

ideate mixtape

generating unexpected ideas via reframing your challenge

the secret about ideation is that the good ideas come from good questions. when brainstorming, it is not about thinking of ideas in response to the “accurate” question; instead inspire your team with provoking prompts. these prompts are often most successful when they come from specific and meaningful insights about your users and your challenge.

use this mixtape to reframe your challenge, and facilitate a high-impact brainstorm to generate solution concepts

ideate mixtape tracklist:

liner notes:

instructions

side a. / prep for you:

ideating

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side b. / reframing work:

how-might-we questions

side c. / brainstorming:

stoke

brainstorming

selection



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ideate mixtape

liner notes. pt. 1

what to do

1. prep: schedule the day and prepare yourself

read through the six-track mixtape following these instructions. block half a day on your team's schedules. plan your space in a mindful way (where is a place that would be a change of atmosphere from the norm? where can you stand and be loud?)

2. reframe: what's your unique perspective

this is probably the most important part of the brainstorm. what do you (and your team) know about this challenge that no one else has considered? not in terms of your long-held expertise, but instead unique user-centered insights. what's your specific vision (not solution) about how you want change people's lives? another way to think about this is: what assumption are you going to disrupt on your way to a successful solution?

as an example, d.school alum doug dietz works as a designer of medical imaging equipment. a few years ago, sedating kids before MRI scans were the norm (as high as 80%). one day doug visited a hospital, and witnessed first-hand a family coming in for a scan and saw the true fear (and tears) of a seven year-old child and her parents. he realized the accepted attitude of just-get-through-it (and sedate children as needed) had to change. he needed to stop thinking about designing machines, and start thinking about designing experiences for those young patients. in the end, his new perspective resulted in significant reduction in child sedation on the pilot "adventure series" rooms.

so, what's your unique perspective? write down your human-centered point-of-view (not business plan) and specific insights. if you're not sure yet, check out our ***understand mixtape***.

3. brainstorming prompts: how-might-we questions

use your insight and point-of-view to develop 5-10 provoking brainstorming questions. you can do this ahead-of-time or with your team during the work session. the key is to bake part of your unique perspective into each prompt.

continuing the above example, doug's brainstorming topics could include "how might we make a medical scan like an adventure?", "how might we make the hospital like going to camp?", and "how might we help parents embody and convey safety ("everything is going to be okay") to their child?"

ideate mixtape

liner notes, pt. 2

4. launch (20 min): get stoked

introduce the working session. review the brainstorming “rules”. even if everyone has brainstormed before it is useful to set the right attitude and be able to refer back to the rules. get everyone warmed up with a stoke activity.

5. brainstorm (60 min): go for quantity

get your group(s) standing and in a playful mode. take one how-might-we prompt at a time as you brainstorm.

6. select (40 min): choose and discuss options

plan to take multiple ideas forward into low-resolution prototyping. select in a way that keeps your innovation potential alive (i.e. don't just keep the safe options). take this time to also discuss merits of some solutions and flesh them out a bit.

7. wrap (30 min): recap the work, and plan next steps

record (write down and sketch) your set of solutions. discuss how the team can develop the ideas and create prototypes. discuss how the day's work felt (“how was this way of working?”). celebrate the team.

8. going forward:

develop your ideas (a bit) and then get them back in front of users. consider the *experiment mixtape* to advance your solutions through prototyping.

ideating

WHAT is ideating?

Ideate is the mode of your design process in which you aim to generate radical design alternatives. Mentally it represents a process of “going wide” in terms of concepts and outcomes—it is a mode of “flaring” rather than “focus.” The goal of ideation is to explore a wide solution space – both a large quantity of ideas and a diversity among those ideas. From this vast depository of ideas you can build prototypes to test with users.

WHY ideate?

You ideate in order to transition from identifying problems into exploring solutions for your users. Various forms of ideation are leveraged to:

- Step beyond obvious solutions and thus increase the innovation potential of your solution set
- Harness the collective perspectives and strengths of your teams
- Uncover unexpected areas of exploration
- Create fluency (volume) and flexibility (variety) in your innovation options
- Get obvious solutions out of your heads, and drive your team beyond them

Regardless of what ideation method you use, the fundamental principle of ideation is to be cognizant of when you and your team are generating ideas and when you are evaluating ideas – typically keeping these two tasks separate, and only mixing the two intentionally.

facilitate a brainstorm



WHY facilitate a brainstorm?

Good facilitation is key to a generative brainstorm. You brainstorm to come up with many, wide-ranging ideas; a good facilitator sets the stage for the team to be successful doing this.

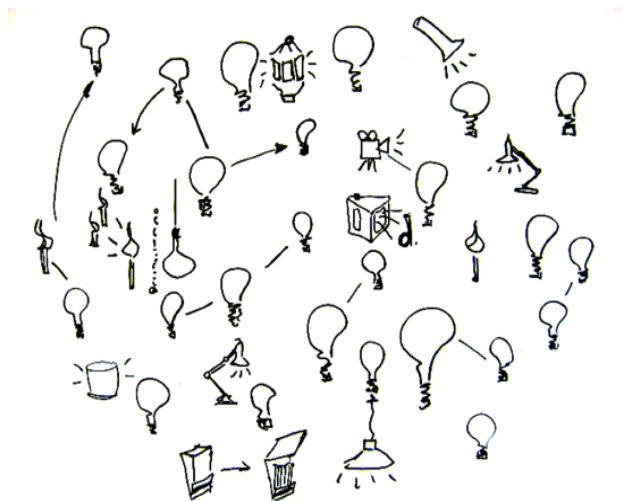
HOW to facilitate a brainstorm?

