



Brainstorming

Brainstorming can be an effective way of generating lots of ideas on a specific issue and then determining which idea, or ideas, constitutes the best solution. Brainstorming is most effective with groups of 8-12 people and should be performed in a relaxed environment. If participants feel free to relax and joke around, they will stretch their minds further and therefore produce more creative ideas.

A brainstorming session requires a facilitator, a brainstorming space and something on which to write ideas, such as a white-board, flip chart or software tool. The facilitator's responsibilities include guiding the session, encouraging participation and writing ideas down.

Brainstorming works best with a varied group of people. Participants should come from various departments across the organisation and have different backgrounds. Even in specialist areas, outsiders can bring fresh ideas that can inspire the experts.

There are numerous approaches to brainstorming, but the traditional approach is generally the most effective because it is the most energetic and openly collaborative, allowing participants to build on each other's ideas.

Creativity exercises, relaxation exercises or other fun activities before the session can help participants to relax their minds so that they will be more creative during the brainstorming session.

Step by step process

- Define your problem or issue, for example: "What format should our meetings with the Shape Up youth representatives take", or "How can we effectively organise a Shape Up communication strategy?" Write out the problem concisely and make sure that everyone understands the problem and is in agreement with the way it is worded. If the issue is very broad, it is probably worth breaking it down into smaller issues that can be brainstormed independently.
- Give yourselves a time limit. We recommend around 25 minutes, but experience will show how much time is required. Larger groups may need more time to get everyone's ideas out.
- Once the brainstorming starts, participants shout call out solutions to the problem while the facilitator writes them down, usually on a white board or flip-chart for all to see. There must be absolutely no criticising of ideas. No matter how daft, how impossible or how silly an idea is, it must be written down. Laughing is to be encouraged; criticism is not.
- Once your time is up, select the five ideas that you like best. Make sure everyone involved in the brainstorming session is in agreement.
- Write down about five criteria for judging which ideas best solve your problem. Criteria should start with the word "should", for example: "it should be cost effective", "it should be fun", "it should be possible to finish before 15 September", etc.
- Give each idea a score of 0 to 5 points depending on how well it meets each criterion. Once all of the ideas have been scored for each criterion, add up the scores.
- The idea with the highest score will best solve your problem. Nevertheless, you should keep a record of all of your best ideas and their scores in case your best idea turns out not to be workable.

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