**Brainstorming**

Every company does brainstorming, but some companies are better at it than others….

* What different brainstorming techniques there are.
* How to prioritize brainstorm ideas.
* And how to be creative during your brainstorming sessions.
* Let’s start..

What is brainstorming?

Brainstorming is a technique for working with a group to find creative ideas for a specific problem.

In short, brainstorming is a method to creatively solve a problem. In this, it is important that everyone has a good understanding of what the problem is in order for people to brainstorm accurate solutions.

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| --- | --- |
| Do’s | Don’ts |
| * There is a clear problem-statement and everyone understands what the problem-statement means. * Write down as many ideas as possible without regard to quality. * Encourage wild and unconventional ideas. . * Combine and improve existing ideas. Do the brainstorming in the morning, that way people still have enough focus. * Go into the brainstorm unbiased and open-minded. * Make sure people can read up on the matter beforehand. * Choose a facilitator to lead the brainstorm. Build on each other’s ideas. | * Don't Cracking down on ideas or making fun * Don’t deviate too much from the problem. * Don’t force people to talk or participate in a brainstorm |
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**Why is brainstorming important?**

Creative thinking shows us that there are multiple solutions to a problem and multiple ways to look at a problem.

People are often stuck in their ways of thinking because of the patterns they see, which is extremely bad for innovation.

Creative thinking helps to challenge our assumptions, discover new things, see from new perspectives and keep us mentally sharp.

**24 brainstorming techniques**

Brainstorming is not about the quality, but about the quantity of ideas.

You’re going to come up with as many ideas for a problem as possible, possibly with a group of people, for a set amount of time.

There are 24 methods you can use to make brainstorming more effective:

1. Brainwriting / Purge

Each member of the group has a certain amount of time to write down all his/her ideas. This has two main advantages:

Introverts get a chance to share their ideas.

It ensures that no one or two ideas dominate the brainstorming.

The result is a wide range of ideas that would not have surfaced if a few ideas had been discussed from the beginning.

2. The 5 Why’s Analysis

The 5 why’s analysis has become popular because Toyota used it as a standard process for root-cause analysis.

By asking “why?” 5 times in response to an answer you will get to the root of the problem or solution which allows for a broader perspective and better dialogue.

3. Starbursting

The starbursting technique pushes you to think about the who, what, where, when, why and how of an idea. Place your idea or problem in the center of the star diagram and at the ends put the questions:

4. Mind mapping

You place your problem or idea in the center of the board and start adding to it with new parts:

This also directly ensures that there is structure and that everything is broken down into certain topics.

5. Rolestorming

Try to imagine yourself as another person, it may be someone familiar or someone you know from your immediate environment.

If you can imagine yourself to be another person, ask yourself again how that would solve your problem?

6. Gap filling

See what situation you are in now (ready state) and see where you want to go (target state). Then ask yourself the question, how do we go from the ready state to the target state? What is needed for that?

The gap filling way is a good brainstorming technique to get from A to B.

7. Brain-netting

Using online software, write down ideas that belong to a particular problem or issue.

This is especially useful in preparation for a brainstorm so that people have enough time in advance to think about possible solutions without a lot of email traffic.

8. Round robin brainstorming

In round robin brainstorming, there is one person responsible for bringing up a question or several questions…

In this process, everyone must answer one at a time. In doing so, no feedback may be given or a second idea shared until everyone has shared his or her idea.

This brainstorming technique is ideal for medium to large teams where there are introverted team members or where there is a poor balance of creative input.

Tip: If someone shares an idea that has already been, give that person time to come up with a new idea.

9. Rapid ideation

Parkinson’s law shows us that we spend as much time on our work as we have available

Putting a time limit on brainstorming can increase the quality of the brainstorm. This allows team managers to maximize productivity and results.

Especially for teams with little time, who have little desire for meetings, or who are easily distracted, Rapid Ideation can be a good brainstorming technique.

10. Reverse brainstorming

Brainstorming sessions are often aimed at solving a problem. Reverse brainstorming sessions are aimed at causing problems.

