

Plus 3, Minus 3

WHAT IS PLUS 3, MINUS 3?

This is an ideation technique that will help you get in the minds of your customers and generate ideas based on their needs. You'll be able to come up with both incremental and groundbreaking ideas, and also uncover some unmet needs.

This exercise works best when you're trying to enhance your current products and services. It helps participants break down an offering into discrete elements, and then find ways to improve it by adding or removing components.

WHY THIS TOOL?

By breaking down a product, service, or experience into its many discrete parts, you can better distinguish areas for improvement. This exercise will help you find ways to enhance your current offerings by refining its component parts, or by removing those parts that aren't working.



TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- **Specifically Define Your Challenge.** A detailed challenge provides focus and more relevant ideas. "Improve bottled water delivery service" will take you further than simply "Improve bottled water."
- **Break Your Problem into Parts.** Dissect your offering into as many parts, steps, or functions that you can. This helps better identify specific areas to focus on for solutions.
- **Plus 3.** Pick three elements that offer opportunities for improvement by adding something to each one.
- **Minus 3** Choose three elements that are troublesome for customers, and eliminate them from your offering.
- **Discuss and Choose an Idea to Implement.** Determine a short- and long-term action plan for idea implementation.

FACILITATION GUIDE



SUGGESTED AUDIENCE

- Relevant for all levels of staff, particularly those who regularly interact with customers or clients



SETUP

- Designate teams of three to four people
- Assign a team leader to write the team's thoughts on the Worksheet
- Pre-fill each worksheet with a clear description of the product, service, or experience you're trying to improve

For example:

DON'T JUST SAY: "Improve flying."

SAY: "Improve the Experience of Flying Economy" (from the minute you board the plane to the minute you disembark).

While the first has clear parameters, the second is too vague.

- Hand out the worksheet to be used in brainstorming



RECOMMENDED TIMING

Step 1.	Define the Challenge:	5 mins.
Step 2.	List Key Elements:	10 mins.
Step 3.	PLUS 3:	10 mins.
Step 4.	MINUS 3:	10 mins.
Step 5.	Group Discussion:	15–20 mins.
		60 mins.



SUGGESTED MATERIALS

- **Worksheets**
Enough for each participant + a few extra
- **Colored whiteboard markers/pens**
Separating by color helps organize thoughts
- **Whiteboard or flip charts**
Write down all group ideas; no idea is a bad idea

FACILITATION GUIDE (Cont'd.)

HOW IT WORKS:

STEP 1. Define the Challenge. Pre-fill each worksheet with a specific challenge.

STEP 2. List Key Elements. Give each group 10 minutes to complete the first part of the exercise—to list all the discrete elements related to your challenge. Pre-fill a couple of features to jog their thinking. For example, if you were a retail bank, you might examine “getting money from an ATM.” The discrete parts/steps related to the ATM experience could be:

- a. Stand in front of ATM
- b. Insert bank card
- c. Enter password/PIN, etc.

STEP 3. PLUS 3. Give participants 10 minutes to pick three elements from the list in Step 2, and think of ways to enhance them. With the previous example, they could be:

- a. Interaction: Incorporate live chat feature with customer service
- b. Bank card: Have the card tell the ATM what you want to do using pre-sets or defaults
- c. Security: Offer voice activation, biometrics (fingerprints, etc.)

STEP 4. MINUS 3. Now give participants 10 minutes to think about removing elements to make the overall experience better for the customer. What elements (or parts within them) are unnecessary, troublesome, or get in the way of the overall experience? For the bank, this could be:

- a. Forms: No more paper forms—just insert your checks
- b. Fees: Make it free for everyone
- c. Marketing screens: Don't show these unless customer has “opted in” for them

STEP 5. Group Discussion. Facilitate a group discussion at the end—you can either have teams discuss all three parts of the exercise (if time permits), or just their top three ideas.

- Which components did you pick for +3? Why? How were they improved upon?
- Which ones did you pick for -3? Why?
- How do these components get in the way of the customer experience?
- Are there certain features/parts of the process we would add/delete for specific audiences or types of users? Which of these ideas could we implement—now and for the long-term?



FACILITATION NOTES

- People will proactively start coming up with +3/-3 ideas as they list out the features/steps in Step 1. Tell them to capture these ideas in Step 2 (+3) and Step 3 (-3) to jumpstart these sections of the exercise.
- Remind them to stay within the boundaries of their challenge. For example, focus on “flying economy”—not reinventing air travel.
- Everyone will include different steps in the process in Step 2. So, when deciding as a group which items to +3 or -3, think about which features will appeal to the broadest customer segment and select those. (Alternatively, select features that appeal to a distinct segment you're trying to target: newbies, power users, etc.)

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WORKSHEET

STEP 1. DEFINE THE CHALLENGE

The product, service, or experience to improve:

Parameters:

STEP 2. LIST KEY ELEMENTS

Break down this product/service/experience into its smallest parts. What are they?



Think About:

- All the activities involved
- The objects you are interacting with
- The setting you're in and what's around you
- What you like/don't like

STEP 3: +3

Pick three parts, features, or steps. How would you improve each of them to make the product, service, or experience better?

1.

2.

3.



Think About:

- What parts/steps need improvement most?
- What changes would add the most value?
- What would make it a more pleasurable experience?

STEP 4: -3

Which three parts, features, or steps would you REMOVE to make the overall product, service, or experience better?

1.

2.

3.



Think About:

- What's not adding value?
- How can you simplify the experience?
- What wouldn't you miss if it were gone?