

Creative Techniques

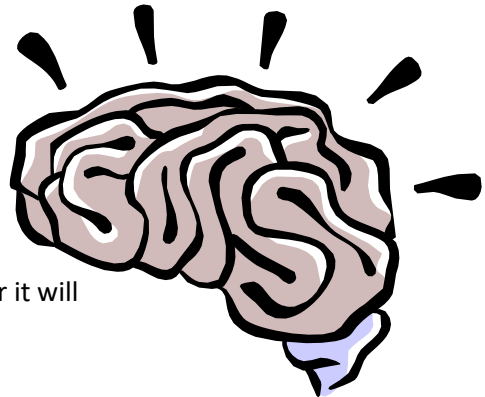
Creativity doesn't always come easily or naturally. We need to use different techniques to break down blocks to creativity. Here are some useful techniques that can be used by groups or individuals.

Creative Techniques - Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a useful and popular tool that you can use to develop a wealth of possibilities to solve a problem or meet a need. It is particularly useful at stage 2 of the innovation process (discover possibilities) although it could also be used in stage 1 (identify the need).

Brainstorming is a lateral thinking process. It asks that people come up with ideas and thoughts that seem at first to be a bit shocking or crazy. You can then change and improve them into ideas that are useful, and often stunningly original. It is particularly helpful when you need to develop new ways of looking at things. This might be when you need to develop new opportunities, where you want to improve the service that you offer, or when existing approaches just aren't giving you the results you want.

During brainstorming sessions there should therefore be no criticism of ideas: you are trying to open up possibilities and challenge assumptions about the limits of the problem. 'Wacky' ideas will often spark more practical ideas that would not have been considered otherwise.



It is important to avoid judgments and analysis at this stage or it will limit idea generation.

To brainstorm effectively, you should:

- Clearly define the problem you want solved/issue you are addressing
- Write all suggestions down – using a mind-map is a great way to capture thought processes as well as suggestions
- Ensure that no one criticises or evaluates ideas during the session. In fact, encourage wacky ideas
- Get everyone to contribute and develop ideas, including the quietest members of the group
- Keep the atmosphere informal – let people walk about, doodle, talk over one another if it helps them to come up with ideas (remember the seven intelligences!)
- Let people have fun brainstorming. Encourage them to come up with as many ideas as possible, from solidly practical ones to wildly impractical ones. Welcome creativity
- Avoid the temptation to move into 'solution mode' with an idea that seems particularly promising. If it doesn't work out in the end, you have no alternatives to consider
- Encourage people to develop other people's ideas, or to use other ideas to create new ones

- Ask questions to build on ideas such as 'what else?' 'how could?' and 'what if?' to stretch thinking
- Appoint one person to note down ideas that come out of the session. A good way of doing this is to use a flipchart. This should be studied and evaluated after the session
- Use colours and pictures. Don't limit your record to one piece of flipchart paper – cover the room if necessary.

Creative Techniques – Mind-mapping (Buzan)

A mind-map is a powerful graphic technique that can help to unlock the potential of the brain. It appeals to many of the seven intelligences as it makes use of various approaches – words, images, numbers, logic, colour and spatial awareness – in a single, uniquely powerful manner.

Originated in the late 1960s by Tony Buzan, mind-maps are now used by millions of people around the world whenever they wish to use their minds more effectively. Similar to a road map, a mind-map will:

- give you an overview of a large subject/area
- enable you to plan routes/make choices and let you know where you are going and where you have been
- gather and hold large amounts of data for you
- encourage problem solving by showing you new creative pathways
- enable you to be extremely efficient
- be enjoyable to look at, read, muse over and remember
- attract and hold your eye/brain
- let you see the whole picture and the details at the same time.

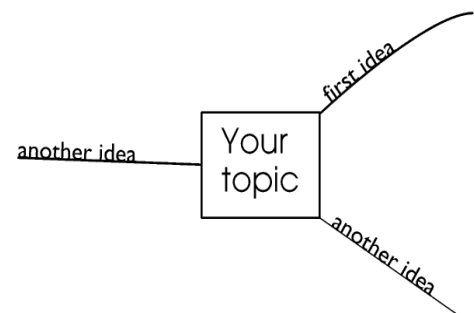
Mind-maps can be a very powerful tool for organising the ideas you generate in stage 2 of the innovation process. In turn, this makes it much easier for you to evaluate, analyse and act upon the possibilities when you move to stage 3.

