Top 5 Brainstorming Techniques

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Preface

Brainstorming is a creative thinking technique that has been used by management for over fifty years and was popularized by advertising executive Alex F. Osborn in the 1950's. This eBook describes five ways in which the technique of brainstorming has evolved as an aid to help you to find creative solutions to the business issues you face.

These five techniques are:

- Brainstorming

- 6-3-5 Brainwriting

- Reverse Brainstorming

- Round-Robin Brainstorming

- Rolestorming

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Introduction

Brainstorming is a creative thinking technique that was popularized by advertising executive Alex F. Osborn in the 1950's to encourage creative solutions in response to advertising campaign briefs from clients.

In his book 'Applied Imagination' he explained that not limiting the number of suggestions that could be put forward (and deferring judgement on them) resulted in a far greater number of suggestions being made and gave the group the ability to combine and improve on initial campaign suggestions.

This eBook describes five of the most popular techniques used in group situations to encourage creative thinking. Brainstorming has moved beyond just being used by marketing professionals and is now popular in all areas of management. Make sure that you know how and when to use each of these techniques to aid your decision-making.

1. Brainstorming

   One of the most common techniques used to creative new ideas is brainstorming, whether in groups or as an individual. To be effective management must encourage creativity by removing any barriers that existing beliefs, procedures or operations put on creative thinking. The purpose of brainstorming is to generate as many ideas as possible and then carefully select the one or two that will enhance your organization.

2. 6-3-5 Brainwriting

   When faced with a specific problem managers will find the 6-3-5 brainwriting is an excellent way to think in a creative way to fins the best solution. Each number forms a different part of the creative process.
   Six – people make up the creative team assigned the task of developing the ideas. A moderator aids them.

Three – is the number of ideas each member presents to the rest of the creative team.

Five – represents the number of minutes allocated to each stage of the process. (This time can be extended for more complex problems.)

3. Reverse Brainstorming

This method of brainstorming literally reverses the problem you face. This means that the group discusses how to resolve the opposite of the original problem. Reverse brainstorming requires that the original problem is very clearly defined and by forcing individuals to look at the problem from a completely different angle hidden issues will come to light. The improved understanding of the original problem then enables a resolution to be found.

4. Round-Robin Brainstorming

This technique of brainstorming provides a more structured format to a creative session. The problem to resolve is clearly and concisely defined and the people are asked to write an idea on the piece of paper in front of them and pass it to the person on their right. This process is repeated for the defined number of rounds. Individuals can use the idea(s) on each sheet to inspire them if they wish. Round-robin brainstorming ensures every voice is heard and is especially useful in groups that consist of a wide variety of personalities and cultural behaviors.

5. Rolestorming

This creative tool combines the methods of role playing and brainstorming. This technique assigns a role or persona to each member of the team, which dictates how they will think and act during the brainstorming session. The roles to be used in each

session will vary according to the problem to be addressed. The essential part of this technique is that no one plays themselves, enabling them to appreciate the problem from a totally different perspective.

Whether you work in a large multinational corporation or a small organization, a good understanding of how the various brainstorming techniques work is invaluable part of decision-making.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is one of the fundamental building blocks of creativity. If you have ever been asked to come up with a collection of creative new ideas – whether in the school or work environment – you have probably used some form of brainstorming as part of your process.
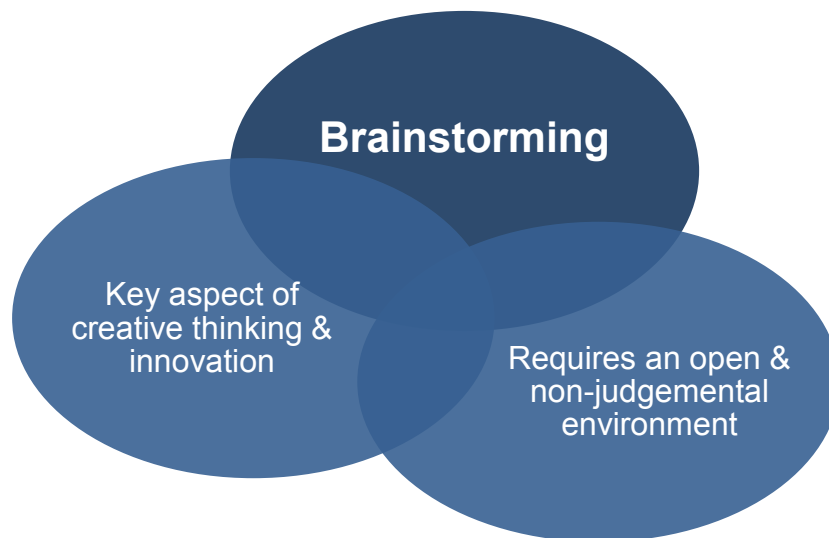
While you have probably brainstormed at least once or twice in the past, it is always helpful to review the techniques that you are going to rely on to be productive in business. By taking a closer look at how you can brainstorm effectively, you just may be able to get more out of this process moving forward.

It Starts with Freedom

One of the first things to understand about brainstorming is the fact that it is meant to be one of the most open and free tools of creativity that you can use. At first, there are going to be very few limitations placed on what can come from your brainstorming sessions –

> *The whole point of the process is to think of as many new, innovative ideas as possible.*

The time for practicality and rational thinking will come later on down the line. For now, you are going to keep your mind as open as possible while trying to collect a variety of potentially great ideas.

It is often difficult to get creativity flowing freely within an established organization because staff members are often reluctant to pose new ideas that may be seen as unrealistic. This is why it is important to create a brainstorming environment that is supportive and encouraging – you want to allow all participants to use their creativity as fully as possible.

Create as many ideas as possible

+

Not to be limited by practicalities

+

Most ideas will not be developed
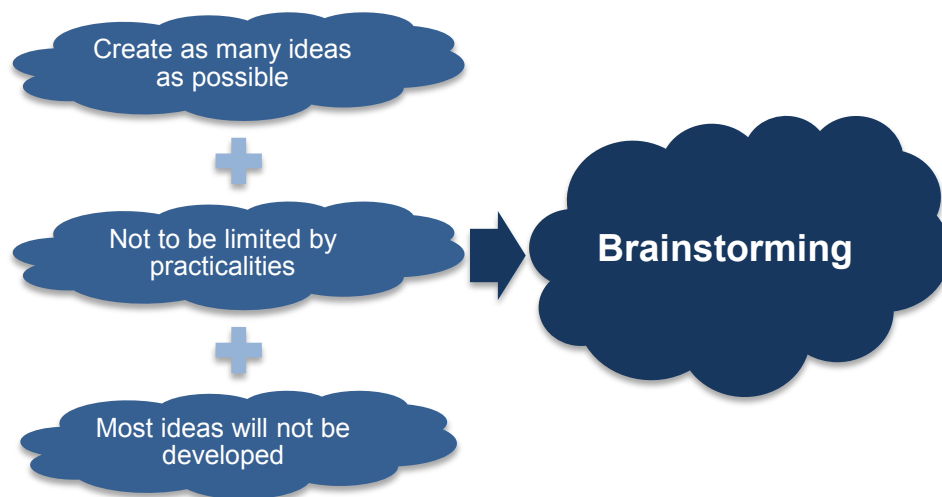
Brainstorming

It doesn't matter that most of the ideas shared during brainstorming will never see the light of day. You are looking for the one or two brilliant ideas among the pack that can change your business, and those ideas are only going to be revealed when brainstorming is used properly.

