

BRAINSTORMING



Purpose

Brainstorming is a tool for generating options. Use this tool to:

- Generate many, varied, or unusual options; and/or
- Start the flow of option generation for any other tools.

Description

During Brainstorming, individuals think of options that address the topic (stated as an open-ended question), and share them aloud for the group. An individual records the options as stated in a visible place. In contrast to group discussion (where generating and focusing often happen together), during Brainstorming, critical analysis and development are temporarily suspended.



History

Brainstorming is one of the most widely-known and extensively researched creativity tools. It is also one of the most misunderstood and misused tools. In 1948, Alex Osborn first used “organized ideation” in an advertising company, which group members called “Brainstorming” or using the brain to storm problems. In his book, *Applied Imagination* (1953), Osborn mentioned that a similar tool, “Prai-Barshana,” was used 400 years ago by Hindu teachers. “Prai” means “outside yourself” and “Barshana” means “questions.” As in Brainstorming, no discussion was allowed and evaluation happened at a later stage. Today, Brainstorming is often used to generate an initial set of possibilities, and to create a foundation upon which to use other tools.

References

- Osborn, A. F. (1948). *How to think up*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc.
- Osborn, A. F. (1953). *Applied imagination*. New York, NY: Scribner's.

Suggested Materials

- Copy of task description sent to participants prior to group session.
- Flipcharts with sufficient flipchart paper.
- Thick point markers for writing on flipcharts.
- Masking tape (one roll for each flipchart being used).
- Guidelines for generating options visibly posted.

Steps for Using Brainstorming

1) Focus the Group on the Task

- Write the task so it is visible to the entire group.
- Have the client answer questions about the topic (if necessary). Osborn recommended that the description of the task be sent to participants before the group session to allow for individual ideation.

2) Review Generating Guidelines

- Establish the guidelines for generating options: Defer Judgment; Freewheel; Seek Combinations; and Strive for Quantity.

3) Provide an Overview of Brainstorming (if new to the group)

- Clarify the purpose and outcome of Brainstorming.
- Overview the steps for the tool.
- Set a target number of options to generate.
- Clarify questions about process or content.

4) Generate Options

- Ask group members to call out each option one at a time. Start with options generated individually prior to the session. Then move on to new options generated during the session.
- Record each option on the flipchart as it is generated, literally and legibly.

5) Check on Progress

- Get feedback from the client about every 15-25 options. For example:
“Is this going in the right direction?” “Is this working for you?”
“Are you getting the kind of options you need?”

- Once the target number is reached, ask the client:
“Would you like more options?”
“Do you have enough options to consider?”

6) Take Next Steps

- Examine possible next steps. For example:
Generate additional options using the same or different tool;
Focus options;
Provide time for reflection and incubation; or
Identify actions to be implemented.

Tips for Using Brainstorming

- Do not assume people know how to do Brainstorming. It is a well known tool, but many people do not know how it works.
- Re-enforce the guidelines for generating options.
- Ensure that all group members (including the client) actively engage in Brainstorming.
- Write legibly and large enough so that flipcharts may be read from a short distance.
- Record the options exactly as they are shared by group members.
- Consider using Brainstorming with Post-its™ to speed up the recording of options and to enhance the efficiency of evaluation during focusing activities.
- When the flow of options slows down, use Brainstorming Enhancers to stimulate new thinking.
- If the group is trained in the use of CPS tools, invite them to generate options (silently) while the key background about the topic is shared.

GUIDELINES FOR GENERATING OPTIONS



DEFER JUDGEMENT



STRIVE FOR QUANTITY



FREEWHEEL



SEEK COMBINATIONS

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