Instead of asking “how can we solve this problem?” you ask “how can we make [problem] happen? From the answers you get, you can start to find solutions to possible problems that a concept or idea might pose.

Thinking of problems first ensures that the team then has a better perspective in solving the problems.

11. Stepladder brainstorming

In stepladder brainstorming, a problem is presented to the group where all but one or two people must leave the room….

The one or two people must then share their ideas after which a third person may enter the room to share his or her ideas, then a fourth, then a fifth and that until everyone has been.

The advantage to this brainstorming technique is that it does not involve thinking as a group, but allows everyone to share their own individual unique ideas without being influenced by the group.

12. SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis is not directly a brainstorming technique, but it can provide additional perspective during brainstorming.

SWOT stands for:

Strengths: what are the strengths?

Weaknesses: what are the weaknesses?

Opportunities: where do the opportunities lie?

Threats: what are the threats?

The SWOT analysis can also be the basis of brainstorming on how to assess a concept.

13. Eidetic image method

In the Eidetic image method, the group starts by closing their eyes to illustrate the current product in their minds…

Then they can start discussing what it looks like, close their eyes again and start visualizing what an improved version would look like, what features it would contain, what color it is, how big it is, etc.

This brainstorming technique works best when improving an existing product or solution.

14. Change of scenery

If you are constantly brainstorming with the same people in the same space, it can feel like repetition, which is obviously not good for inspiration.

By regularly changing the scenery or space and perhaps also the team composition, it is possible to tap into new sources of inspiration.

15. Drivers analysis

In the drivers analysis brainstorming technique, you focus on the causes of a problem.

Ask yourself or your team of brainstormers, “What causes [problem]?” and then “What causes [answer previous question]?

The deeper you can go the more likely you are to find the root of a problem.

16. Collaborative brainwriting

With this method of brainstorming, there is no need to dedicate a specific session to it….

For example, a facilitator hangs up a large sheet in an office with a problem-statement and possibly already some brainstorming ideas and everyone can contribute ideas in his or her own time.

This way everyone can contribute anonymously, just make sure it is clear to everyone when the deadline is to contribute.

17. SCAMPER

The SCAMPER brainstorming technique helps brainstormers look at a problem from multiple perspectives, SCAMPER is an acronym that stands for:

Substitute: evaluate what would happen if you swapped one facet or solution for another.

Combine: evaluate what would happen if you combined one facet or solution with another.

Adapt: assess what would happen if you placed one idea or solution in a different context.

Modify: think about how you could change an idea or solution to make even more impact.

Put to another use: think about how you could still use your idea in other ways.

Eliminate: assess what can be removed from your idea or solution to make it simpler.

Reverse effective: finally, you can look at how you can reorganize an idea to make it more effective.

During a brainstorm, it is helpful to use a SCAMPER template:

18. The idea napkin

The Idea Napkin brainstorming technique allows a broad topic to be broken down into tangible solutions.

Each brainstormer has an ‘Idea Napkin’, on which they write one idea and an elevator pitch of that idea. They also write down who they are trying to solve a problem for and what problem they are solving.

When everything is written down, the idea is for everyone to present their ‘Idea Napkin’ to the others, then all ideas are prioritized on an impact and effort matrix to determine which ideas are worthwhile:

19. 6 thinking hats

In the 6 thinking hats brainstorming technique, you need at least 6 people who are going to wear thinking hats. These different ‘thinking hats’ are going to allow them to look at a problem or idea from one specific angle.

There are 6 different thinking hats:

Blue hat (Conductor’s hat): manage the decision process, ask for summaries and come to conclusions.

Green hat (Creative hat): the green hat comes up with creative ideas and thinks in terms of possibilities.

Red hat (Hat for the heart): go out of your feeling and instinct, you don’t necessarily have to think logically.

Yellow hat (Optimist’s hat): with the yellow hat you look at problems with an optimistic view, you see advantages in everything.

Black hat (Judge’s hat): the black hat is very critical and sees problems in everything, it is important to see risks and dangers quickly.