An Individual and Group Method

When dealing with business tools, the tools you will come across can usually be placed into one of two categories – individual tools, and group tools. However, when talking about brainstorming, you will find that this method can actually be used both by individuals and by groups.

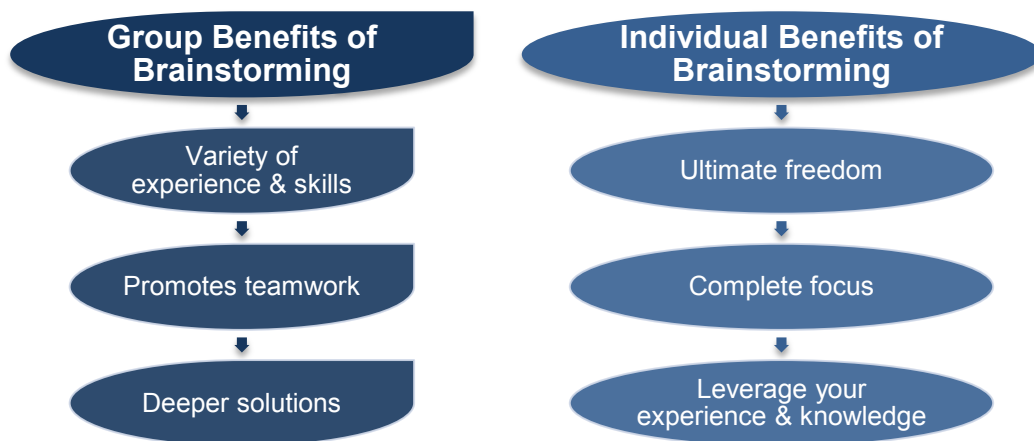In fact, there are some benefits to brainstorming alone, and there are other benefits to be enjoyed when you bring a group into the picture.

Some of the key benefits of individual brainstorming are as follows –

- *Ultimate freedom*. Even when all members of a group are instructed to be as supportive as possible, there is still bound to be some judgment and criticism within the process. That won't be

a problem with individual brainstorming, however, as you will be free to record any and all ideas that come to mind.

- *Focus*. Rather than being distracted by the conversation and activity of the group as a whole, you can focus in on the task at hand when you brainstorm on an individual basis.

- *Leverage your experience*. If you have detailed experience with a specific problem that needs to be solved, it may be best to brainstorm solutions to that problem all on your own. After all, you have the experience and knowledge necessary, so it should be just a matter of time until you find a proper solution.

Group Benefits of Brainstorming	Individual Benefits of Brainstorming
Variety of experience & skills	Ultimate freedom
Promotes teamwork	Complete focus
Deeper solutions	Leverage your experience & knowledge

Of course, there are plenty of benefits to be noted when talking about group brainstorming as well, such as the points on the list below –

- *Variety of backgrounds*. When brainstorming as a group, you will have access to the various experiences of all members of the group, so you will be more likely to stumble on a quality idea or solution. The group may find an idea that may have been missed by an individual brainstorming on their own.

- *Promote teamwork*. Every organization can benefit from bringing its team together to work toward a common goal. By having a productive team brainstorming session from time to time, you will be able to build morale and allow everyone to feel like they are having input in the process.

- *Deeper solutions*. Once someone within the group brainstorming session comes across a good idea, others in the group may be able to expand on the idea in order to come up with a thorough, complex answer to the problem at hand.
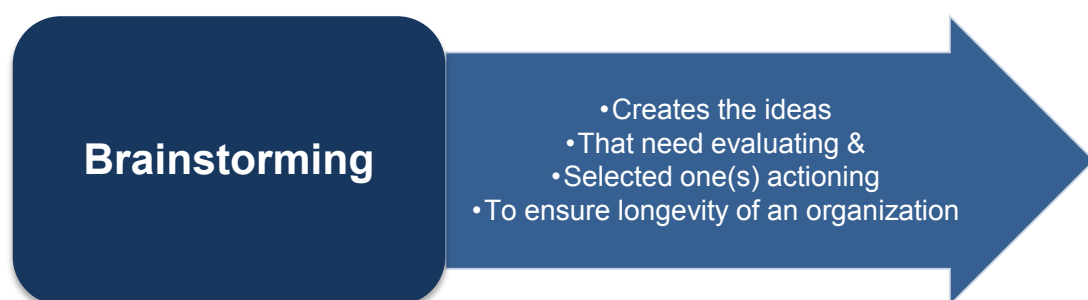
A Clear Problem

Brainstorming is meant to be a form of creativity that places an emphasis on freedom, but you still need to have some basic structure in place for your brainstorming sessions. Generally, that structure is going to come in the way of a problem.

What is the problem that you are trying to solve with this session?

By clearly defining the problem that you are trying to solve, you should be able to keep your brainstorming process moving in the right direction. This is important whether you are brainstorming as an individual or in a group setting.

Moving on to Other Tools

Brainstorming is a great way to 'get the ball rolling' with regard to the ideas you need to drive your business forward. It is not, however, the end of the road for those ideas. If you don't take action on the best ideas that come out of your brainstorming sessions, you will have accomplished nothing other than wasting some valuable time.

Brainstorming
- Creates the ideas
- That need evaluating &
- Selected one(s) actioning
- To ensure longevity of an organization

So, to make sure you capitalize on the great ideas that have come from your brainstorming time, it is important that you have other tools in place and ready to go. Tools that are focused on helping you take action on all of your great ideas are necessary at this point. Be ready to go with those next

steps so you can transition immediately from brainstorming into the action phase.
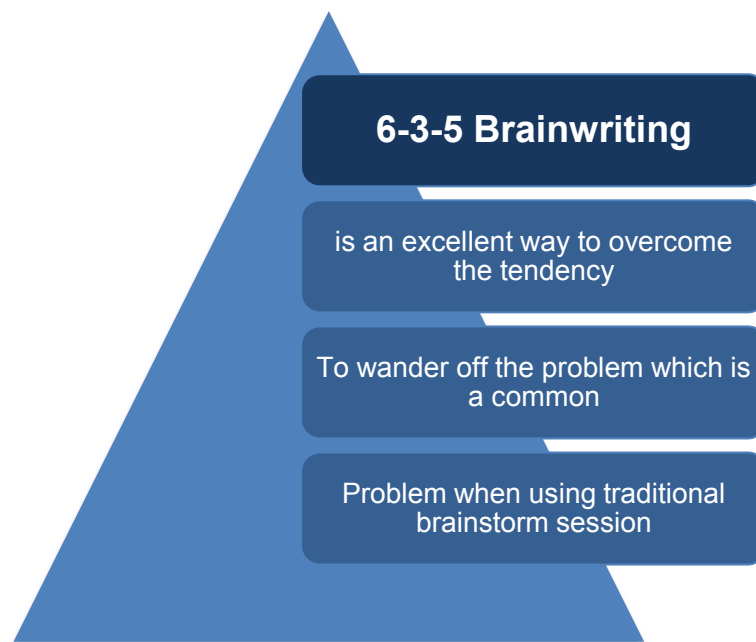
It is extremely simple to get started with a brainstorming session of your own, which is why this is one of the best creativity tools available to groups and organizations. Allow your people to brainstorm freely and without judgment - and you should be able to watch them flourish along with your company for years to come.

