3   Idea Tower

▲ Addressed Needs   ● Idea Description   ⚡ Problems   ▲ Addressed User
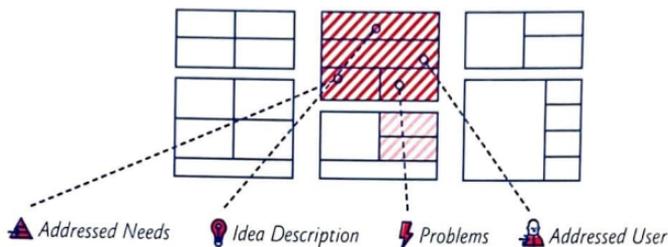
WHAT AND WHY?

We use the Idea Tower method to further shape our fest ideas. We take turns in adding new elements and ideas in order to erect a »tower« of ideas, so to speak. This method is used after traditional brainstorming (method 1) because we need lots of raw ideas that we can develop further. This method is an alternative variant of traditional brainwriting (method 2) because it is also done mostly as silent work.

MODUS OPERANDI

1__We select the idea that we want to amend
From the many ideas that emerged from a previous open brainstorming session and/or silent brainwriting, each of us selects one inspirational idea devised by another team member. All members now glue the sticky note with their initial idea on their respective template (Template 7.3.1).

2__We write, pass on and pile up ideas
Now each of us adds further elements and ideas to the initial idea on the template. For each of these additions, we put a sticky note in one of the empty fields. As usual we describe our ideas with no more than five words and try to visualize them.

Similar to traditional brainstorming, everything is allowed! We can add a complete new and different idea or a refined alternative of the initial idea. We continue to add elements and ideas until we cannot think of any more. Then we pass on the template clockwise to the next team member. When we can think of something relating to our new template, we add it to the existing ideas. If we do not get any inspiration, we simply pass on the template.

Adding and passing on usually happens in a fast-paced rhythm with cycles of one minute or less. However, when we happen to be in a creative flow, we do not rush it. The templates that have already been handled by every team member are piled up in the middle of the table. At the end of the session we have thus erected a tower of ideas.
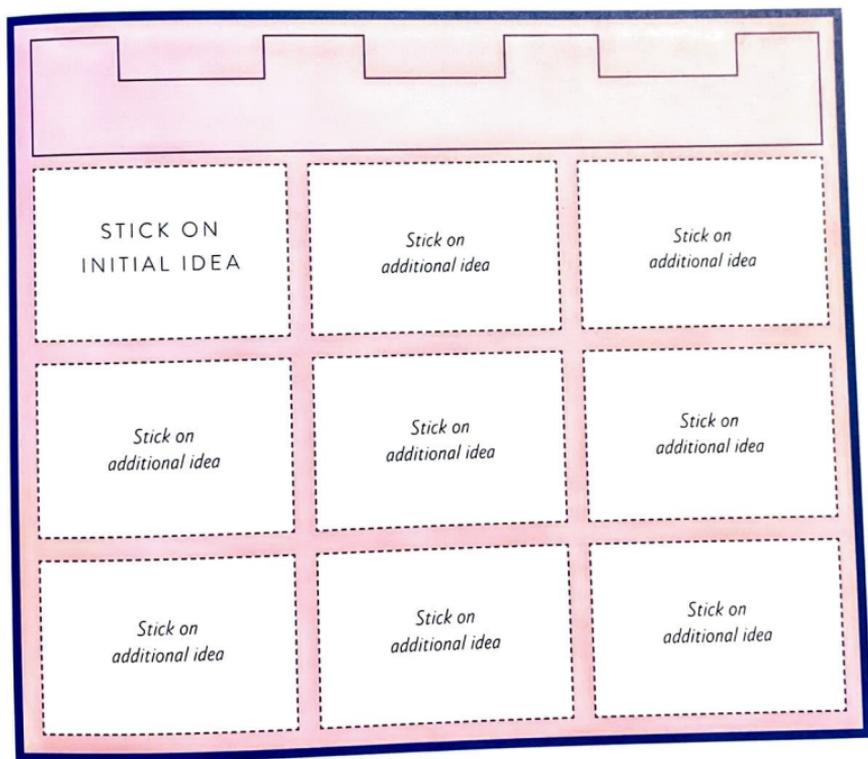

STICK ON INITIAL IDEA	Stick on additional idea	Stick on additional idea
Stick on additional idea	Stick on additional idea	Stick on additional idea
Stick on additional idea	Stick on additional idea	Stick on additional idea

Fig. 7.3.1: digital-innovation-playbook.com/templates/create

3___We provide new initial ideas (optional)

When we run idle because our neighbor needs more time or because there are not enough templates in circulation—as the pile in the middle of the table is growing larger—we can replenish the supply. Surely we can find another good initial idea.

4___We do not overdo it

Idea tower sessions can be of very different lengths. It depends on the number of initial ideas, the size of the team and our form on the day. As we already know, inspiration and creativity are reluctant visitors. Usually, a session lasts up to 30 minutes.

We finish working with this method when we run out of ideas that we can amend, even if we have not yet used up every initial idea from brainstorming because that is not the purpose of this method. The idea tower serves to improve the best ideas, which we select based on our gut feeling.

At the end, we share the idea tower templates among the team so that everyone is up to date with every idea. We do not yet discuss the ideas because we are still in no-criticism mode! The discussion happens at the end of the CREATE module when we select the best ideas for incorporation into the comprehension prototype (see section 7.4).

HOW DOES IT FEEL?

The Idea Tower method fosters inspiration and team spirit. Basically, it can be used whenever the brainstorming fades out and we merely develop superficial ideas. The idea tower helps us do dig deeper again.

Alternatively, we can use the idea tower also as a conceptual design tool after selecting the best ideas. Before using the method in this way, we should get familiar with it during our regular quest for ideas.

GOOD TO KNOW

The idea tower is a well-tried refined variation of traditional brainstorming. It is very similar to the lotus blossom technique*[1]. These methods can also be combined to draft ideas. We can also experiment with other brainwriting methods like idea pools, ring ideas or 6-3-5 brainwriting.

As far as we know there is no technical book focusing exclusively on brainwriting variants, but there are numerous books about various creative techniques, which may also cover brainwriting.

[1] The lotus blossom technique was developed by Yasuo Matsumura. We write down an idea in the center of a piece of paper. Then we draw a circle and empty petals around the initial idea. Later we will fill these petals with elements and additions to our initial ideas. According to our ability to draw, the picture can resemble a lotus blossom. In the next step, each of the additions becomes the centre of a new lotus blossom, so that we can gather additions to the additions to our initial idea.