White hat (Fact hat): neutral and objective, shares lots of statistics and facts.

+ Royal hat (Owner hat): guides the brainstorm, is looking for the balance between subjectivity and objectivity.

This brainstorming technique is useful to get an overall picture of one or more ideas.

20. ‘What if’ brainstorming

The ‘What if’ brainstorming technique is a good technique to bring out all possible solutions to a problem.

By asking questions like “What if this problem occurred in the 1800s?” or “What if our president would have to solve this issue?”.

By approaching it this way you can look at the problem and the solutions from different angles.

21. Random word picker

You pick a random word or animal and start brainstorming about how the word or the characteristics of the animal can help you solve your problem.

This brainstorming technique is really about getting new ideas in a creative way.

22. Storyboarding

Storyboarding is a brainstorming technique where you start sketching the problem and possible solutions. In doing so, you are going to visualize different parts of the problem and the solution which works extremely well for physical challenges.

23. Wishing

You start by wishing for something ‘I wish our company would make 10 million euros in profit’ and then you start thinking about how you can achieve this.

Try to set really ambitious goals, this ensures that you start thinking bigger and you will encounter other problems and solutions.

24. Crazy eights

In the crazy eights brainstorming technique, each participant is given a template with 8 empty boxes. The timer is set for 8 minutes during which time each participant must fill the boxes with 8 sketches of possible ideas. Repeat this process so that they can build on each other’s ideas.

**How do you prioritize ideas?**

There are several ways to prioritize ideas:

1. Dotmocracy

To prioritize ideas, it is possible to give all participants X number of stickers that they can divide on the ideas they have.

You can be creative with this by handing out different colored stickers to also vote on ideas that absolutely should not be implemented or perhaps an order in the ideas based on the colors.

2. How Now Wow

The How Now Wow technique is more about categorizing ideas based on how unique they are and how easy they are to accomplish.

After a team has written down ideas, they can be prioritized in the How Now Wow matrix:

How Now Wow

How Now Wow

How ideas: original but difficult to implement.

Now ideas: unoriginal and easy to execute.

Wow ideas: unique ideas that are easy to execute.

Obviously, you want to have as many “Wow” ideas as possible because they are unique from the competition.

3. Impact-Effort Matrix

The impact-effort matrix allows you to determine the ratio of effort to results and then prioritize the best ideas:

Impact Effort Matrix

You can write down where an idea belongs on the matrix or you can give points to ideas and use those points to determine where an idea will be placed.

4. I.C.E. / P.I.E.

ICE and PIE are well-known prioritization frameworks; they are acronyms that stand for…

ICE:

Impact: what is the potential impact if the idea works?

Confidence: how confident are we that the idea will work?

Ease: how easy is it to set up this idea?

PIE:

Potential: how potential is this solution to our problem?

Importance: how important do we think solving this problem is?

Ease: how easy is it to implement this solution?

Potential Importance Ease PIE

Idea 1 6 7 9 7,3

Idea 2 2 6 10 6

From these scores you can get an average, it is also possible to add a multiplier to certain parts of ICE or PIE that you think are important.

5. Feasibility, Desirability and Viability Scorecard

These 3 pillars are topics on which you can rank an idea:

Feasibility Desirability Viability Score

Idea 1 6 7 9 7,3

Idea 2 2 6 10 6

Feasibility: is it actually achievable?

Desirability: how much would we like this solution?

Viability: how confident are we that this will work?

This is very similar to the ICE / PIE framework, but the questioning changes a little bit.

6. MoSCoW

MoSCoW is a very well known prioritization framework, it is widely used to set up requirements for a particular thing and prioritize them.

MoSCoW is an acronym that stands for:

Must have: What really needs to be in it?

Should have: what should actually be included?

Could have: nice to have, is nice to add, but has no priority.

Would have / Will not have: we’re not going to do anything with this for now.

