

Brainstorming

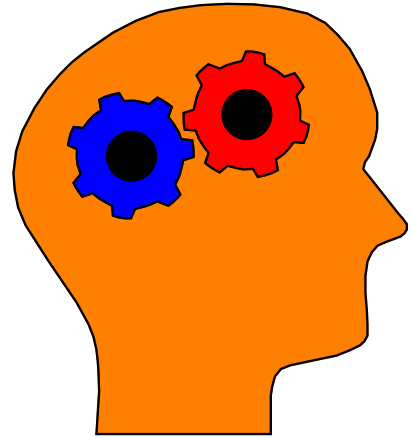
Purpose: To quickly generate a lot of ideas, issues, problems, solutions

Use When:

- You need to identify problem areas, possible causes of problems, potential solutions
- You need to involve everyone in a project
- You need to generate excitement and energy

Materials Needed:

Flip chart, marker, masking tape, post-it note pads – material dependent upon which version one uses.



Steps for Brainstorming

1. Write a clear “focus question” on flip chart paper so it is visible to everyone. Review the focus question to make sure everyone understands the issue. E.g., “What are some ways to improve the health of employees at our facility?” Stay focused on this topic; take no tangents.
2. Explain the rules of brainstorming (below).
3. Give people a few minutes of **silent** thinking time. Ask them to jot down their ideas on paper.
4. Go around the table and have each person say **one** (not all) of his or her ideas. Write the ideas on flip chart paper so that all can see. One person speaks at a time. When someone is out of ideas, they should simply say, “pass.” Continue until everyone passes. Going around ensures that you don’t drown out that quiet, brilliant mumbler in the back of the room.
5. Once all ideas are up, go over the list:
 - ❑ To provide an opportunity for last minute ideas
 - ❑ To ask if clarification is needed from the originator of any idea
 - ❑ To combine or eliminate similar ideas – but only if the originators agree

“Rules” for Brainstorming

- **Defer Judgment.** There are no criticisms, comments or discussions while the list is being compiled! Judgment or interpretation of ideas is deferred to the evaluation time after the idea-finding ends.
- **Quantity of ideas is the goal.** The more ideas to choose from, the better the chance of great ones emerging.
- **No idea is too wild!** Adopt a “try anything” attitude; don’t worry about looking foolish/silly.
- **Build (“Piggyback/hitchhike”)** on other’s ideas; all ideas don’t have to be original. Synergy is when one plus one equals thirty-nine!
- **Push yourself** when you seem to run out of ideas – the best ideas often emerge last.
- **Be Visual.** Sketch ideas to help people understand them if necessary.

There are several different iterations of how to use brainstorming in group settings. Here are the most common.

Open Brainstorming

Steps For Open Brainstorming

1. Write the focus question so it is visible to everyone and clarify, without discussion, if needed. (Circulate the focus question prior to the brainstorming session if possible, so participants can reflect on the issue.)
2. Agree on the focus question.
3. Individuals respond to the focus question publicly.
4. The team scribe writes each idea or response generated on a flipchart without clarification or question.
5. After the idea finding ends, review the list of ideas. Clarify and discuss each idea on the list. Statements may be combined, edited, or removed from the list only if the originator agrees.
6. Add any additional ideas stimulated by reviewing the list.

DEFINITION

Brainstorming is a tool to quickly generate lots of data.

USE BRAINSTORMING WHEN

- ✓ There is a need to collect many ideas from individuals affected by an issue, to generate multiple alternatives, or to search out all possible solutions.
- ✓ Team members each have input to a particular question or issue.

Variation: Silent Brainstorming

Steps for Silent Brainstorming

1. Write the focus question so it is visible to everyone and clarify, without discussion, if needed. (Circulate the focus question prior to the brainstorming session if possible, so participants can reflect on the issue.)
2. Agree on the focus question.
3. Individuals silently write responses to the focus question. Each response is printed in large letters on a separate post-it note.
4. All post-it notes are then displayed publicly on a flipchart, wall, or table.
5. Post-it notes can then be reviewed silently or read aloud.
6. Clarify and discuss each idea or any that are unclear. Statements may be combined, edited, or removed only if the originator agrees.
7. Add any additional ideas stimulated by reviewing the list.

USE SILENT BRAINSTORMING WHEN:

- ✓ The subject is controversial.
- ✓ There is a strong hierarchy.
- ✓ Participants might hesitate to respond publicly.
- ✓ There are language barriers within the group.

Blocks To Successful Brainstorming

- ✓ Beginning brainstorming before defining the issue.
- ✓ Not agreeing on the focus question before beginning to brainstorm.
- ✓ Criticizing or judging ideas offered during brainstorming.
- ✓ Evaluating ideas before completing the idea-finding.
- ✓ Holding back to avoid appearing "foolish or silly."
- ✓ Sticking to acceptable or traditional ideas.

Variation: Non-Repetitive Listing

Steps For Constructing A Non-Repetitive List

1. Begin with silent brainstorming.
2. Build the non-repetitive list by going around the circle and getting one idea from each person in turn until all suggestions are recorded on the flipchart. Individuals are asked to determine the similarity of their ideas to previously stated ones and not to give a suggestion that has already been listed by someone else. In this way the list becomes non-repetitive.

DEFINITION

The non-repetitive list is a tool used to collect ideas generated from silent brainstorming, without duplication.

USE NON-REPETITIVE LIST WHEN

- ✓ Many people need to have input into building a list
- ✓ Eliminating duplicate ideas is desirable
- ✓ There is little conflict associated with the topic so participants will be more likely to see the commonality between ideas and less likely to own the particular words used to state the idea

Variation of the Non-Repetitive Listing

Sometimes knowing the similarity of ideas within the group at this stage is helpful, especially if decision-making is to follow.

Vary step 2 as follows:

- 2a. Build the non-repetitive list by going around the circle and getting one idea from each person in turn until all suggestions are recorded on the flipchart.
- 2b. Individuals are asked to indicate, by a show of hands, if they also had privately listed any ideas on the list.
- 2c. Put a check mark for each person who raised their hand. Ideas or options most frequently thought of have more check marks.