

# Forced Connections

## WHAT IS A FORCED CONNECTION?

Hitting a wall when it comes to different thinking? Need to come up with novel ideas or inject value into an existing product? With Forced Connections, you'll be surprised how easy it is to invigorate or create new ideas for a product, service, or process.

### WHY USE THIS TOOL?

Forced Connections helps people shift gears by providing offbeat inspiration. By using an object that is unrelated to the issue at hand, people are able to generate creative solutions and truly novel ideas. The next time you find yourself in a stalled brainstorming session, use this tactic to help participants stretch their thinking.

## FACILITATION GUIDE



### SUGGESTED AUDIENCE

- Relevant for all levels of staff
- Small teams of four to five people



### MATERIALS

- Worksheets  
Enough for each participant
- Whiteboard or flip charts  
Use them to write down all group ideas; no idea is a bad idea
- Colored markers, pens, and pencils  
Separating ideas by color will help organize your thoughts



### SETUP

Imagine your team seated around a table, trying to come up with ideas for improving a product or service. Thirty minutes into the session, the flow of ideas stalls. This is a good time to introduce Forced Connections.



### RECOMMENDED TIMING

<b>Step 1.</b>	Define the Challenge:	5 mins.
<b>Step 2.</b>	Brainstorm: Pick a Stimulus:	5 mins.
<b>Step 3.</b>	Brainstorm: Identify Key Attributes:	5 mins.
<b>Step 4.</b>	Brainstorm: Force the Connection + Generate New Ideas:	5 mins.
<b>Step 5.</b>	Draw the Final Idea:	5 mins.
<b>Step 6.</b>	Group Discussion:	20 mins.
		<b>45 mins.</b>

## FACILITATION GUIDE (Cont'd.)

### HOW IT WORKS:

- STEP 1. Define the Challenge.** Write the product, process, or problem you want to improve on Worksheet 1. Phrase it as an open-ended question, such as “how might we improve the shower?” or “in what ways could we improve the packaging for Product X?”
- STEP 2. Pick a Stimulus.** Select an object in the room.
- STEP 3. List Five Attributes of the Object.** This could include its color, scent, or texture.
- STEP 4. Force the Connection.** Apply 3–5 of the attributes to the challenge you are facing to generate new ideas.
- STEP 5. Draw the Concept.** Ask teams to draw their selected concept. Try to include as many connections as possible and be open to ideas that arise in the drawing process. Drawing is an excellent technique to build a narrative around an idea for which there might not be an existing context. It improves collaboration and helps individuals better share a vision that might only exist in their own mind. Finally, it frees people from the business jargon and bullet points of PowerPoint presentations and encourages both big-picture vision and details.
- STEP 6. Discussion.** Wrap the session with a discussion about the exercise.



#### GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Did the stimulus generate new ideas that are pursuable?
- How was it to draw your idea rather than presenting your idea in words?



#### EXAMPLE: THE SHOWER

Let's say your team is brainstorming ways to improve the shower and they run out of ideas.

1. Have them select any stimulus in the room (for example, a pen).
2. Ask them to list four or five attributes of that object (e.g., refillable, blue, portable, scent, has a cap).
3. Have the team choose one of the attributes and tie it back to the shower.
  - For this scenario, let's choose “portable.”
4. Ask them to explore the characteristics of “portable” in relation to the concept they are working on.
  - ( e.g., How could we make a shower that is portable?) Maybe we can make a shower for camping?
  - Follow this thread for a while, exploring it from multiple angles.



#### TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- **Define Your Challenge as a Question.** Use open-ended phrasing such as “In what ways can we improve...?” to specify your challenge and open up new thinking.
- **Be Creative With Stimulus Attributes.** Describe the stimulus in terms of size, color, texture, features, how it works, adjectives, etc. The more creative the better.
- **Draw Your Concept.** Replacing words with pictures encourages big-picture vision while capturing detail.
- **Discuss Most-Promising Solutions.** As a group, distill the most-promising ideas into improving the product.

## FACILITATION GUIDE (Cont'd.) SAMPLE WORKSHEETS

### Worksheet 1: Step 1–4


- Step 1.** Define the Challenge
- Step 2.** Pick the Stimulus
- Step 3.** List Key Attributes
- Step 4.** Force the Connection

**FUTURETHINK**

**WORKSHEET 1**

**STEP 1. DEFINE THE CHALLENGE**  
Let's Improve (product, process, or problem): \_\_\_\_\_

IDEA GENERATION TOOL  
FORCED CONNECTIONS

STEP 2. PICK A STIMULUS	STEP 3. LIST KEY ATTRIBUTES	STEP 4. FORCE THE CONNECTION GENERATE NEW IDEAS
 <p>Pen</p>	1. writes 2. communicates 3. colored 4. has a cap 5. refillable	write on walls to leave reminders or capture ideas add computer/email to the shower colored water to match my mood Put a top or roof on the shower to retain steam and make it more like a sauna auto-refill soap and shampoo

innovate@futurethink.com | © FutureThink LLC. All rights reserved
Page 3

### Worksheet 2: Step 5–6


- Step 5.** Draw the Final Idea
- Step 6.** Group Discussion

**FUTURETHINK**

**WORKSHEET 2**

**STEP 1. DRAW THE IDEA**  
Using the new ideas generated, draw your new concept.

IDEA GENERATION TOOL  
FORCED CONNECTIONS



**Capped Shower**

© Copyright Future Think LLC. All rights reserved. All other trademarks are the property of their respective companies. futurethink clients may make one attributed copy or slide of each figure contained herein. Additional reproduction is strictly prohibited. Information is based on best available resources. Opinions reflect judgment at the time and are subject to change. To purchase reprints of this document, please email [innovate@futurethink.com](mailto:innovate@futurethink.com)

innovate@futurethink.com | © FutureThink LLC. All rights reserved

Page 4

WORKSHEET 1

STEP 1. DEFINE THE CHALLENGE

Let's Improve (product, process, or problem): \_\_\_\_\_

STEP 2.	STEP 3.	STEP 4.
PICK A STIMULUS	LIST KEY ATTRIBUTES	FORCE THE CONNECTION GENERATE NEW IDEAS
	1.	
	2.	
	3.	
	4.	
	5.	

## WORKSHEET 2

### STEP 5. DRAW THE IDEA

Using the new ideas generated, draw your new concept.



© Copyright Future Think LLC. All rights reserved. All other trademarks are the property of their respective companies. futurethink clients may make one attributed copy or slide of each figure contained herein. Additional reproduction is strictly prohibited. Information is based on best available resources. Opinions reflect judgment at the time and are subject to change. To purchase reprints of this document, please email [innovate@futurethink.com](mailto:innovate@futurethink.com).