Key Points

- Brainstorming is one of the fundamental building blocks of creativity and most people will have used it in some form when trying to come up with new ideas.
- Even if you have used it before, it is such a powerful tool that it is worth taking the time to see if you could improve the way you approach it in the future.
- The most important thing is to create a brainstorming environment that is supportive and encouraging because you want to allow all participants to use their creativity as fully as possible.
- Brainstorming is meant to be a form of creativity that places an emphasis on freedom, but you still need to have some basic structure in place for your brainstorming sessions.
- The key is to have asked the right question or to have posed the problem in a way that at least some of the results of the brainstorming session are usable.

6-3-5 Brainwriting

As you already know, brainstorming is one of the most-powerful creativity tools available today. A simple brainstorming session can be incredibly productive, especially when you need to find new directions and possibilities for your organization. Businesses that get stuck in a rut doing the same old thing are unlikely to thrive into the future, which is why creativity tools like brainstorming are so valuable.

6-3-5 Brainwriting

is an excellent way to overcome the tendency

To wander off the problem which is a common

Problem when using traditional brainstorm session

However, while brainstorming is an excellent tool, it does have its limitations. There are very few rules that are to be followed when brainstorming, meaning that you may find your session's wind-up wandering off in a number of different directions. This can be useful on occasion, but you may also need to have –
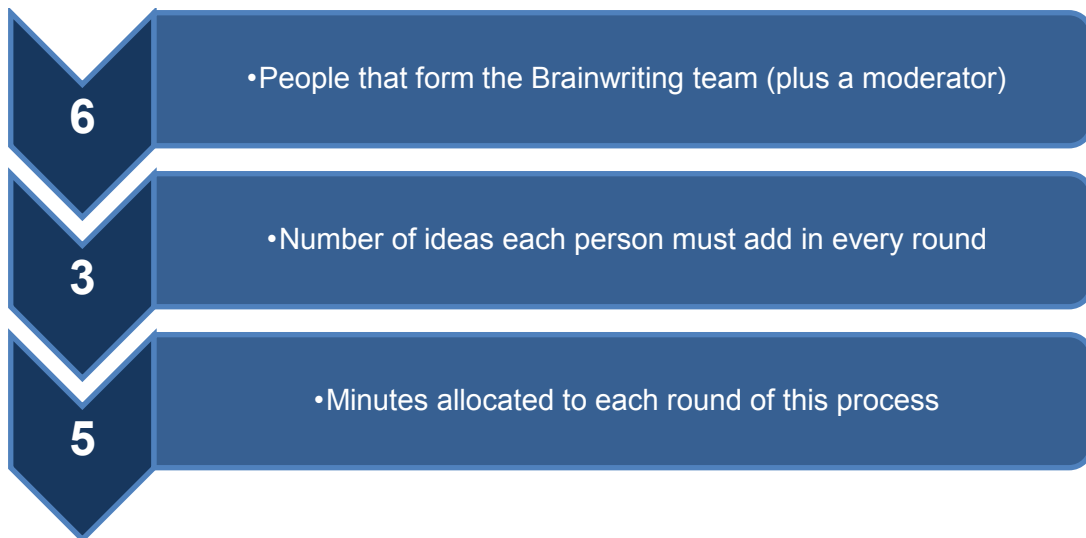
> *Creativity sessions that are more focused on solving a specific problem.*

When that is the case, turning to 6-3-5 brainwriting is a wise choice.

The Idea

It can be difficult to brainstorm in a group, as many people will feel pressured and nervous when trying to present their ideas clearly to others.

Often, one or two people dominate traditional group brainstorming sessions, with everyone else winding up in the background. It is usually the loudest and most outgoing people who have their ideas heard, which may or may not lead to a positive outcome for the organization as a whole.

6	•People that form the Brainwriting team (plus a moderator)
3	•Number of ideas each person must add in every round
5	•Minutes allocated to each round of this process

To get around this problem, you can implement the process of 6-3-5 brainwriting. Each of the three numbers included in the title of this system represents a different element of the process. The list below highlights the basics -
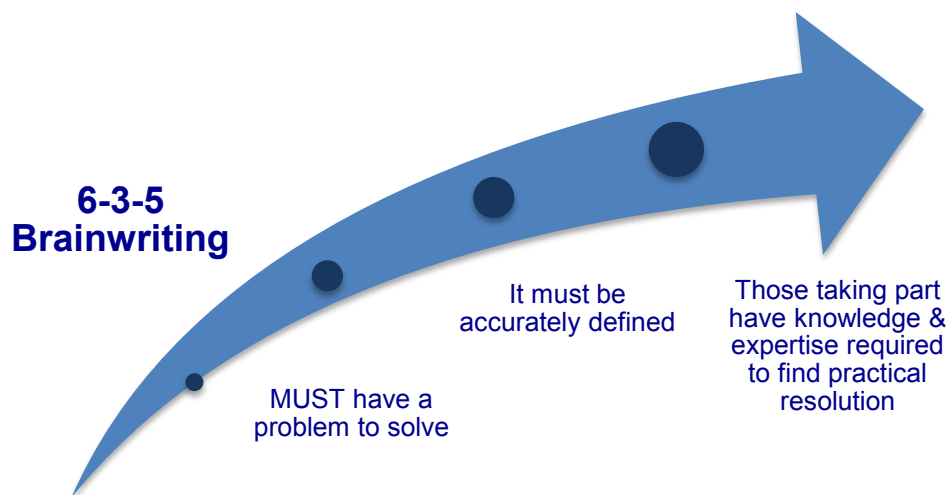
- **Six.** The 'six' in the title of this method refers to the number of people involved in the brainwriting process. There are going to be six people tasked with developing ideas to solve a given problem, in addition to one person who is going to serve as the moderator (for a total of seven).

- **Three**. During each round of the brainwriting session, each person involved is going to be asked to come up with three ideas. These ideas will be written down on a worksheet (more on the worksheet later). While it is common to simply write out the ideas that come to mind, some applications may call for ideas to be drawn or otherwise represented visually.

- **Five**. Five minutes are going to be allotted for each stage of this process, during which each of the six people will need to come up

with three ideas. While this time limit is helpful to keep people focused and to prevent the session from taking up too much time, it can be altered to suit the needs of your organization specifically. For instance, if you are trying to solve a particularly difficult problem, it may make sense to bump up the time limit slightly.

As you can see, this is a relatively simple process when you break it down into its three components. With six people participating actively in the brainwriting process, three ideas per round, and five minutes for each round, you can generate a tremendous amount of creativity within a very short period of time.

Setting the Stage

To get started with 6-3-5 brainwriting, you will first need to have a problem that must be solved. By carefully and accurately defining this problem, you should be able to generate more-relevant ideas during the session. Much of the success of this process is going to come down to how well you define your problem, so take as much time as necessary on that step before getting started.

