**Starbursting**

Understanding New Ideas by Brainstorming Questions

Starbursting - Understanding New Ideas by Brainstorming Questions

Start your brainstorming with a bang!

When your team brainstorms ideas for a new product or service, you'll need to understand how each idea works. What features would it have? How much would it cost? Where would you market it? Who would buy it? And so on.

Asking questions like these is a valuable way of understanding the new idea, and of challenging it to ensure that all of the relevant aspects of it have been considered before any work begins on implementing it. But to get the most out of this approach, it's important that the questions are asked in a systematic and comprehensive way.

Starbursting is a useful way of doing this.

In this article, we'll explain what the starbursting method is, and demonstrate how to use it with an example.

What Is Starbursting?

Starbursting is a form of brainstorming that focuses on generating questions rather than answers. It can be used iteratively, with further layers of questioning about the answers to the initial set of questions.

For example, a colleague suggests a new design of ice skating boot. One question you ask might be "Who is the customer?" Answer: "Skaters".

But you need to go further than this to ensure that you target your promotions accurately: "What kind of skaters?" Answer: "Those who do a lot of jumping, who need extra support", and so on. This would help focus the marketing, for example to competition ice dancers and figure skaters, rather than ice rinks that buy boots to hire out to the general public.

Starbursting requires you to ask six different types of questions: Who, What, How, Where, When, and Why. By covering all areas, Starbursting is a comprehensive and systematic questioning exercise that you can use every time you explore a new idea.

Tip:

If you want to explore a really significant proposal, make sure you also use techniques like Risk Analysis and Impact Analysis to explore the questions you should ask.

How to Use the Tool

The best way to see the power of this simple but effective technique is to think of a product, challenge or issue to work on, and follow these steps:

Step 1

Download our free template and print it out or take a large sheet of paper, draw a large six-pointed star in the middle, and write your idea, product or challenge in the center.

Step 2

Write the words "Who", "What", "Why," "Where," "When," and "How" at the tips of the star.

Step 3

Brainstorm questions about the idea or product starting with each of these words. The questions radiate out from the central star. Don't try to answer any of the questions as you go along. Instead, concentrate on thinking up as many questions as you can and write them down beside the corresponding point.

Step 4

Once you have generated as many questions as you can for each of the star's points, work as a team to produce and discuss the answers. This should highlight any potential problems with the new product.

Figure 1 below shows some of the questions you might generate in a short starbursting session, focused on the skates mentioned above.

Figure 1 – Starbursting Diagram for New Product

Starbursting - Understanding New Ideas by Brainstorming Questions

Key Points

Starbursting is a form of brainstorming used to generate questions in a systematic, comprehensive way.

It works by prompting you to ask six different types of questions:

Who?

What?

How?

Where?

When?

Why?

It's a useful tool to support your problem solving or decision making processes by helping you to understand all aspects and options more fully.

Starbursting is a great technique for exploring a proposed product, service, or idea. Starbursting makes it easy to generate focused questions that deserve answers – and often brings up questions that would not be asked in a typical brainstorming session. In addition, starbursting can help team members to think through questions that might not otherwise be asked.

On the other hand, starbursting is not intended as a tool for planning. That means that even after all the questions are answered, you’ll still be leaving your meeting with no clear timeline, management structure, or project goals. You’ll have to follow up with additional planning sessions based on the answers you’ve generated before moving forward with a solution.

