FUTURETHINK

IDEA GENERATION TOOL
FORCED CONNECTIONS

# **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**

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

# 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).
- 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."
- 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.

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# FACILITATION GUIDE (Cont'd.) SAMPLE WORKSHEETS

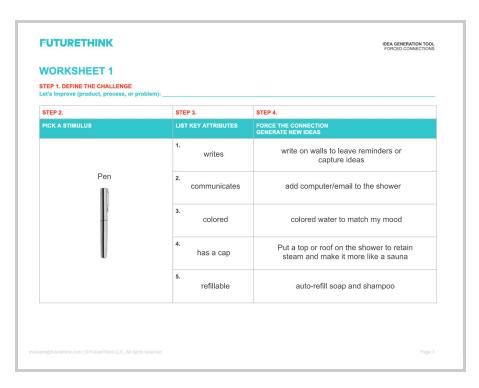
Worksheet 1: Step 1-4

Step 1. Define the Challenge

Step 2. Pick the Stimulus

Step 3. List Key Attributes

Step 4. Force the Connection



#### Worksheet 2: Step 5-6

Step 5. Draw the Final Idea

Step 6. Group Discussion



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## **FUTURETHINK**

## **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.	

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### **WORKSHEET 2**

ed, draw your new cond	•		

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