How to draw a Mind-map

Step 1 Write your central topic in the centre of a landscape page.

Step 2 As each major idea or theme emerges from your brain draw a line radiating from the rectangle. Write the name of the major idea above each line.

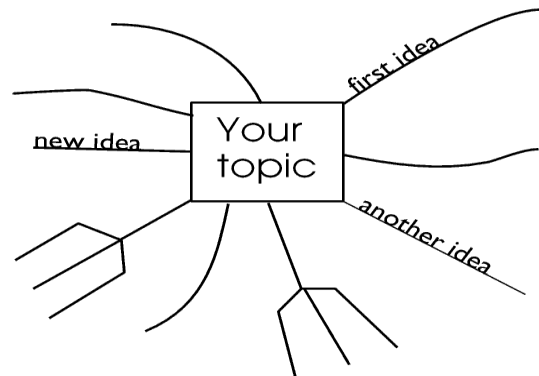
Don't spend too much time writing neatly or drawing nice straight lines. Go for SPEED not NEATNESS.



Step 3 As each idea materialises, quickly check whether the idea is an extension of an existing idea.

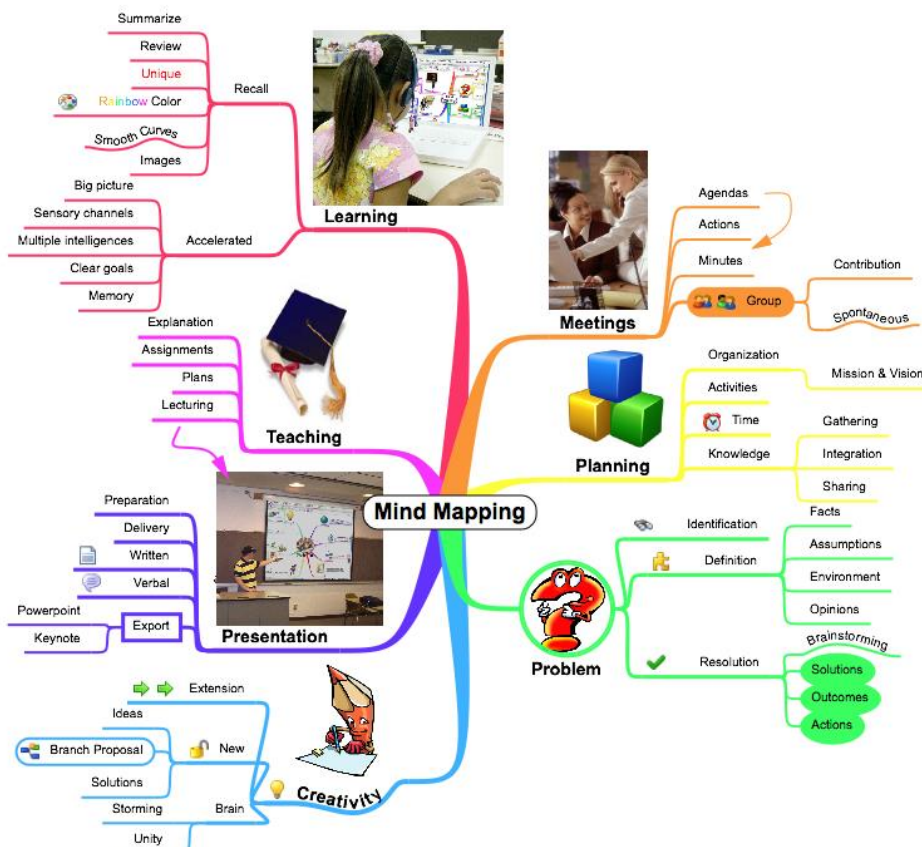
- If it is, then just continue the line
- If the idea is a variation of an existing idea then draw a branch off of the central line and label it.

