

Ideation Phase

Brainstorm&Idea Prioritization Template

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Maximum Marks	4 Marks

INTRODUCTION

After having been inspired by customer challenges or problems through gathering data and insights, it is time to brainstorm and generate as many ideas as possible — as potential solutions. And then cluster, select, and combine the most novel ones and develop them into concepts. This is the Ideation phase.

Identifying new opportunities consist of first and foremost the identification of problems and their context before the generation of solutions, or at least ideas of potential solutions.

The objective of the Ideation phase is to generate potential solutions for the problem at stake. In the Ideation phase, the focus is on the ‘what if’ or ‘what could be the future’ after having focused on what the current situation is in the Inspiration phase.

While the inspiration phase was in the concrete world — the here and the now, — the ideation phase is in the abstract world.

The inspiration phase ends with the development of insights based on an immersion in the collected data resulting in the re-articulation of the challenge or the ‘how might we...?’ question. The Ideation phase requires the following outputs from the Inspiration phase:

- A well defined and articulated challenge/problem
- The personas for whom the team will be ideating for
- A team potentially made up of individuals from the Inspiration phase

The Ideation phase is composed of two steps:

- Idea generation
- Concept development

Idea generation: generating as many ideas as possible

Idea generation is 90% planning and 10% execution.

This stage requires a lot of planning and preparation to ensure that the results are rich and interesting.

For ideation, we need to designate a team, think of its composition and size, establish a positive and constructive mindset by adopting the right rules, be located in an inspiring place where data are displayed for everyone to observe, stimulate the creativity of the members, and follow

a process by having a facilitator, and mixing individuals to collaborative effectively and creatively.

Rules for idea generation

Ideation can be equated with brainstorming. However, we need to control and manage our brainstorming sessions to curb human biases and errors for desirable outputs. Brainstorming can encourage free-rider behavior, generate social anxiety, and downward adjustment and regression to the mean. In general, individuals generating ideas in isolation perform better when solving specialized problems, whereas, for cross-functional problems, diverse competencies attain better solutions.

On the other hand, the benefits of brainstorming in groups include increased motivational levels among team members and the mixing of expertise leading to original and novel ideas. Ideas generated through collective group efforts are much more accepted, enhance buy-in levels and ease implementation, regardless of the quality of the ideas. Here are some pointers on running effective brainstorming sessions:

- Mix individual and collective approaches. Start with individual ideation to tap into each member's creativity preventing the free-riding effect, regression to the mean, and similarity among ideas. Members should share their ideas within the team in collective creativity sessions to achieve collaborative creative work. Collective creative work enables building on and getting inspired by each other's ideas.

- Keep creativity sessions short and at an intense pace and avoid asking clarifying questions. Each member presents his/her idea, in short, turns to prevent members from self-censorship, evaluation apprehension, social anxiety, and getting into details of their ideas which could lead the team into thinking about what could not work and therefore stop the ideation flow — which is usually the biggest obstacle to creativity.
- Go for quantity over quality at this stage. Keep the flow to generating as many ideas as possible for now.
- Do not organize or cluster the ideas yet. During idea generation, the objective is to keep divergent, imaginative, and intuitive thinking, favoring the flow of ideas.
- Defer judgment. Do not criticize others, build on their ideas, and be tolerant, benevolent, and supportive.
- Be visual. Do not write, but show through drawings and sketches.
- Have an inspiring space for ideation. The sessions are to be intense and energetic, with short breaks during which the members can mingle and bounce ideas off of each other.
- Gather small teams. It is better to hold multiple sessions with small teams rather than have a big one — more ideas will be generated and it will avoid production blocking issues.
- Organize sessions with different profiles of individuals. A cross-functional team or even outsiders such as customers.

- Assign a moderator to make sure rules are respected. They will guarantee a constructive and positive mindset, the focus and intensity of the session, and that there is only one discussion at a time.

Enhancing creativity levels

To increase member creativity levels and develop more novel ideas, we need to build constrained context or environment scenarios for the team members — for this, we need to develop ‘What if...?’ scenario questions. Here are some tips that fall into this line of thinking.

- Share insights from the inspiration phase. This could be a quote, a story, a picture, a video, or a persona. What you choose and share depends on what you want the team to focus on.
- Perform some warm-up exercises. This can be physical as well some brain games to get the mind thinking in a more divergent and intuitive manner than being analytical and convergent. The warm-up exercises can also help break the ice between the members, especially if they do not know each other,
- Use trigger questions. It is helpful to think about unusual conditions to stretch our imagination — in other words, to think outside the box (i.e. convergent thinking). This is in the same line of thought as observing extreme customers and how they approach the problem. Here the emphasis is on the constraint of the challenge, and how these customers have managed to find solutions to their problems.
- Focus on extreme scenarios. Place the team in extreme situations: What if we had a stake of life or death? What if the market was eaten up by an incumbent with access to deep pockets?

- Use analogies, benchmarks, and metaphors. Here, you are pushing participants to make connections between apparently distant situations. For example, the idea of a co-working space such as We Work, where entrepreneurs/freelancers pay membership for a place and its services, could have been inspired by the metaphor of how a gym club works.
- Shift or skip roles. Start from the stakeholders' map or value analysis and switch some roles or twist the succession of steps. This is also a good way to generate novel ideas.
- Roleplay. The notion of role-playing allows people to step into the shoes of the people they are trying to provide solutions for.
- Imagine an ideal day in the life of the customer. Meaning, what if we were in a world without any constraints? What would that look like?
- Change the time horizon. Ask people to visit the future or to go to the past and see what it would look like in those timelines.

