. This analytic option is useful for ranking the different options and useful when there are no expressed priorities, or the options are completely different.

The tool compares each option and shows the difference in importance between the options.

See the worksheet with instructions.

Key Points

Brainstorming is a process that will help you move out of groupthink and unlock possibilities. By using this approach, you also build on commitment and buy-in since everyone was involved in the problem-solving process.

Message from Dr. Howard

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Stay energized!

Dr. Cynthia Howard

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