

BRAINSTORMING

Fostering the flow of innovative ideas

Brainstorming is a well-known method for collecting ideas orally. It encourages participants to think freely and openly without inhibitions, stimulating creativity and spontaneous thought processes. This method can generate inspiration for innovation. The topics handled can examine optimistic scenarios or wanted consequences and not only regard negative problem statements. Like brainwriting, brainstorming allows a group to focus on a specific and concrete topic and develop solutions or ideas for it simultaneously but individually.

Purpose: Knowledge construction

Group size: < 20

Duration: < 30 min

Multilanguage fit: no

Level of interaction: high

USE THIS METHOD:

- Produce ideas and stimulate creativity.
 - Define ideas.
 - Overcome blocks and think critically.
 - Plan approaches or solve problems.
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STEPS TO APPLY THE METHOD: _____

Preparation


1. Define the purpose of the learning activity and the topic or theme for the session. The topic should be specific and concrete and could be about a problem, a project, an outcome, an organization, or an idea.
 - During the brainstorming session, generated ideas need to be recorded. If you, as the facilitator decide to write down the ideas, it is helpful to have a moderator, to ensure that all opinions are properly captured and that the process is well managed.
 2. Based on the purpose of the learning activity: plan the session either for a small group of participants (less than 10 persons) (variation 1) or for more participants distributed into small groups (variation 2).
 - To encourage balanced participation, plan this session for small groups.
 - For both variations, consider applying the *Three Stage Brainstorming* approach:
 - The approach starts by conducting a short brainstorming on simple topics to get participants into the creative thinking mode.
 - Stage 1 “Brain dump”: participants share any ideas on the specific topic.
 - Stage 2 “Divergent thinking”: participants generate ideas related to those already captured, such as risks, implementation, or resources.
 - Stage 3 “Creative ideation”: participants examine ideas in more depth and reformulate them into possible solutions.
 3. Create a set of questions for the topic and define the time limit for the brainstorming session.
 4. Define the tool that you will use, familiarize yourself with its functionalities, and prepare the online space with breakout rooms.
 - a. Consider the use of a collaborative whiteboard or an annotation tool.
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Delivery

Start the learning activity

1. Brief the participants and explain the learning activity and its purpose.
 - Introduce the topic and explain that the intention of the exercise is to generate as many ideas as possible without thinking about them too much. Later on these will be discussed, analyzed and evaluated.
 - Introduce 4 rules: All ideas are welcome, think outside the box, judgments are not accepted, a free flow of ideas is encouraged and nurtured.
 - Show the previously designed space without zooming into the content (if using additional tools).
 - Introduce the tool to facilitate the learning activity (if using other tools). Include: Name of the tool, participants' requirements. **Note:** Allocate time in your session for participants to try the selected tool if they are unfamiliar with it.
 - Next, the facilitator presents a topic or problem to the group as a challenge and the time participants will have for the learning activity.
 - Variation 1:
 - Participants are given XX minutes to brainstorm. They write down their ideas individually.
 - Participants share their ideas orally within the group.
 - Facilitator records all ideas and clusters them into logical groups of related ideas.
 - Participants and facilitator discuss results.
 - Variation 2:
 - Participants are assigned to groups and distributed into breakout rooms.
 - Groups appoint a group representative to record all generated ideas.
 - Groups are given XX minutes to brainstorm. During this time participants write down their ideas individually.
 - Participants share their ideas orally within their groups.

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- All ideas are recorded in a place visible for everyone in the group.
 - Groups are given XX minutes to organize and prioritize ideas. The highest-rated ideas are clustered.
 - Group representatives present the prioritized ideas to a wider group.
 - Facilitator clusters ideas of all groups and discusses results with all participants.
2. Present the topic or problem, the timing for the session, and start the learning activity right away (variation 1) or assign participants to groups, distribute them into breakout rooms (variation 2). **Note:** Check on each group during the session.
 - Allow participants to work on the learning activity for a fixed time.
 3. Discuss, analyze, and evaluate ideas.
 - Variation 1: First, organize ideas by clustering them into logical groups of related ideas. Proceed with the discussion.
 - Variation 2: Bring all participants to the main room. Invite the group representatives to share the results of their group work.
 - Cameras and microphones are enabled only for the facilitator and the representatives of each group.
 4. For both variations: Consider using the Dotmocracy method to evaluate ideas jointly. Display all ideas and instruct participants to place a dot or other indicator underneath the most promising ideas. Select the ideas with the most “votes” for further analysis or action.
 5. Conclude the learning activity by conducting a participatory **debriefing** of the brainstorming session and announcing the best-evaluated ideas. **Note:** The ideas generated can inform subsequent exercises on the content, such as [Case Studies](#) or [De Bono Six Thinking Hats](#).
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Recommendations

- Create a productive, playful atmosphere to encourage participants to relax and share without inhibitions.
- Allow the process to take a natural course without time limits or directions.
- To make practical use of the ideas, follow the exercise with convergent processes to cluster and evaluate them.
- A simple way to represent the ideas collected is to use a free online tool to generate a **word cloud**: <http://www.wordle.net>.
- See the [Top 100 Lists](#) method for another approach to Brainstorming or [TRIZ](#) for reverse brainstorming methods.

Note: For the learning activity, you will need a timer.

TOOL TIPS:

<https://padlet.com/>

<https://miro.com/templates/brainstorming/>
