# Cards Against How Might We?

# Cheat Sheet

We’ve prepared a HMW or two that unblock each of the blocker statements. These are based on our experience (and a few hard-won insights along the way.) These are by no means the ONLY how might we questions that work… but they are effective and they’re helpful examples as you practice this skill.

Use this cheat sheet after your group has brainstormed a bit. See how your HMWs compare. What other HWMs did you create that also work? We’ve left space for you to add your own.

| BLOCKER # | Effective HMW examples: | Insights behind this HMW: |
| --- | --- | --- |
| #1  We don’t have the people/time to take on new stuff. | **HMW** free up capacity to see if it’s worth the effort?  **HMW** estimate if gains/savings could cover the necessary investment? | “New work” is often experienced as adding to vs. revisiting overall priorities and work.  Factoring in what you can stop doing if you make improvements might change “the math”. |
| Your notes: |  |  |
| #2  It’s against the\_\_\_\_\_\_ policy to do that. | **HMW** ensure we’re correctly interpreting the policy? | What the interpretation of policy is, does not always reflect the intent of the policy. It’s important to check the source of the rules vs the understood implementation. |
| Your notes: |  |  |
| #3  There’s no budget. | **HMW** test our idea without spending extra money? | There is a presumption you need the budget for the entire “implementation” before you test an idea. The validation of the idea can help make the case if/when budget is needed. |
| Your notes: |  |  |
| #4  That direction needs to come from the top. | **HMW** use the authority we do have to make this better?  **HMW** clarify what decisions we are empowered to make? | Often people don’t recognize the autonomy they do have. |
| Your notes: |  |  |
| #5  That’s out of our scope / authority. | **HMW** use the authority we do have to make this better?  **HMW** ensure our work delivers on the outcomes that matter most? | If we always say it’s someone else’s job to change something… nothing is likely to get done. Focusing on the outcome can help see that there is almost something you **can** do. |
| Your notes: |  |  |
| #6  The minister already approved this specific approach. | **HMW** share what we’ve learned and how another approach could better achieve the outcomes the minister asked for? | Ministers may be interested in outcomes and results, it is unlikely they are prescriptive in the approach or “how”. |
| Your notes: |  |  |
| #7  I doubt that will work because I’ve seen a lot of things fail. | **HMW** get the most valuable lessons from previous failures?  **HMW** let ourselves start before we stop? | Past failures don’t predict the outcomes now. We shouldn’t let it hold us back from trying. |
| Your notes: |  |  |
| #8  Legislation takes too long to change. | **HMW** understand what exactly is required to make the necessary changes?  **HMW** find something we can change to make this work? | Legislation, regulation, policy are not all the same and changing them has differing pace. Policies, regulations, and laws were written by people and can be re-written. |
| Your notes: |  |  |
| #9  People won’t understand that. | **HMW** test our idea to learn what makes sense?  **HMW** communicate so that people understand what we need them to do? | We should not predict, we need to base decisions on what people actually do.  People won’t understand if we don’t give them the opportunity. |
| Your notes: |  |  |
| #10  The rules are the rules. We can’t change them. | **HMW** determine which rules apply and if they are flexible?  **HMW** make sure we correctly understand the policy intent? | Often the “rules” are not what we think. Interpretations become entrenched over time. It’s important to check the source of the rules vs the understood implementation. |
| Your notes: |  |  |
| #11  Too many things need to be changed for that to work. | **HMW** identify one change that will have the most impact?  **HMW** quantify the impact of keeping things exactly as they are? | Trying to change everything is overwhelming. If you break it down it becomes easier to iterate.  Knowing the real cost of failures in a system can change perspective. |
| Your notes: |  |  |
| #12  Including that other group will just slow us down. | **HMW** include others in a way that works for them, so we can tap into their expertise?  **HMW** ensure we have what’s needed to work together efficiently / effectively? | Including others doesn’t have to be “all together… all the time”.  It’s also risky to exclude expertise that might be important to the success of your work. |
| Your notes: |  |  |
| #13  Someone already tried that three years ago. It didn’t work. | **HMW** learn from that experience, so we can incorporate those insights into what we are trying to do? | There are many reasons that something may not have succeeded. Situations and conditions can change over time. A single failure doesn’t invalidate an idea. |
| Your notes: |  |  |
| #14  The people / experts we need are not available. | **HMW** leverage talents and expertise in people we already have?  **HMW** adapt our approach so we can include the expertise we need? | Expertise can be found in many places and are not limited to one person. |
| Your notes: |  |  |
| #15  We don’t have time to research with users. | **HMW** know if these ideas will work for the people who will be most impacted?    **HMW** gain insights that increase our confidence we’re on the right track? | User research doesn’t need to be lengthy or expensive.  Multiple check-ins with users as you proceed helps reduce risk and improve outcomes. |
| Your notes: |  |  |
| #16  Staff don’t like change. They won’t agree. | **HMW** learn from staff what they wish was different or have already “hacked”?  **HMW** include staff impacted by changes in this process? | People doing the work often find ways to compensate for something that doesn’t work well.  Changes imposed are very different than change you are part of creating. |
| Your notes: |  |  |
| #17  That’s just how it is in government. | **HMW** respectfully challenge the status-quo in government so we can respond to what’s changed?  **HMW** quantify the impact of keeping things exactly as they are? | The idea that we cannot change anything about how government works is untrue.  Knowing the real cost of failures in a system can change perspective. |
| Your notes: |  |  |
| #18  Privacy will never let you do that. | **HMW** check with privacy experts to find out what is possible? | Privacy is rarely a flat “no”. If you take care and work with privacy teams, they can ensure you’re compliant with the rules. |
| Your notes: |  |  |
| #19  We don’t even know how big of an issue this really is. | **HMW** estimate the scale of this issue?    **HMW** understand the impact of this issue on the people most affected? | Not knowing the size of an issue is not a reason to stop or not look closer before deciding what to do.  Even if the scale of an issue is small in terms of the number of people impacted, if it’s a significantly negative impact, it is important to know. |
| Your notes: |  |  |
| #20  That sounds risky. What if people don’t like it? | **HMW** describe the risk of doing nothing?    **HMW** check this approach with the people who will be most impacted? | It is natural for change to feel risky, but not changing is also sometimes a risk.  Testing an idea/approach early will help you learn more before deciding what to do next. |
| Your notes: |  |  |