

IDEAS

"It's better to fail in originality, than succeed in imitation."

Herman Melville



IDEAS

WORKSHOP TECHNIQUES:

one: THREE GOOD / THREE BAD

How to deal with negativity

two: CHANGING THE GAME

How to effectively classify your brainstorming ideas

three: CATEGORY STEALING

How to get inspiration from a wider field

four: CENTRAL IDEA SATELLITE SYSTEM

How to build on a good idea

five: EYES OF EXPERTS

How to harness the power of experts

six: THE FOUR CORNER WALKABOUT

How to build on good ideas

RECOMMENDED READING:

- **The Ideas Book, The Smart Thinking Book** – Kevin Duncan
- **The Workshop Book** – Pamela Hamilton
- **Thinking Fast & Slow** – Daniel Kahneman
- **Hunch** - Bernadette Jiwa
- **Imagine** - Jonah Lehrer
- **Where good ideas come from** - Steven Johnson



INTRODUCTION: RULES OF ENGAGEMENT + THE RIGHT STIMULUS

This section is all about brainstorming and generating interesting and innovative ideas for your business.

Before we dive into the exercises, here are some tips on how to facilitate a successful session. It is important to get the attitude of attendees right, and that means setting the right tone.

Getting this right will depend on who you invite, their predisposed views on the subject matter, their mood on the day, and the manner in which you direct and control them.

It's a good idea to create **Rules of Engagement** that reflect your company culture.

Be aware that there is a distinct difference between cynicism and pragmatism. Extremes are to be avoided in idea generation. Freewheeling, impractical ideas are as useless as the immediate killing off of every new suggestion. The onus is on the person running the session to break it down into the smallest possible chunks and ensure that the **Right Stimulus** is introduced at the right time.

A maximum suggested run of time on one theme is 30 minutes, but some sections should be restricted to as little as 5 minutes.

Exercises, practical application of what has been discussed, and group work can all lead to faster ideas, so long as they are not trivial or allowed to spiral out of control (either off brief, or for too long).

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

BREAK WITH THE PAST

PRODUCTIVE LISTENING

BREVITY = INTELLIGENCE

TAKE ISSUES SERIOUSLY,
BUT NOT YOURSELF

NO SHOW, NO SAY

NO JARGON

NO SHOWBOATING

NO CYNICS

THE RIGHT STIMULUS

VARIETY

EXERCISES

PREPARATION

VISUALS

BREAKS



one: THREE GOOD / THREE BAD

How to deal with negativity

Many idea sessions are derailed by negative material and attitude. It only takes one moaner and the whole thing can veer off in an unwanted direction.

If you believe this is a possibility, then the Three Good, Three Bad tool is excellent for combating it.

Instead of allowing negative comment to creep in to proceedings, the technique deliberately seeks out the bad stuff, deals with it early, and offsets it with good stuff. This is sometimes called the car park – a place where all the negativity is parked.

EXERCISE: All attendees are asked to write down three bad things about the product/project/initiative, and then three good. This draws the sting out of all negative comment.

The results are reviewed and summarised by the facilitator. Usually there is a significant overlap, and there is much to be learned about the degree of consensus, or an absolute focus on just one deficiency.

The exercise should always be done first, and should never last more than an hour, or 20% of the meeting time.

All the good features are then used as inspiration to go on to provide an excellent solution.

GOOD
1.
2.
3.

BAD
1.
2.
3.

two: CHANGING THE GAME

How to effectively classify your brainstorming ideas

The Three Buckets exercise was introduced by Adam Morgan in his book *The Pirate Inside*. It is an extremely helpful way to categorise ideas/projects and work out how effective they are likely to be. Each idea must be placed in one of the three buckets.

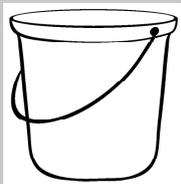
On the left is Brilliant Basics. These represent 'excellence as standard'. You or your company should be doing these well as a matter of course, just like your competitors.