6-3-5 Brainwriting

MUST have a problem to solve

It must be accurately defined

Those taking part have knowledge & expertise required to find practical resolution

One other point that needs to be taken care of before you get started is ensuring that you have six people who are qualified to address the problem at hand. The people you select to take part in this process should all have knowledge of the issue that you are facing, and they should all have experience in this area.

Picking the right people is another big step toward a successful conclusion, as those with the right experience are going to be the most likely to develop helpful solutions.

Putting It into Action

With everything ready to go, it is now time to go ahead and get started with the brainwriting session. Each of the six participants is going to sit down within a meeting room, and each will have their own piece of paper that will serve as a worksheet. At the top of this sheet is going to be a clear definition of the problem, so that the problem is always at top of mind and easily accessible.

When the clock starts, all six people are going to work on creating three ideas within the five-minute time frame. When time is up, each worksheet will be passed one chair to the right. Now, each participant is going to have a sheet that already has three ideas from the person sitting to their left. With those ideas to reference, another round is started and all six people create three more ideas.
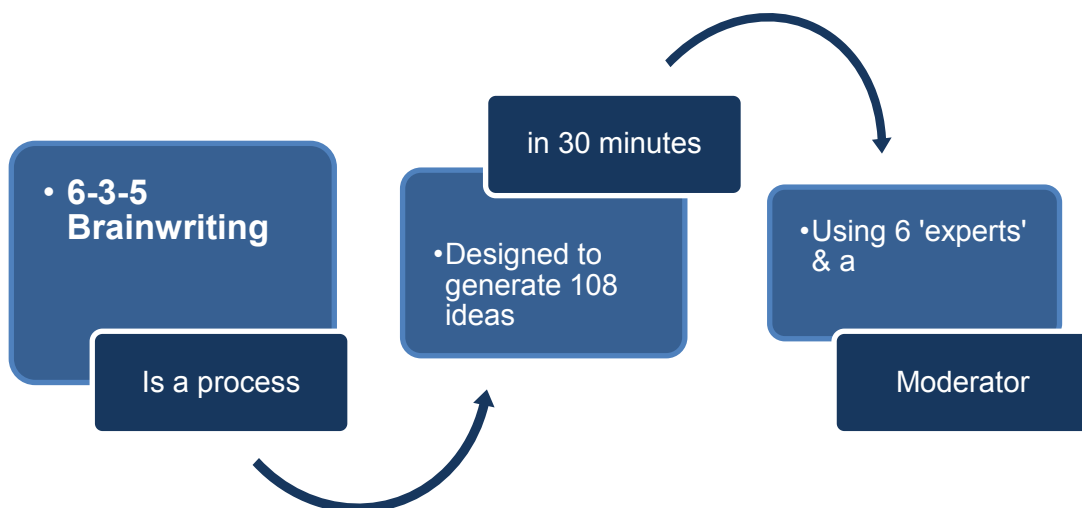
This process continues for six rounds, until each worksheet contains a total of 18 ideas. Obviously, with six rounds of five minutes each, the whole process should only take 30 minutes.

The Benefits

So what are the benefits of using 6-3-5 brainwriting when you need to solve a problem in your organization? First, there is the structure of this form of brainstorming session. You will be unlikely to waste time with this model, as everyone will know what is expected of him or her before getting started. Also, since each person is working on their own, there won't be any competition for attention during the course of the meeting.
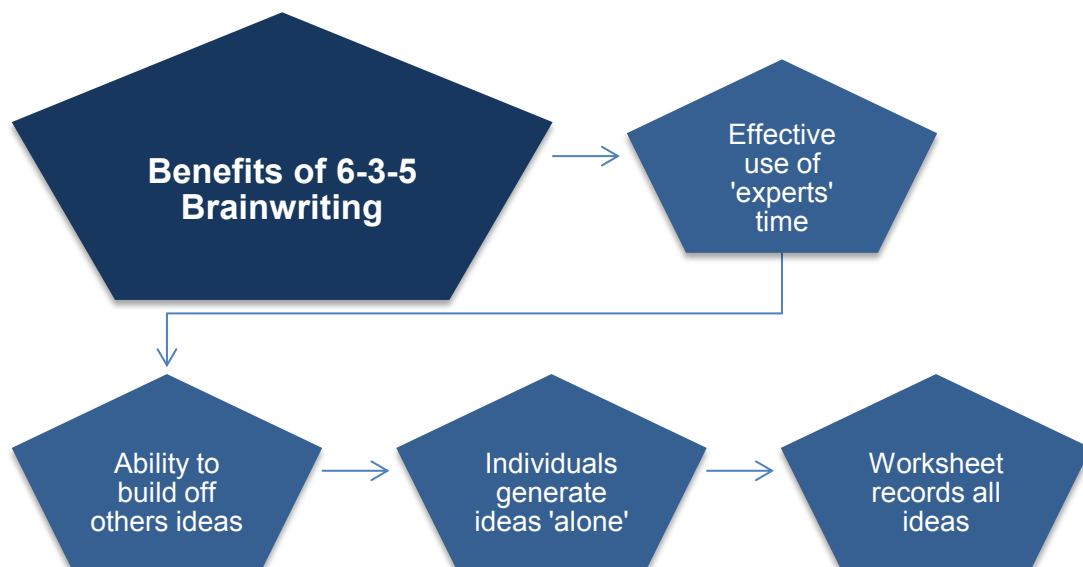
Another big benefit of 6-3-5 brainwriting is the ability for contributors to build off the ideas of others. By the end of the session, there will be a long list of ideas already present on each of the worksheets, and those ideas can be used to spur new thoughts. The cumulative effect can be a powerful one in this case, and it just might lead to the discovery of an idea that is perfect for solving the issue at hand.

6-3-5 brainwriting certainly isn't going to be the perfect creativity process for every situation that you face in your business, but it is a nice tool to have available. When a large quantity of ideas is desired, this form of brainwriting is an attractive option to be sure. With specific rules and a time limit in place, you should come away impressed with what this system can do for your organization.

Key Points

- While brainstorming is an excellent creativity tool, it does have its limitations due to the lack of rules and structure.
- Traditional group brainstorming sessions can easily become dominated by one or two people, with everyone else winding up in the background.
- To get around this problem, you can implement the process of 6-3-5 brainwriting.
- There are going to be six people tasked with developing ideas to solve a given problem, in addition to one person who is going to serve as the moderator.
- During each round of the brainwriting session, each person involved is going to be asked to come up with three ideas that are written down on a worksheet.
- Five minutes are going to be allotted for each stage of this process, during which each of the six people will need to come up with three ideas.
- This approach tends to save time and prevent the exercise from becoming dominated by the participants with the loudest voices.
- It also encourages contributors to build on the ideas of others because it takes place in several rounds.

Reverse Brainstorming

Have you ever felt like you are 'banging your head against a wall' when trying to solve a specific problem? If you have spent any amount of time working in the professional business world, the answer to that previous question is almost certainly 'yes'.

Sometimes, problems pop up in the process of running an organization, which are extremely difficult to solve. Of course, you need to find a way around these problems if you are going to stay on a successful track, so you can't just throw your hands up in the air and give in. When you do come across a particularly tricky problem to solve, the technique of reverse brainstorming just might be the way to find a perfect solution.