If the idea is something totally and utterly new, then draw a brand new line from the rectangle in the centre of the page. Within a short space of time your Mind Map will begin to take shape.



Once you have finished generating ideas and constructing the mind-map you can start analysing the information shown on the mind-map.

Example of a completed Mind-map



Creative Techniques – The Five Whys

The Five Whys is a simple problem-solving technique that helps users to get to the root of a problem, or define a specific need quickly. The 5 Whys technique involves looking at any problem and asking: 'why?', which will prompt another 'why?' and so on until there is no further need to ask 'why?' because the answer is discovered.

Here is an example...

1. Why is the bread too dark?

Answer: Because it is overcooked.

2. Why is it overcooked?

Answer: The ovens appear to be hotter than they were before.

3. Why are they hotter?

Answer: They have been serviced, and some have had new parts installed.

4. Why were some new parts installed?

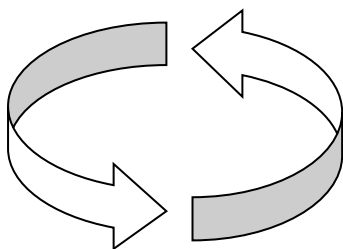
Answer: Because a lot of the fans were inefficient.

5. Why were they inefficient?

Answer: they had slowed down, so we had to increase cooking times to compensate.

So, have we changed the process to take into account the new fans are much more efficient?

Creative Techniques - Reversal



Reversal is a technique that can be useful at the 'identify the need' stage of the innovation process, but is particularly suited to the 'discover possibilities' stage.

It is sometimes difficult to 'see the wood for the trees' when trying to improve something, or do something differently. Reversal allows your brain to relax away from the conventions and structures that may limit thinking. From this, new possibilities may be identified.

Reversal simply requires you to think of the opposite of the gap you are trying to fill, or the problem that you are trying to solve.

For example, instead of looking for ways to reduce waste, consider 'what could we do to **increase** waste?'

The resulting ideas will be many and far-reaching, and may include ideas such as:

- Print off all our emails
- Don't check product quality until it is made
- Throw equipment away and buy new as soon as they break.

These ideas are then reversed, and the merits/details of each can then be discussed in more detail in the 'evaluate options' stage.

Here, our reversed suggestions would be:

- Don't print emails
- Check product quality at multiple stages
- Make sure equipment is regularly serviced and repaired.

Creative Techniques - Reframing

Reframing is a simple technique that encourages you to look at a problem or opportunity from a number of different perspectives. Again, this technique is useful with stage 2 of the innovation process (discover possibilities), but it can also be used at stage 3 (evaluate options) to help decide if an option is feasible.

You can reframe by considering different **positions**, e.g:

- What would we consider excellent customer service?
- What would our customers consider excellent customer service?
- What would our colleagues consider excellent customer service?
- What would our consumers consider excellent customer service?

You can reframe by considering different business **cultures**, e.g:

- How would Coca-Cola approach this?
- How would BMW approach this?
- How would Tesco approach this?

You can reframe by considering different **people** e.g:

- What would Elon Musk do?
- What would an Army Colonel do?
- What would Greta Thunberg do?
- What would James Bond do?

Reframing allows you to let go of company protocols and traditions, and consider what is possible when all of those barriers (real or perceived) are removed.

Creative Techniques - Provocation

Provocation is a lateral thinking technique that breaks down assumptions and opens the mind to possibilities that may not have been considered before. Originated by Edward de Bono, provocation begins by making deliberately stupid statements (provocations), in which something you take for granted about the situation is not true.

Statements need to be outrageous to shock your mind out of existing ways of thinking. Once you have made a provocative statement, you then suspend judgment and use that statement to generate ideas. Provocations provide original starting points for creative thinking.

For example, you may state that “we don’t need business development executives to visit their clients – they can do everything via technology”, which seems silly. You then work with this statement as if it were true, and analyse it from a number of angles – some sensible, some more outrageous.