In the middle is Compelling Difference. These should be 'significantly better than normal'. These are demonstrably better than your competitors, but not genuinely remarkable.

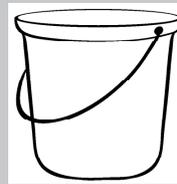
On the right is Changing the Game. These are 'truly extraordinary'. They are utterly distinctive in the market, and genuinely remarkable.

EXERCISE: This exercise will reveal whether a sufficient proportion of your initiatives are going to make a genuine difference to your business.

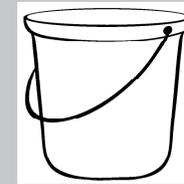
BRILLIANT BASICS



COMPELLING DIFFERENCE



CHANGING THE GAME



three: CATEGORY STEALING

How to get inspiration from a wider field

The principle of Category Stealing is simple: choose a category different to your own and ask how they would approach your issue.

Everyone operates in one category or another, and many of the traditions, rituals and formats in them operate in quite fixed ways. This can lead to sameness in one sector, but could provide inspiration in another.

EXERCISE: Start by listing a number of other categories like [Automotive](#), [Banking](#), [Technology](#), [Pharmaceuticals](#). If you need reminding, scan the share prices in a newspaper, search online, or watch the TV for an evening.

Identify the characteristics of well-defined ones, such as their usual approach to finance, branding, distribution, price, product features, and so on.

Then work out what you can steal to apply to your brand.

If a whole category doesn't have clearly defined traits, then take one brand instead that does. For example, how would Apple or Coke do this?

CATEGORY:

CATEGORY:

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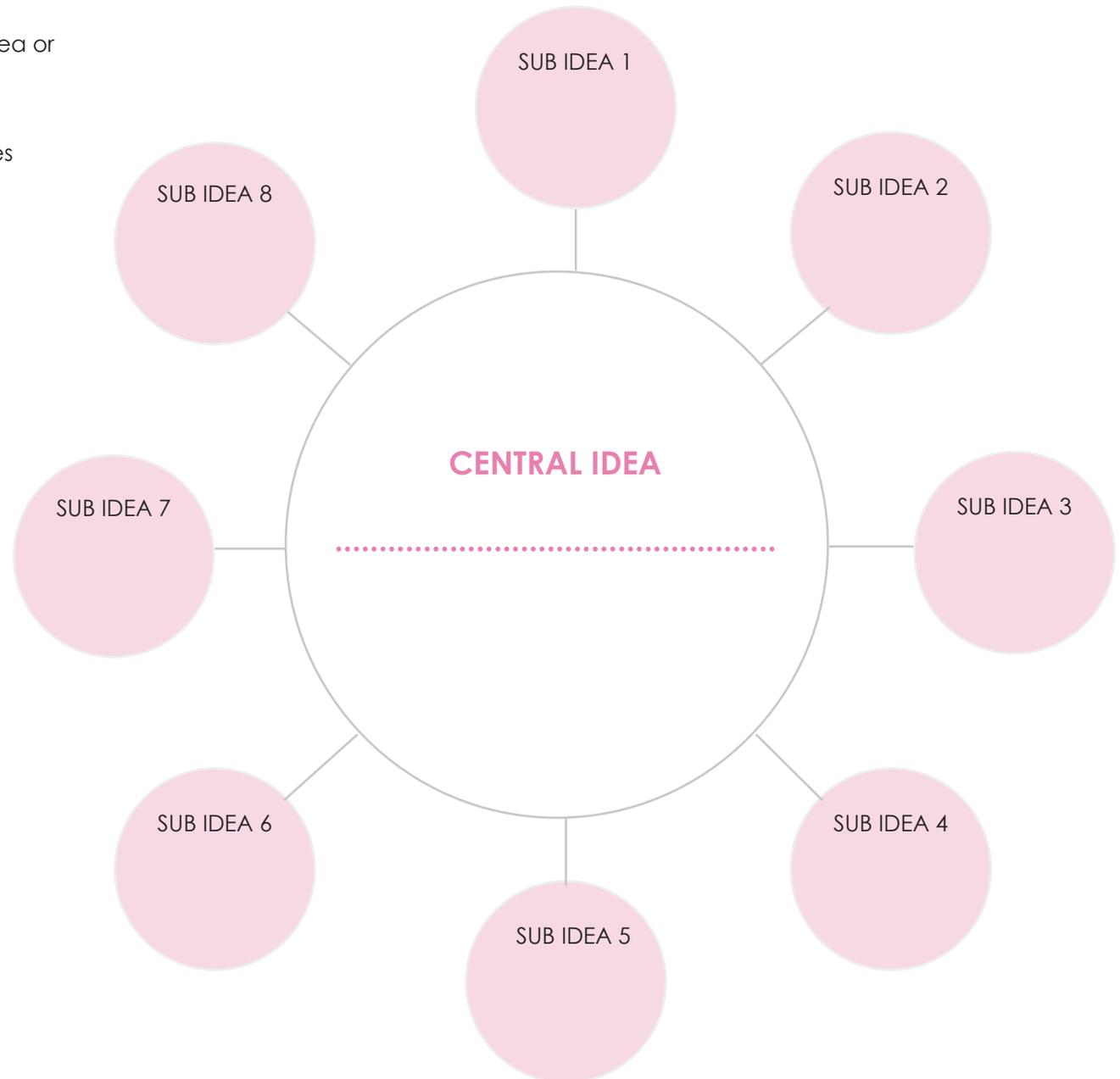
four: CENTRAL IDEA SATELLITE SYSTEM