Reverse Brainstorming

Excellent technique to crack the

Most comlplex of problems

Organizations often face
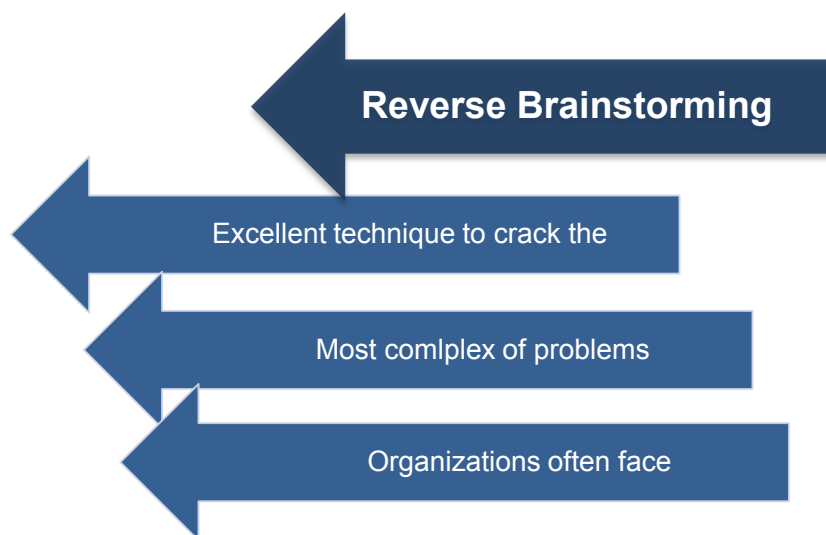
Most likely, you are already familiar with traditional brainstorming. This is one of the most open and free-flowing forms of creativity that there is in business, as it asks individuals and groups to simply come up with as many ideas as possible.

Standard brainstorming is great in a number of different situations, but it might not do the job when you need to crack a particularly difficult issue. Regular brainstorming will often take you in many different directions at the same time, which could lead to you getting off-track somewhere along the way.

Putting It in Reverse

To turn the standard brainstorming process on its head, you may decide to engage in a round of reverse brainstorming. Basically, the idea behind this process is to turn the problem that you are facing around so you are looking at it from the opposite direction. This concept might seem a bit strange at first, but it can open your mind up to allow you to see things from a whole new perspective.

When you are getting started with reverse brainstorming, you actually need to begin just as you would with any other brainstorming session – by clearly defining the problem. At this point, you are going to do things just as you would do them normally.

Reverse Brainstorming

Whilst it may not make business sense, the new perspective aids the creative process

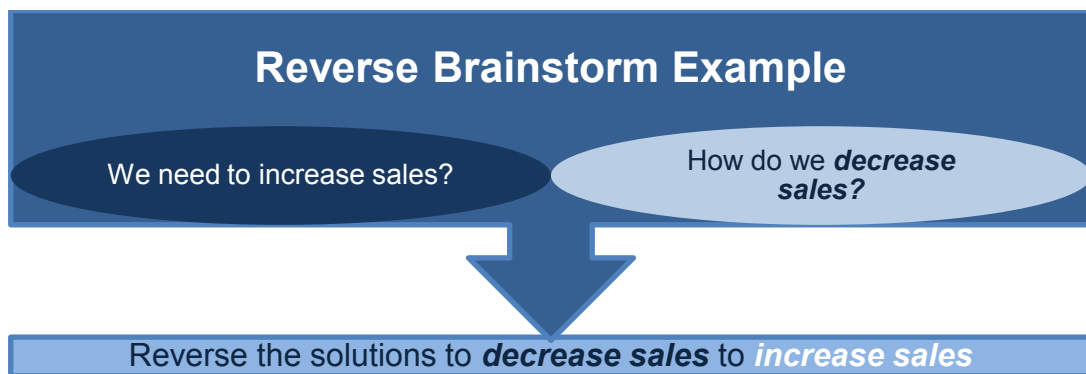Turns the problem 'around' & seeks out solutions to that instead!
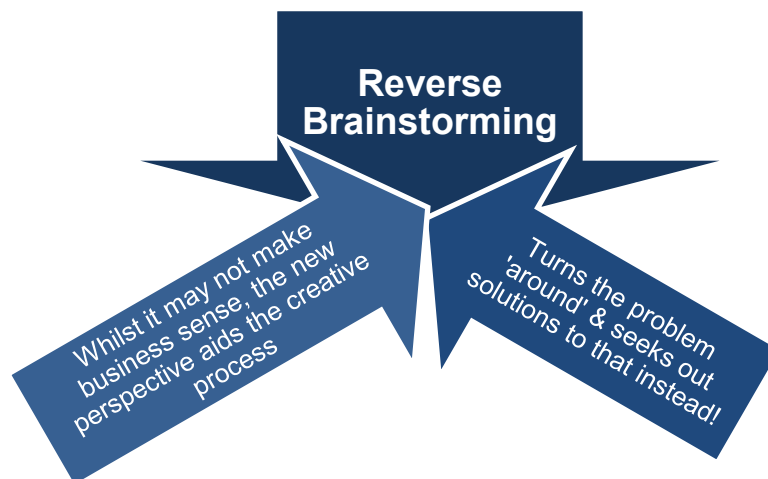
Take the time necessary to clearly define the problem that you are facing, and write that problem down at the top of a sheet of paper. If you are going to be trying to solve this problem in a group setting, make sure that everyone involved has a very clear understanding of the problem at hand.

It is at this point that the 'reverse' part of the process comes into play. Now that you have clearly highlighted the problem you are facing, you are going to totally turn that problem around in the other direction. When you do this, the problem will no longer make sense as a business issue, but you will be able to view it from a perspective that you have not considered previously. With any luck, a new crop of ideas will quickly come to mind when you reversed the problem successfully.

Examples

This concept is best highlighted through the use of a couple examples as follows –

- If the problem at hand is *'what can we do to increase sales?'*, you will flip that problem around and ask *'what could we do to intentionally decrease sales?'*. Obviously, you would never take action that would intentionally cost you sales, but you can benefit from looking at the problem from this reverse direction. While you are thinking about what you could do to intentionally sabotage your sales numbers, you just might stumble across actions that can be taken to have a positive effect.

Reverse Brainstorm Example

We need to increase sales?

How do we *decrease sales?*

Reverse the solutions to *decrease sales* to *increase sales*

- Another potential problem that you could have is the issue of too many of your employees leaving for other jobs. If there has been a mass exodus from your organization in recent months, the question of '*how can we keep our employees?*' is sure to be on your mind. To use reverse brainstorming, you would ask yourself what you could do to chase employees out the door. What would you do if *you wanted your employees to quit?* Things like lowering pay, offering less time off, micromanagement of the staff, and more are likely to come to mind.

Obviously, those are just two examples of problems that can be turned around when using reverse brainstorming. If you think about this process, as it would relate to your business, you can almost certainly think of many more examples.