Some suggestions for working with a provocative statement include:

- What are the good bits?
- What are the interesting bits?
- What would you have to do if it were true?
- What would happen if it were true?
- Pull out the features of the ideas generated by the provocation and the provocation itself:
 - Think how it would be if it were ‘more’.
 - Think how it would be if it were ‘less’.
- Take the situation that you are considering, either as a whole or just some part of it, and...
 - Exaggerate it!
 - Make it smaller or bigger.
 - Make it less or more important.
 - Make it compulsory.

Creative Techniques – Is/Is Not

This is a simple technique that helps to define a problem clearly. This is very important if more than one person needs to understand or work on it.

“A problem well-described is a problem half-solved.”

It is especially useful when you suspect there is only partial knowledge of the situation, or when agreeing what is in and out of scope.



How to Use it

1. State the issue in clear, factual terms. Avoid defining the issue in terms of its possible solutions - use only observable facts. For example: “10% of invoices have the wrong unit price”, not “Data entry clerks need training because they make mistakes entering data”. Separate problems from personalities, and deal with what IS.

2. Describe everything you know about the issue:

- WHAT is it / WHAT is it not?
- WHERE is it / WHERE is it not?
- WHEN is it a problem/ WHEN is it not a problem?
- WHO is involved / WHO is not involved?
- HOW OFTEN does it happen?
- HOW BIG a problem is it?

3. Ask yourself - “How will we know that we have succeeded in solving the problem - what are the measurements that would tell us?”

4. Define the boundaries of the process and its inputs and outputs:

- which people, departments, equipment etc are involved?
- what are the boundaries of the process?
- what are the inputs, who supplies them?
- what are the outputs, who are the customers who receive them?

5. Find out what the customers of the process want and what their opinion is of quality, response time, on-time delivery and cost.

6. Record your findings and the team’s ideas.

7. Use the results to plan further investigation and data gathering before moving on to analysing and generating solutions and action plans.

Creative Techniques – Role-Storming

This is a variation on traditional brainstorming and an excellent way of truly smashing down barriers and preconceived ideas.

1. Brainstorm Obvious Ideas

First, conduct a regular brainstorming session with your group. Not only will this generate some good initial ideas, but it will also highlight more obvious ideas. This leaves you free to expand your thinking and push boundaries in later steps.

2. Identify Roles

Next, decide which roles or identities you'll use. You can assign one role to each person in the group, or play the role collectively, moving on to another role when you're done.

The person you choose can be anyone, so long as it's a person not in the current group. Consider people such as a colleague, your boss, a major competitor, someone in public life, a leader from the past, or a friend or family member. Ideally, you should know enough about them to take on their identity for a short time. (They don't necessarily have to be associated with the problem you're trying to solve.)

3. Get into Character

For each role, allow group members a few minutes to get into character. Use these questions to help with this:

- How does this person see the world?
- What is this person's personality or attitude likely to be?
- How would this person solve problems?
- What are this person's strengths and weaknesses?

Make an effort to get into the persona of the character: the more deeply you understand this person's feelings, worldview, and motivations, the better you can use this perspective to generate good ideas.

Creative Techniques – Drill Down

Drill Down is a simple technique for breaking complex problems down into progressively smaller parts. This allows you to analyse specific elements of a problem and address the bits that need fixing, leaving other aspects alone. In simple terms, it means that you are not using a sledge-hammer to break a nut!

1. To use the technique, start by writing the problem down on the left-hand side of a large sheet of paper.
2. Next, write down the points that make up the next level of detail on the problem a little to the right of this. These may be factors contributing to the problem, information relating to it, or questions raised by it. This process of breaking the problem down into its component part is called 'drilling down'.
3. For each of these points, repeat the process. Keep on drilling down into points until you fully understand the factors contributing to the problem. If you cannot break them down using the knowledge you have, then carry out whatever research is necessary to understand the point.

Drilling into a question helps you to get a much deeper understanding of it. The process helps you to recognise and understand the factors that contribute to it. It can also prompt you to link in information that you had not initially associated with a problem. It also shows exactly where you need further information.

An example of a 'drill-down' diagram is provided opposite:

Figure 1: Drill Down Into Problem of Poor Sea Water Quality

