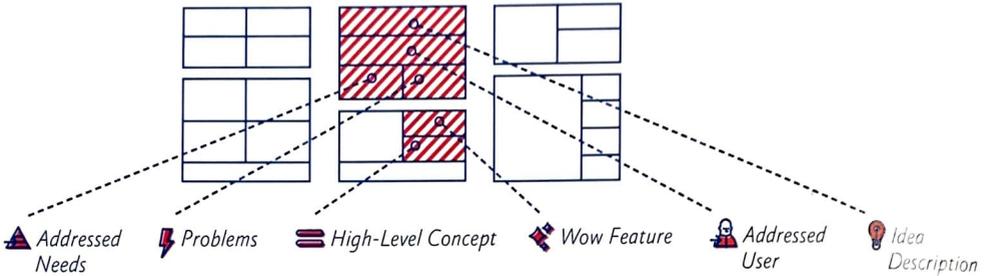


1

Brainstorming



WHAT AND WHY?

Brainstorming is the classic among our CREATE tools. Done properly, this method kick-starts our innovation development and brings us a step closer to our killer innovation. Done the wrong way, however, it causes frustration and only very few over even no useable results at all.

The term »brainstorming« was coined by the American advertising expert Alex F. Osborn who developed this method during his work for the global advertising agency BBDO. Its name describes the objective, »using the brain to storm a problem.« Osborn first presented this method and its basic rules in 1942 in his book *How To Think Up*¹, although at a mere 38 pages it might better be called a brochure.

In contrast to common belief, the essence of brainstorming is not free associations but the rules that foster free associations and avoid creative blocks during team work. For example, one rule prohibits criticizing the ideas of

other team members during the brainstorming session. The method serves to activate the creative areas of our brain in order to explore and extend a solution space and to test its limits. Only in this way can we go beyond the known and usual. In doing so we consider all the knowledge that we have gathered in the EXPLORE module (if we started our innovation development as discoverers). The how-might-we question that we used to finish the EXPLORE module contains the core needs and core problems of the identified users. This is the explicit knowledge, which constitutes the tip of the iceberg in our research.

Everything that is written between the lines of the how-might-we question is of equal importance: the details and backgrounds (e.g. from the development of a persona) and the empathy we developed for the user. This implicit knowledge is the foundation of the research iceberg. Now we use our whole knowledge for the development of a solution.

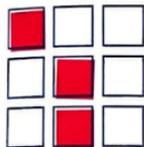
¹ Only available second hand.



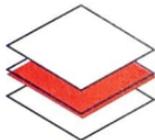
Fig. 7.3.1

- No *won*
- No *yes, but...*
- No *discussion*

NO CRITICISM



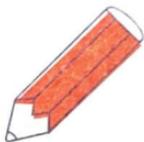
DEVELOP MANY
IDEAS



BUILD ON THE
IDEAS OF OTHERS



ANYTHING
GOES



VISUALIZE
EVERY IDEA

MODUS OPERANDI

Preparation

First we read Chapter 5 about our basic tools. It tells us everything we need to know about using sticky notes, arranging our team space and working collaboratively. Before we can get creative, we also have to devise the proper setting. This includes doing our brainstorming while standing up. Just imagine we sat comfortably around a conference table, sipping from a glass of water. How could we possibly get our brains into gear in such a situation? Sitting means that our brain receives input. Standing, on the other hand, means that our brain has to *deliver*.

1__We prepare the first brainstorming session

There should be at least four of us because otherwise, the session will drag along and only produce a small output of ideas. We need our brainstorming question, the how-might-we question and—if we have used the related method in the EXPLORE module—also our persona¹. If we have a persona, we put up the persona template in view. A glance at the template sometimes provides a new stimulus. If we have not created a persona, we should at least know for what users we are going to develop our ideas. Either the group members have an image of the user in their minds, or we jot down some quick notes, e.g. on the persona template.

¹ See method 5.2 in the EXPLORE module.

In order to support the activation of our brains we write the brainstorming question in big letters onto our whiteboard or a big sheet of paper that we stick to the wall. In the course of our brainstorming session, we stick our labeled sticky notes around the how-might-we question. During brainstorming, the rules depicted in Fig. 7.3.1 apply.

Rule #1: No criticism (for the time being)!
Criticism is not allowed. No »No, that doesn't work!«, no »Yes, but...«, no »That's silly/that's not feasible/that doesn't suit us/there is no technology for doing this.« Also no non-verbal criticism by rolling our eyes, grunting or dashing out of the team space.

If we do not follow these rules but dissect and discuss every idea, we waste precious time and energy. Furthermore, in such an atmosphere we block the really exciting ideas, and our brainstorming would not get into gear. First, we collect as many ideas as possible. Only afterwards will we examine if they are useful.