7. Multi-criteria Decision Making

In multi-criteria decision making, you write down what you think is important about a solution and prioritize different ideas based on that:

Idea 1 Idea 2

Cost 3 5

Scalability 5 7

Maintenance 2 2

Support 8 3

Average 4,5 4,3

8. The Value Matrix

Also called the Value and Effort matrix, this involves weighing the costs against the benefits:

The Value Matrix

The Value Matrix

How to brainstorm effectively?

How do you set up the brainstorm effectively?

Have a clear problem-statement

The better the problem statement is the better the brainstorming will go. It is easier to focus ideas on a situation when that situation is enormously clear.

Have a clear agenda

By just starting to do anything you will probably not find the desired solution. Make sure you have a clear agenda with times when you want to do something exactly. It is also important to make clear in advance what the desired end result of the brainstorm is.

Choose one or more appropriate brainstorm techniques

Each brainstorming technique fits a different type of situation, evaluate which brainstorming techniques exist and choose some to come up with solutions from multiple angles.

Document the results

By just talking and thinking about ideas a lot will be lost, document the ideas so they can be looked back at later.

Prioritize the outcomes

Not every idea has the same potential to be used, therefore it is important to choose which ideas can be taken up, which ones will be interesting at a later date and which ones can be thrown in the garbage can.

Get to work with high priority ideas

Make sure you have time available in the coming period to start working on good ideas.

What is creativity in brainstorming?

Creativity is the ability to think outside of traditional ways and come up with new, original ideas, methods or objects.

It is often thought that the left part of the brain is for creativity and that the right part of the brain contains analytical ability:

3 types of brains

3 types of brains

In creativity, it is about the networks between the different parts in the brain. There are 3 types of networks that are important here:

The executive attention network: allows you to maintain your attention and focus.

The imagination network: allows you to daydream or imagine yourself in someone else’s shoes.

The salience network: allows you to identify certain things based on old information stored in your brain.

What types of creative thinking are there?

At work, there are several types of creative thinking you may encounter:

Divergent Thinking: a brainstorming session where you write down as many solutions as you can think of.

Convergent Thinking: gathering facts and finding the most used and complete solution to the problem.

Inspirational Thinking: focus on the best-case scenario to find a new solution to a problem.

Lateral Thinking: reorganize information to come up with creative solutions to move from the ready state to the target state.

Aesthetic Thinking: solutions that we actually like, with a focus on structure, knowledge, composition, color and shape.

What is critical thinking in brainstorming?

A critical thinker does not simply assume ideas and assumptions, but will always be looking for more ideas, arguments and insights to get the full picture.

Critical thinkers will identify, analyze and solve problems in a systematic way rather than thinking from intuition or instinct.

A critical thinker is able to:

* Make the connection between ideas and in them determine how important and relevant arguments and ideas are.
* Recognize, build and evaluate arguments.
* Find errors and inconsistencies in reasoning.
* To approach problems in a consistent and systematic way.
* Reflect on his own assumptions, beliefs and values.
* Discover your creativity
* You are now armed with knowledge to set up the best creative brainstorming sessions….

What is a design sprint?

A design sprint is a limited-time process that uses design thinking. The goal is to find an answer to a critical business question or a specific problem within that limited timeframe.

What is the difference between a design sprint and design thinking?

During a design sprint, design thinking is used.

How to lead a brainstorm session?

To lead a brainstorm session it is important that you understand the problem, that you set a clear agenda, that you use the right brainstorm techniques and that you stimulate new ideas and don’t criticize ‘bad’ ideas.

How do you approach a brainstorm?

First come up with a clear problem-statement, then choose matching brainstorm techniques, plan a clear agenda and at the end prioritize the outcomes of the brainstorm session.

What are the prerequisites to a brainstorm?

There should be a purpose for the brainstorm, it should be with others, you should stimulate each other’s ideas, there should be no criticism of ideas, and make sure there is enough creativity.

What is a good brainstorming question?

Before brainstorming, the right questions should be asked, this can be done using Starbursting. Starbursting asks questions such as: how, what, where, when, who and why.

What is design thinking?

Design thinking is a problem solving method where after the brainstorming session a prototype is made to be tested in practice.

Design Thinking Process