Reversing the Reverse

To bring this process back to a point where it can help you solve the original problem that you were facing, you are going to need to reverse the answers that you developed (when addressing the reversed problem). To continue with the example of having employees leave your business, you might have the results of your brainstorming session look something like this –

- Paying less would drive employees away, so increasing salaries would be likely to retain a higher percentage of your staff

- Offering fewer vacation days would have people look for other opportunities, meaning extra vacation days would be a boon to your team

- Micromanaging your team would be likely to send people off, meaning you should be able to keep more of your staff by trusting them to get the job done independently

Get staff to leave		Lower wages & benefits		Micromanage people
• **Reversing the Reverse**	→	•Raise wages, pay scales & benefits	→	•Delegate authority & tasks

As you can see, the opposite of the answers you found during your reverse brainstorming session is likely to be something that can be seen as a solution to your original problem.

> *By turning the problem around, you can see the issue from a new perspective – then, when you return to the actual issue, practical solutions may be clear.*

The examples provided above are relatively simplistic, but this process can work even when challenging and complex matters are in play.

Most likely, you aren't going to need to turn to reverse brainstorming with great regularity. The majority of the problems that you face during day-to-

day operations are going to be able to be solved through traditional methods. However, when you find that you are stuck on an issue that is particularly tricky, try putting this system into action to see what it reveals. By turning your usual way of thinking on its head, you just may wind up finding the solution that you have needed all along.

Key Points

- Brainstorming is one of the most open and free-flowing forms of creativity that asks individuals and groups to simply come up with as many ideas as possible.
- Regular brainstorming will often take you in many different directions at the same time, which often leads to wasted time, as it is easy to drift away from the original problem.
- Reverse brainstorming begins by clearly defining the problem and writing it down on a sheet of paper.
- The 'reverse' aspect comes from the next step, which is to phrase the problem or issue the opposite way around.
- You then brainstorm the reversed problem in order to come up with as many ideas as possible, even though they will have the an entirely detrimental effect on the original problem.
- The final stage is to reverse these ideas and apply them to the original problem.
- This may seem convoluted but turning your usual way of thinking on its head can often result in genuinely new ideas being considered.

Round-Robin Brainstorming

When you think about using brainstorming in your organization, you probably have mixed-feelings about what it offers. On the one hand, you need creativity in your business to succeed, and brainstorming sessions can be a great way to generate fresh ideas.
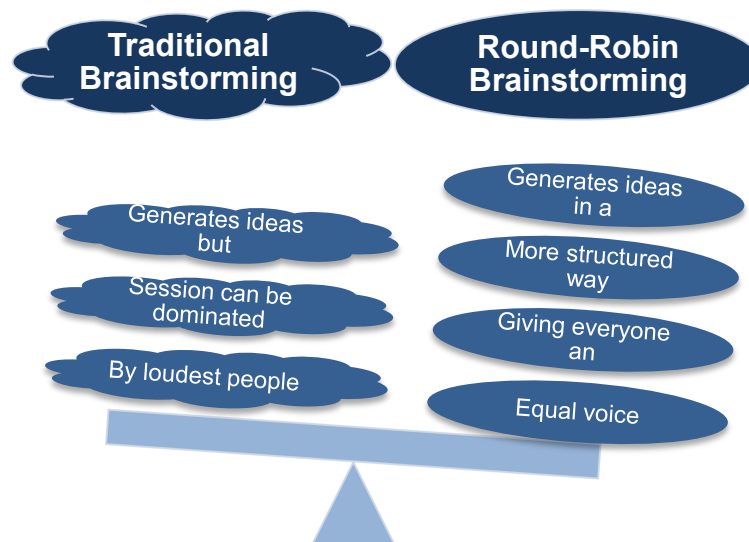
Unfortunately, there are some downsides to brainstorming in a group setting, specifically when it comes to the issue of one or two people dominating the conversation.

There is bound to be a wide range of personalities within any group of people, and some of those personalities are going to be outgoing and just plain loud. Those are the people who will take over the meeting, and everyone else will be left to just sit back and listen.

So, what is needed is a method of brainstorming that can take the positives of this method while eliminating some of the drawbacks.

Notably, you need a method that is going to make it hard for individual people to take over your creativity meetings.

After all, you want to consider the ideas of everyone in your company, not just the loudest people of the bunch. Toward that end, you may wish to consider using round-robin brainstorming to open up the floor to everyone included in the meeting.

Structured Creativity

In round-robin brainstorming, your meetings are going to take on a more organized format, one that will ensure that everyone is able to make their ideas known clearly. Traditional brainstorming is known for being rather free and open, but that is not going to be the case here, as these sessions are going to be focused on structure.


Round-robin brainstorming isn't going to be the right solution for every problem, or for every group of people, but it is perfect when the needs of many different personality types need to be considered.

To get started with a round-robin brainstorming session, you can simply follow the steps below –

- At the beginning of your brainstorming session, make sure everyone has a place to sit around the table, and provide all participants with a sheet of paper (or index card). Also, you are going to use the time at the start of the meeting to discuss the specific problem or problems at hand. Make sure to be extremely clear on the issue that needs to be solved, as clarity at this point will help you receive the kinds of ideas you need to move forward.

- With the preparations complete, ask each member of the session to write down one specific idea on the paper or card in front of

them. You may wish to assign a time limit to this phase, just to make sure the process doesn't drag on unnecessarily. For instance, you could tell everyone that they will have five minutes to formulate their idea.

- When finished, each participant will pass his or her card one spot to the right. Now, each person will be holding a piece of paper that contains the idea from another person. From there, everyone will add another new idea to the paper they now possess. The other ideas listed on the sheet can be used for inspiration, but that is not required (in other words, it is okay to have unrelated ideas on the same page).

- Continue this process for a predetermined number of rounds. In a small group, you may decide to continue until each person winds up with their original piece of paper once again. However, making that kind of full circle may not be practical with larger groups.
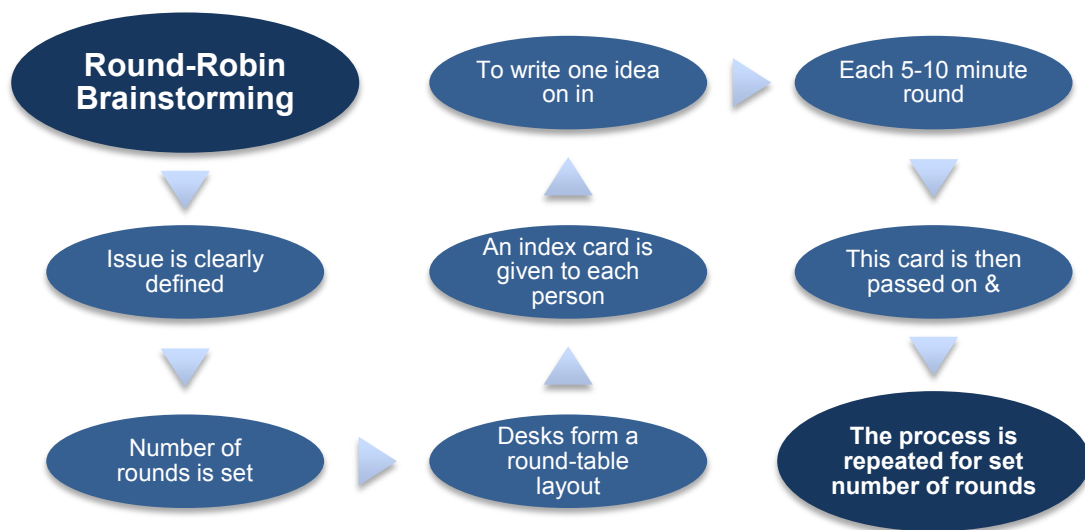
Right away, you can easily see some of the advantages to this method of brainstorming. First, no one will be talking during the session. With silence in the room, each individual will be free to focus on the task at hand without being distracted by conversation. Also, there will be no difference in terms of input between loud team members and those who are more reserved.