Professional tip for evaluating ideas: Instead of »Yes, but...«, we start every sentence with »Yes, and...« followed by a solution (if one comes to mind). In this way we present a solution instead of criticism.

Rule #2: Develop many ideas

We can develop approximately 100 ideas in half an hour. This is not only possible but also makes sense: We will much more likely find one innovative idea among 100 ideas than if we had discussed five ideas to death in the same half an hour.

It is okay to ask comprehension questions. After all, we do not want to hone our own ideas exclusively, but build upon the ideas of our colleagues.

Rule #3: Building upon the ideas of others
In this rule we assume that we do not take offence when someone modifies our original idea. Many good ideas arise from the interplay of the different perspectives in the team. For this reason, it is important to have a *diverse* team.

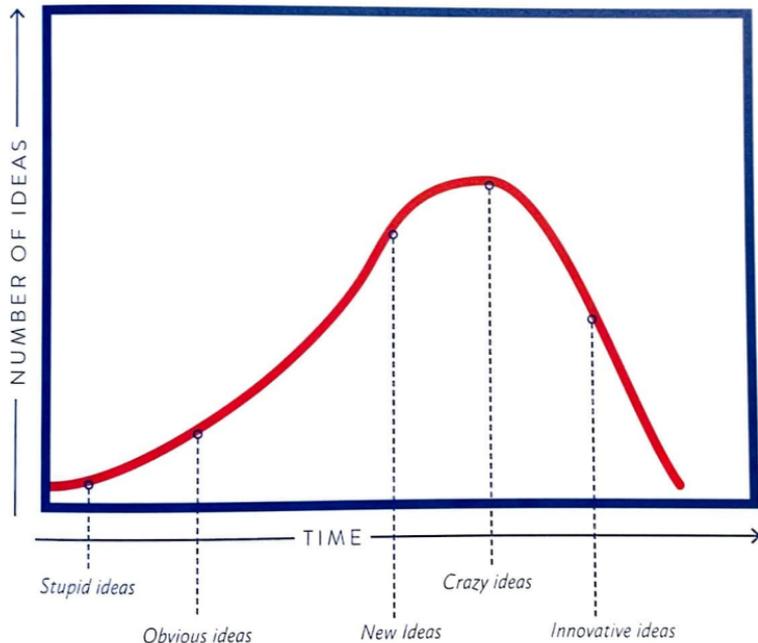
Rule #4: Visualize every idea

Pictures inspire us. For this reason, we visualize each of our ideas on sticky notes. Sketches and stick figures suffice. This is not about beauty and perfection, but about mass (see rule #2) and maintaining an overview.

Rule #5: Anything goes

In brainstorming, basically everything is allowed. The traffic lights are always green. We utter any idea that crosses our mind. We *have* to be stupid and crazy, we have to break taboos and to re-design the world order. At least this should be our aspirations if we want to develop a really good solution.

Fig. 7.3.2



2__We invite a moderator (optional)

Getting started with brainstorming may become easier with the help of a moderator who simply ensures that the rules are being followed, that everyone has a say and that the mutual is not neglected in the heat of the battle. In a way, the moderator is a nice version of the »bad cop«, but *not* a member of the project team!

3__We start with the first round

All ideas have to get out—first the obvious ones so that they no longer gum up our head. The stupid, crazy and outlandish ideas follow suit, so that they no longer haunt us. Since we build upon the ideas of our colleagues, even absurd raw ideas have the potential to turn into a useful idea. Crazy ideas also help to extend our range of possibilities and to go beyond its limits. Apart from that, we look for solution ideas that are as specific as possible.

Brainstorming is a bit like making popcorn: In the beginning, there is a warm-up phase until the ideas start to »pop up.« Then we get into flow and suddenly lots of ideas emerge. At the end of a brainstorming session, there will be fewer and fewer ideas. This is wonderfully shown in Fig. 7.3.2.

4__We sort the ideas—after the brainstorming!

A brainstorming session lasts for about 15 to 30 minutes per question. Afterwards, we sort the ideas. We cluster them according to topics. As a rule of thumb, each cluster contains approx. five to ten sticky notes. When the clusters get too extensive, we create subdivisions.

HOW DOES IT FEEL?

At first, many of us had problems with not being allowed to express criticism during brainstorming. In our everyday life we are used to evaluate and assess actions, suggestions and problems immediately. Thus every now and then during our brainstorming sessions, it happens that a critical half sentence slips out. As long as this occasional and unintended criticism is neither malicious nor offensive, we do not take it amiss.

GOOD TO KNOW

As mentioned previously, brainstorming was invented by Alex F. Osborn. The development into the current form, however, we owe to the American management theorist Charles Hutchison Clark. At this point we want to recommend his classic text *Brainstorming*¹, first published in 1958.

¹ Charles Hutchison Clark: *Brainstorming: The Dynamic New Way to create Successful Ideas*, New York 1958.