
Tools

Brainstorming

Generating Ideas

Background

Brainstorming is a common method for a group to generate a high volume of ideas on a given topic in an efficient and effective manner. With idea volume the goal, this inclusive process is implemented without criticism or judgement. Energy and openness result with group members creatively launching from others' ideas and innovative thinking. Brainstorming is a simple tool, but must be managed.

When to Use

- When new and fresh thinking is required
- When total participation is needed
- When many possibilities need to surface.

How to Use

1. The brainstorming question is identified, agreed on, and posted for all to see.
2. Each team member offers an idea without comment or criticism.
3. Each idea is written in large letters on a chart paper for all to see.
4. Ask the speaker if the recorded idea is written as intended.
5. Continue the process for 5 to 20 minutes, depending on complexity or importance.
6. As a group activity, review the written list to clarify ideas and discard duplicated ideas.

Variations

A. Round Robin Brainstorming. To ensure that all group members have an equal opportunity to participate, adopt the process of each person offering ideas, in turn. When a participant does not have an idea, they can say "Pass". The process continues until all ideas are offered.

B. 6-3-5. This is a silent method based on a single brainstorming issue. (1) Each group member has five minutes to write down three ideas on a sheet of paper.

(2) Each person then passes his or her sheet of paper to the next person, who has five more minutes to add three more ideas that build on the first three ideas.

(3) The rotation is repeated as many times as there are team members (e.g., 5 team members = 5 rotations).

Source: The Memory Jogger II by Michael Brassard and Diane Ritter

Next Steps

Use nominal group technique to identify the most important ideas. If the brainstorming process generated a large number of ideas, it may be necessary to limit the number of items ranked. A "one half plus one" approach would rank only a portion of the total. The process would be repeated for the remaining ideas.

Source: The Memory Jogger II by Michael Brassard and Diane Ritter

