

Divergent vs. Convergent Thinking



KEY LEARNINGS: DIVERGENT VS. CONVERGENT THINKING

Introduction

- Divergent thinking and convergent thinking are two essential modes of problem-solving and brainstorming.
- The key to effective innovation is using them at the right time and not mixing them together.

What Is Divergent Thinking?

- Definition: The process of generating many ideas without judgment.
- Encourages creativity, free-flowing ideas, and exploration.
- Focuses on quantity, variety, and originality rather than feasibility.
- Example: A hotel brainstorming ways to improve check-out might generate ideas like:
 - "What if there was no check-out process?"
 - "What if guests could text to check out?"
 - "What if a drone collected room keys?"

What Is Convergent Thinking?

- Definition: The process of narrowing down ideas and selecting the best ones.
- Involves evaluating, refining, and deciding which ideas are practical and feasible.
- Example: After brainstorming, the hotel team evaluates and decides:
 - A drone collecting keys is impractical.
 - A texting-based check-out system is feasible.
 - A keyless smartphone check-in/out is both practical and beneficial.

Why Separating Divergent and Convergent Thinking Matters

- Mixing the two at the wrong time kills creativity.
- Example: If a manager immediately dismisses an idea during brainstorming (divergent phase), it stifles innovation.
- Companies like Disney and IDEO explicitly separate these phases to encourage both creativity and critical thinking.

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Practical Applications

- Divergent Phase: Go for volume—more ideas lead to better solutions.
- Encourage even "wild" ideas (they may inspire real insights).
- No immediate judgment or criticism.
- Convergent Phase: Analyze, refine, and select the best ideas.
- Focus on feasibility and impact.
- Use ranking, voting, or structured evaluation.

Key Takeaways

- Divergent Thinking = Expanding possibilities.
- Convergent Thinking = Narrowing down to the best solution.
- Keep these two modes separate for maximum innovation and problem-solving success.

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