How to build on a good idea

This system is very effective at demonstrating whether an idea or initiative has significant scope or not.

EXERCISE: The central idea should be placed in the centre circle. Then you need to draw up a list of related sub-themes or ideas that support the central initiative. They can be variations on the theme, or different media through which it can be expressed, or different audiences receiving the message, and so on - so long as all the orbiting thoughts are cousins in some way.

This diagram looks simple enough, but it is not as easy as it looks to fill in. The satellites must be properly anchored themes that truly dramatise the fertility of the central idea. If they do not, then either choose ones that do or, in extremem cases, throw out the central idea in favour of one with greater scope.



five: EYES OF EXPERTS

How to harness the power of experts

This is a charming and fun technique that really works, regardless of the topic. The idea is to view the challenge through the eyes of a known person who is very successful at something i.e. successful businessman (Richard Branson), a sportsman (David Beckham), and a universally known political figure (Nelson Mandela).

It is not essential that they are technically expert, but it is important that they have a reputation for approaching their task in a distinctive way.

EXERCISE: The list of experts can be decided before the session, or generated spontaneously by the group.

Examine a challenge using the style and viewpoint of each expert. This can either be done collectively (all attendees imagining one expert at the same time), or separately (sending pairs or mini-groups off to work through the eyes of several different ones).

EXPERT:



APPROACH:

EXPERT:



APPROACH:

EXPERT:



APPROACH:

Six: THE FOUR CORNER WALKABOUT

How to build on good ideas

This technique is easy and almost always surprising.

EXERCISE: First, you need a room large enough to allow your participants to walk around. Then take four large sheets of flip chart paper. Choose four ideas, and write one only on each sheet. Place each sheet in a different corner of the room.

