

Brainstorming

Brainstorming was designed by Alex Osborn (1938). It enables individuals and teams to generate, in a relatively rapid time period, creative ideas and opportunities about how to achieve a desired outcome.

AF Osborn 1938, *Applied imagination: the principles and problems of creative problem solving*, 3rd revised edition, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, NY.

Brainstorming enables people to:

- Put inhibitions and rules aside with the aim of generating new ideas
- Generate a large number of ideas regardless of their initial worth
- Create new ideas by suspending judgment
- Develop an optimal state of mind for generating new ideas
- In some situations it may be useful to do “inverse”/“negative” brainstorming e.g. brainstorming ideas about how not to achieve improvements in profit.

Preparation for Brainstorming

- Defining the topic for around which you want to generate ideas
- Identifying and inviting the most appropriate people to participate (i.e. people with practical experience; specialists; creative and lateral thinkers; different cultures and genders). The tool is best used with 3 to 15 people (it is difficult to achieve effective participation in groups greater than 15), therefore it may be necessary to split into smaller groups
- Identifying and securing a pleasant venue
- Ensuring each participant has a pen and paper (or cards)
- Ensuring a scribe is equipped to record ideas (on a white board or flipchart) so that all participants can read the ideas. Or ensuring that participants can record their ideas on cards and place the cards on a wall so that all can see the contributions.

Steps in using Brainstorming

1. Explain the context and purpose of the session. Ask for questions of clarification.
2. Explain the rules of brainstorming i.e.:
 - Any idea is acceptable - welcome ‘blue sky’ ideas
 - Don't comment on or criticize other ideas
 - Record all thoughts
 - Reduce "dead air" - keep ideas flowing
 - Build on other ideas when possible
 - Focus on quantity, not quality.
3. Ask if there are questions of clarification. If necessary use an example e.g. “ideas for improving tea making and drinking”.
4. Ask participants to start Brainstorming. They can contribute their ideas in three ways:
 - Each person contributes one idea at a time to a scribe until all ideas are recorded
 - Each person spends 5 minutes (quiet time) to record their own ideas then contributes one idea at a time to a scribe until all participant's ideas are recorded
 - Each person writes their ideas on cards and after 10 to 15 minutes places the ideas on a wall so that all so that all participants' ideas are recorded.
5. After the list of ideas has been generated, participants review the list to clarify the meaning of items. Since “quantity, not quality” was emphasized in the generation of the ideas, some items may be expressed in vague terms which need to be clarified.
6. Once all items are understood the list of ideas can be rationalized by combining items that are similar and eliminating duplication, but only with the agreement of all participants.
7. Discuss the results. Explain the value of the list of ideas and how they will be used. Ask if there are questions of clarification. Thank the participants for their contributions.