Step 3: Ideating and Brainstorming

Ideation is a process of generating ideas for the solutions to the problems you have identified. You'll **start with the questions you identified during the Define phase** and challenge your team to think broadly and with an open mind. This is where the true creative thinking happens. The goal is not to find the best solution, it's to think of as many solutions as possible, even crazy ones! You'll determine which ideas and solutions are the best later during prototyping and testing.

You will likely return to this phase again, after trying out some of your ideas. During the first ideation round, focus on generating **as many broad ideas as possible**. As you've learned more about what works and what doesn't, your subsequent ideation rounds can become more narrow, although you still want to keep minds open for ideas you had not thought of the first time.

Encourage your team to completely **ignore obvious solutions** and remind them that risk taking and divergent thinking are valued—**there are no bad ideas**. This is also an important time to harness the power of diversity and different perspectives, especially bringing in people who have no experience in this area. The brainstorming lecture and worksheet offer additional strategies that are important for any idea generation method.

There are a number of techniques to push your creative team to think WAY outside of the box. For instance:

1) Add constraints, such as removing certain options or requiring others. For example, you could ask the team to generate ideas based on the notion that there are no computers to use. Or, you could encourage them to think of solutions that would lead to a 10 times improvement rather than a slight improvement.

What constraints might you want to challenge your team with?

2) Ideating and Prototyping: You can also **ideate and prototype** at the same time, so ideas can be put into immediate action and testing, even if they're simply sketching or paper models.

Will you be ideating and prototyping concurrently? If so, how will you move between idea generation and into prototyping?

3) Mind mapping, which we talked about in the creative thinking section, is another great tool for ideation and it works well with groups or individually.

Look at the mind mapping activity and decide, will you be using this method?

4) Brainstorming, which we discuss in a separate video, is the **ideal method for ideating**. See the attachment that accompanies the brainstorming video.

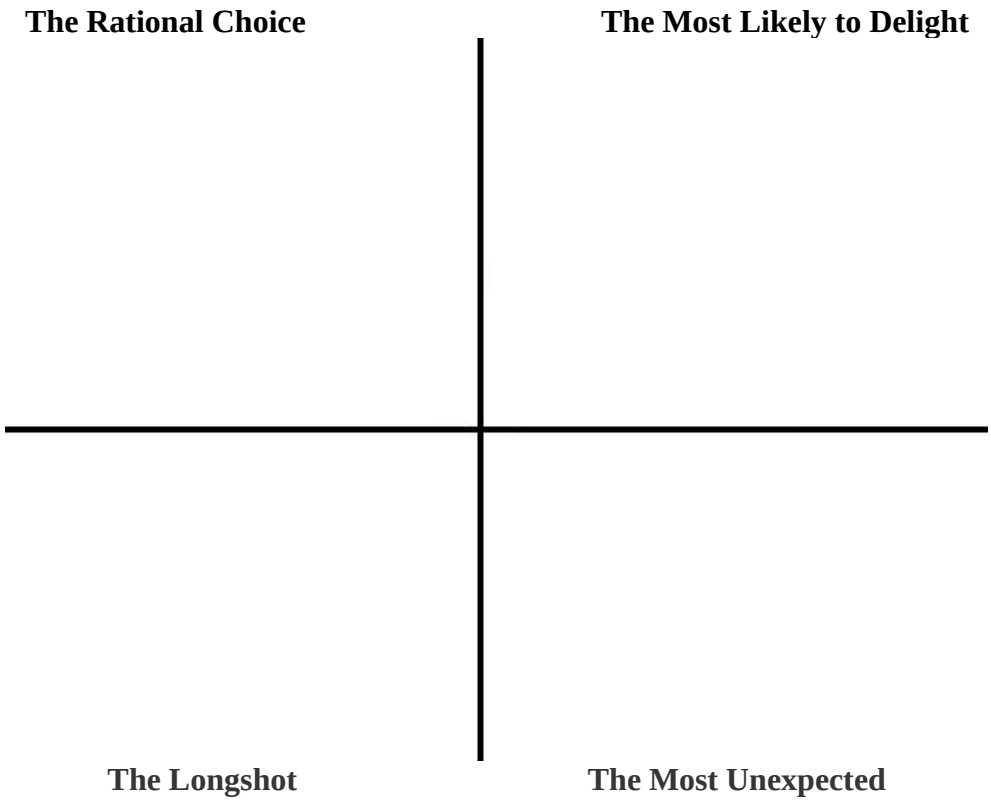
NARROWING IT DOWN

After you've brainstormed or otherwise generated your ideas, you will need to work with your team to narrow down the list and identify the ones most likely to work, or most intriguing. This is where you begin to evaluate the viability of each idea.

Voting Method: One simple method for this is to have each team member vote for their favorite, or top 3 favorites, and explain their rational for their choice.

Story Mapping, which we used during the empathy phase and elsewhere, is great method for narrowing down your list of ideas. Again, get out your sticky notes and divide a collaborate wall into quadrants, asking team members to take the ideas they like best or that stand out and place them into different categories. You can use the recommended categories or create your own:
The Rational Choice, The Most Likely to Delight, The Longshot, or The Most Unexpected. After this, you may need to use the voting method to narrow ideas further.

Your categories (if different than the recommend categories:



In the end, you'll want to carry forward multiple (usually 2 or 3) of the most promising ideas into prototyping. Of course, you can prototype more, depending on the complexity of your ideas and the type of prototypes. If there are too many good ideas to narrow down, select the ones that represent the most extreme of each general type of idea. Prototyping these will help you determine which direction is the most promising. You can always return to this phase later, after learning more through prototyping and then testing.

How many ideas do you need your team to narrow down to?

What will you do to aid this, such as choosing extremes or voting to narrow further, if needed?