Everyone will have an equal opportunity to share his or her ideas without having to compete for attention.

As another benefit to this method, the brainstorming session can gain momentum as it goes thanks to the ideas that will be shared one round at a time. Since some of those ideas may have never come to light in a traditional brainstorming session, round-robin brainstorming has the potential to greatly outperform a standard brainstorming meeting.
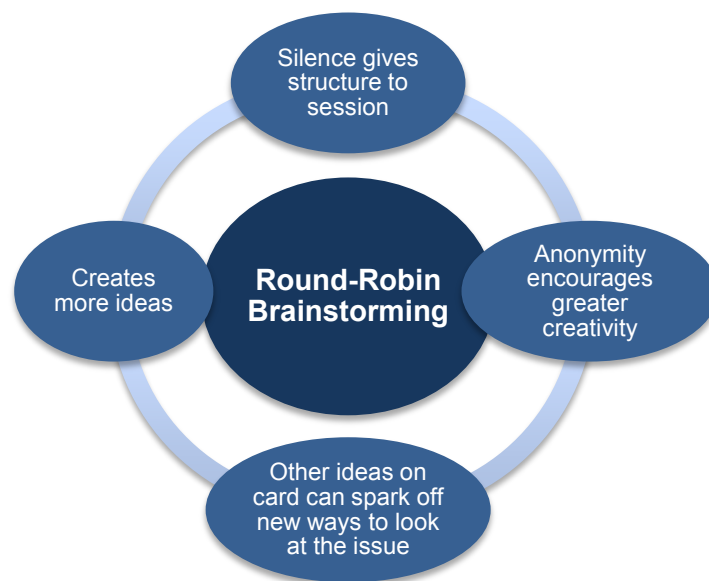
With a growing list of other people's ideas to reference the session moves on, team members may be inspired to conceive of larger and more creative ideas.

Potential Downfall

If you are looking for drawbacks to this method, the lack of anonymity may be one glaring weakness. Some team members may hold back on their true ideas because they know that people will be able to assign each idea to a specific person. Even if you don't list a name on the top of each piece of paper, it only takes some basic reasoning skills to figure out which participant authored which ideas.

Of course, in some settings, the lack of anonymity will be a good thing. If you want to know who developed which ideas, round-robin brainstorming is a great way to go. However, if you would like to keep the process

anonymous to make sure that everyone is free to offer up their most creative and innovative thoughts, you will want to:

- Shuffle the index cards between rounds,

- Use a software tool or

- Opt for another creativity tool.

One of the great challenges that you face when running a meeting is making sure that everyone in the meeting has an equal opportunity to be heard. This can be especially difficult during a creativity meeting, when some of the more vocal members of your team might want to make sure they get credit for a given idea. To step around some of those potentially damaging issues, consider:

Using round-robin brainstorming to facilitate a productive and efficient brainstorming session.

You won't want to turn to this model in all cases, but nearly every organization can make use of it from time to time. Thanks to its democratic design and efficient operation, round-robin brainstorming sessions tend to become one of the preferred ways for employees to air their ideas. It only takes a bit of practice before everyone in the company becomes very comfortable with this technique.

Key Points

- There are some downsides to brainstorming in a group setting, specifically when it comes to the issue of one or two people dominating the conversation.
- Round-robin brainstorming can help address this by making sure that everyone gets a voice.
- The technique involves each participant, writing down an idea on a piece of paper, which is then passed on to another participant after a predetermined time.

Key Points cont.

-     This carries on for a predetermined number of rounds with each participant adding one more idea to the card. This may or may not be based on what has already been written.

-     If anonymity is important then it is possible to use a software tool or shuffle the index cards between rounds.

-     With a growing list of other people's ideas to reference the session moves on, round-robin brainstorming has the potential to greatly outperform a standard brainstorming meeting.

Rolestorming

Have you recently held a brainstorming session within your organization that you felt was somewhat 'less than successful'?

Brainstorming can be a great way to come up with a variety of new ideas, but sessions, which include large numbers of people, can easily get off track.

Even if brainstorming is usually an effective tool for your teams, it isn't going to hit a homerun each and every time you put it to use. When brainstorming seems to be coming up short, consider turning to Rolestorming as a unique alternative.
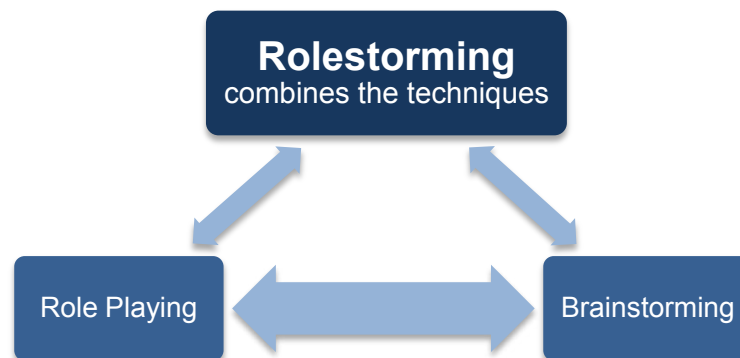
Addressing Common Issues

Although brainstorming is extremely popular – and can often be effective – there are some commonly accepted drawbacks, which limit its usefulness in the group setting. Some typical drawbacks of regular brainstorming include the following -

- People tend to frequently just agree with the loudest or most-outspoken person in the room. Those who don't have the self-confidence to argue for what they believe will just step into the background quickly and quietly.

- Once, one good idea has been produced by the group, there is a tendency to just settle for that solution and move on. It can be

hard to reach truly innovative and exciting ideas when the team is just happy to come to a reasonable conclusion.

- It is natural for people to want to look smart in front of their co-workers, so ideas which may be seen as 'outside-the-box' may be deemed to risky to propose. True creativity only takes place when people are free and relaxed – and that doesn't always happen in a brainstorming session.