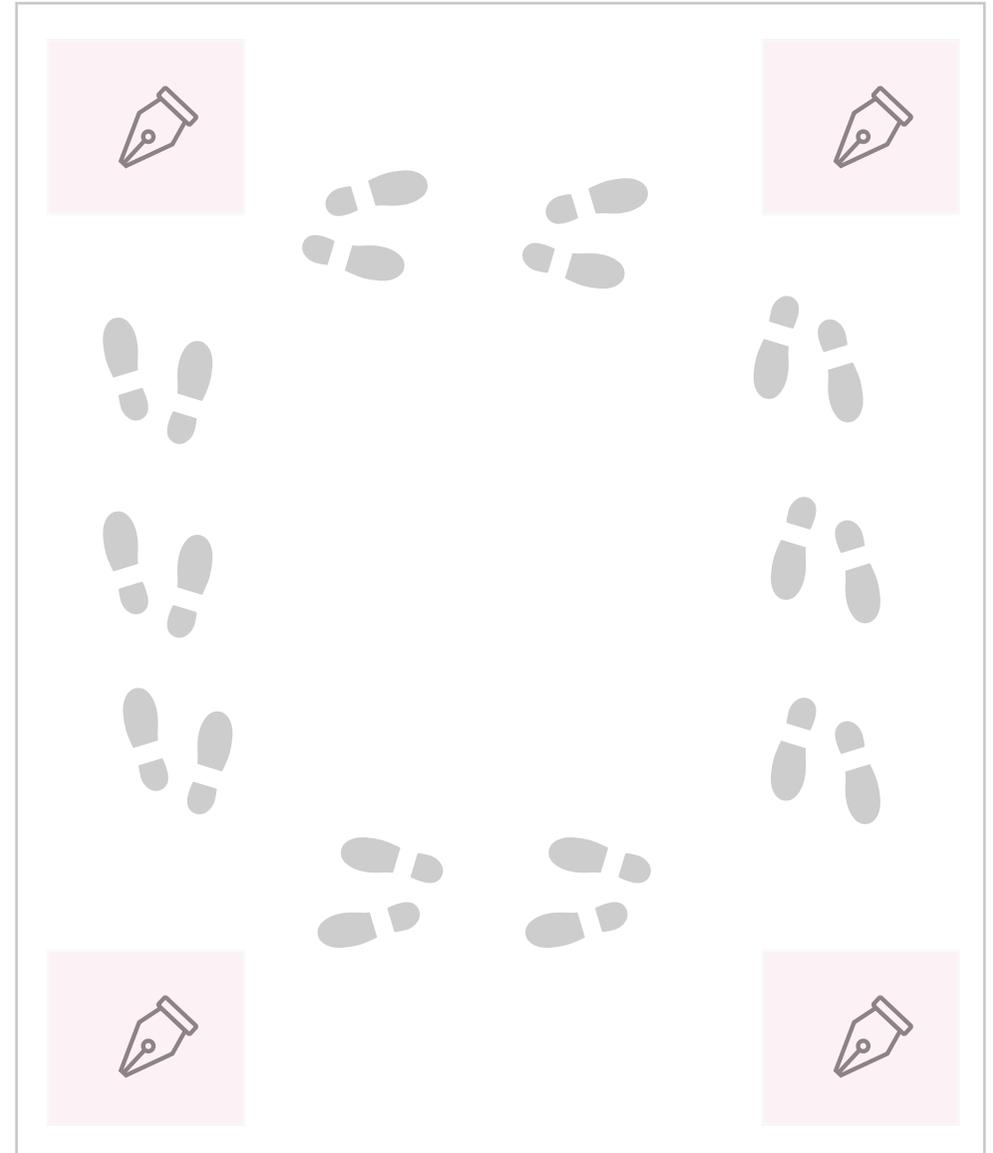
Give your first attendee a marker pen, send them to a corner, and ask them to write the first thought they come up with next to the original idea.

They then move on to the next corner, and another attendee is sent to add to their thought.

Keep sending everyone round, each building on what has gone before until each sheet is full.

This technique achieves three things:

- Lateral departures that are intrinsically linked to the original idea/s.
- Surprise and stimulation for the attendees when they see the ways in which their ideas can be built upon by others to generate something more powerful.
- People have better ideas when they are on the move



"Some people take no mental exercise other than jumping to conclusions."

Harold Acton