Can sometimes reduce or limit creativity within the group:

Ideas 'outside the box' aren't expressed for fear of damage to image or career

Traditional Brainstorming

Only loudest, most vocal or domineering people are heard

Once 1 *good* idea is voiced group stop thinking & settle on it as solution
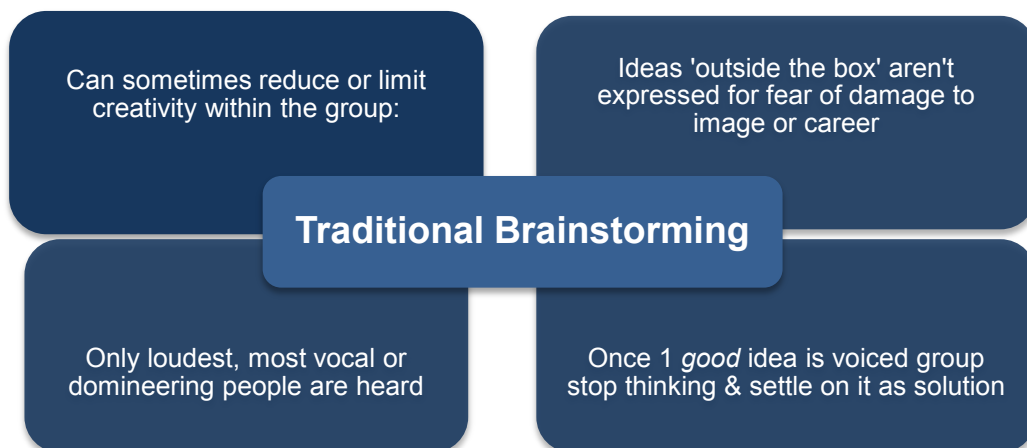
As you can see, there are some problems with brainstorming in a group setting. These problems don't mean that you should never attempt to brainstorming with some of your team members – you can still work through many problems in this manner. However, basic brainstorming shouldn't be seen as the 'be all, end all' when it comes to creativity.

Putting a New Spin On It

To take brainstorming in a new direction, it is possible to turn to the technique of Rolestorming. As you might be able to guess from the name, this is a system that is going to combine role playing and brainstorming.

Basically, instead of taking part in a brainstorming session as themselves, your team members are going to 'take on' other personas while brainstorming.

This is obviously a unique way to approach creativity, but it has some surprisingly powerful advantages.
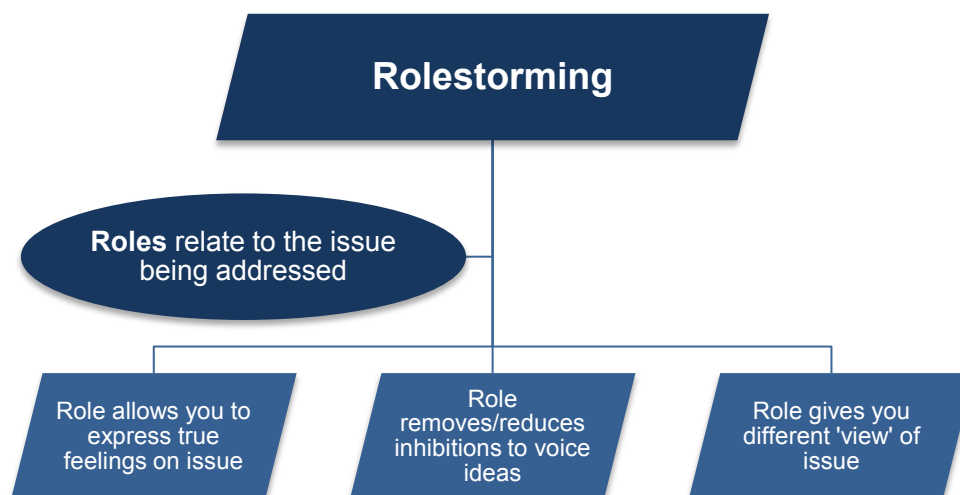
Obviously, one of the first things you will have to consider when starting a Rolestorming session is exactly what roles need to be filled. The answer to that question can be found by looking at the issue that you are trying to address by holding a brainstorming session in the first place.

So, for example, imagine that you are having this meeting because you need to figure out how to negotiate better terms from your suppliers. In that case, you may wish to have some of the meeting participants actually play the role of a supplier. Others could take on roles from around your organization that are different from their own.

*In the end, everyone will be playing a role that is **different from their day-to-day job**, and the session can begin.*

What's the Point?

So what is the point of role-playing during a brainstorming session? There are a couple of potential advantages to be enjoyed. The first is the freedom that will be felt when playing a role instead of simply being yourself. When you are just representing yourself, you may feel inhibited and be unwilling to air your true feelings. However, some of that can be stripped away when you play a role.

Rolestorming

Roles relate to the issue being addressed

Role allows you to express true feelings on issue

Role removes/reduces inhibitions to voice ideas

Role gives you different 'view' of issue

Speaking as another person, you can say what you really feel and your true ideas will suddenly be out there in front of everyone. If your organization has

trouble convincing team members to offer up their own ideas, this method may be just the thing to bring their ideas to the surface.

Also, Rolestorming can help participants to look at a given topic from another direction. When you always look at problems from the same viewpoint – your own viewpoint – it can become difficult to apply all of your creativity to the issue.

When you step outside of your own mind, on the other hand, you may be able to see a better picture of the problem in front of you. Seeing an issue from someone else's perspective is a powerful feeling, and it is one that can lead to many new insights.

The Hurdle

There is one major hurdle that needs to be discussed when it comes to

Rolestorming – the reluctance of some people within your organization to take part in a role-playing session.

Some of your team members may not be comfortable with this kind of method, and the whole point of the session is to make people comfortable so they can be creative and productive. If you are having trouble getting your team to relax and take part, try using a few warm-up exercises to teach everyone the basics of role-playing.

Use 'warm-up' exercises from		Acting world to overcome		Participants reluctance to role play

You can take warm-up ideas from the world of acting or even improve, as these disciplines relate closely to role-playing. At the end of the day, you don't want to try to force your team members into doing anything they don't want to do, so work to create a situation that makes everyone feel comfortable and included.

Let's be honest – Rolestorming is an 'outside the box' idea which is going to catch some of your employees off guard at first. With that said, once your

team opens up to the idea of role playing during a brainstorming meeting, the sky is the limit for what this technique can produce.

Allowing team members to step outside of their traditional role in order to see things from a new angle, your brainstorming sessions could suddenly be far more productive than ever before. Have fun with this exercise and look forward to impressive results.

Key Points

- Although brainstorming is extremely popular there are some commonly accepted drawbacks, which limit its usefulness in the group setting.
- Firstly, it does not suit those who don't have much self-confidence.
- Secondly, once, one good idea has been produced by the group, there is a tendency to just settle for that solution and move on.
- Thirdly, ideas, which may be seen as outside the box, may be deemed to risky to propose.
- Rolestorming involves your team members assuming other personas while brainstorming.
- This can help participants to look at a given topic from another perspective and allows them to voice points of view, which they would otherwise be uncomfortable with in their normal role.

Other Free Resources

The Free Management eBooks website offers you over 500 free resources for your own professional development. Our eBooks, Checklists, and Templates are designed to help you with the management issues you face every day. They can be downloaded in PDF, Kindle, ePub, or Doc formats for use on your iPhone, iPad, laptop or desktop.

eBooks – Our free management eBooks cover everything from accounting principles to business strategy. Each one has been written to provide you with the practical skills you need to succeed as a management professional.

Templates – Most of the day-to-day management tasks you need to do have already been done by others many times in the past. Our management templates will save you from wasting your valuable time re-inventing the wheel.

Checklists – When you are working under pressure or doing a task for the first time, it is easy to overlook something or forget to ask a key question. These management checklists will help you to break down complex management tasks into small controllable steps.

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