ENERGY – As the facilitator it is your task to keep the ideas flowing. Perhaps the most important aspect of a successful brainstorm is the seed question that you are brainstorming about (see the “How Might We” method card for more information). During the brainstorm keep a pulse on the energy of the group. If the group is slowing down or getting stuck, make an adjustment. Create a variation to the “How-might-we?” (HMW) statement to get the group thinking in another direction (prepare some HMW options ahead of time). Or have a few provocative ideas in your back pocket that you can lob in to re-energize the team.

CONSTRAINTS – Add constraints that may spark new ideas. “What if it had to be round?,” “How would superman do it?,” “How would your spouse design it?,” “How would you design it with the technology of 100 years ago?” Additionally you can create process constraints. Try putting a time limit on each how-might-we statement; shoot for 50 ideas in 20 minutes.

SPACE – Be mindful about the space in which you conduct a brainstorm. Make sure that there is plenty of vertical writing area. This allows the group to generate a large number of potential solutions. Strike a balance between having a footprint that is big enough for everyone, but also is not so large that some people start to feel removed. A good rule of thumb is that all members of the group should be able to reach the board in two steps. Also, make sure each person has access to sticky notes and a marker so they can capture their own thoughts and add them to the board if the scribe cannot keep up with the pace. (See more about scribing on the “Brainstorming” method card.)

how-might-we questions



WHY generate how-might-we questions?

“How might we” (HMW) questions are short questions that launch brainstorms. HMWs are seeds for your ideation that fall out of your point-of-view statement, design principles, or insights. Create a seed that is broad enough that there are a wide range of solutions but narrow enough that the team is provoked to think of specific, unique ideas. For example, between the (possibly) too narrow “HMW create a cone to eat ice cream without dripping” and the too broad “HMW redesign dessert” might be the properly scoped “HMW redesign ice cream to be more portable.” It should be noted, the the proper scope of the seed will vary with the project and how much progress you have made in your project work.

HOW to generate how-might-we questions?

Begin with your Point of View (POV), insights, or problem statement. Create small actionable questions that retain your unique and specific perspective. Write these questions beginning with the phrase, “How might we...” It is often helpful to brainstorm the HMW questions before the solutions brainstorm. For example, consider the following POV and resulting HMW statements.

Challenge: Redesign the ground experience at the local international airport

POV: Harried mother of three, rushing through the airport only to wait hours at the gate, needs to entertain her playful children because “annoying little brats” only irritate already frustrated fellow passengers.

Amp up the good: HMW use the kids’ energy to entertain fellow passenger?

Remove the bad: HMW separate the kids from fellow passengers?

Explore the opposite: HMW make the wait the most exciting part of the trip?

Question an assumption: HMW entirely remove the wait time at the airport?

Go after adjectives: HMW we make the rush refreshing instead of harrying?

ID unexpected resources: HMW leverage free time of fellow passengers to share the load?

Create an analogy from need or context: HMW make the airport like a spa? Like a playground?

Play against the challenge: HMW make the airport a place that kids want to go?

Change a status quo: HMW make playful, loud kids less annoying?

Break POV into pieces: HMW entertain kids? HMW slow a mom down? HMW mollify delayed passengers?

stoke



WHY stoke?

Stoke activities help teams loosen up and become mentally and physically active. Use stoke activities when energy is wavering, to wake up in the morning, to launch a meeting, or before a brainstorm.

HOW to stoke?

Do an activity that gets your creativity going and increases your team members' engagement with each other. A good stoke activity not only increases energy but also requires each person to actively engage, listen, think, and do. For example, when playing Pictionary you must watch a teammate drawing, listen to other teammates guessing the answer (allowing you to build on those ideas), think of what the answer might be, and call out guesses yourself. Keep the activity brief (5-10 minutes) and active so you can jump into your design work after. Many improv games are good stoke activities. Try one of these:

Category, category, die! Line folks up. Name a category (breakfast cereals, vegetables, animals, car manufacturers). Point at each person in rapid succession, skipping around the group. The player has to name something in the category. If she does not, everyone yells "die!!" and that player is out for the round.

Sound ball Stand in a circle and throw an imaginary ball to each other. Make eye contact with the person you are throwing to, and make a noise as you throw it. The catcher should repeat the noise while catching, and then make a new noise as he throws to next person. Try to increase the speed the ball travels around the circle. Add a second ball to the circle to increase each person's awareness.

"Yes, Let's" Everyone walk around the room randomly, and then one person can make an offer: "Let's act like we're all at a cocktail party," "Let's be baby birds," or "Let's act like we don't understand gravity." Then everyone should shout in unison the response, "Yes, let's" and proceed to take the directive by acting it out. At anytime someone else can yell out the next offer. The answer is always, "Yes, let's!"

brainstorming



One Conversation at a Time

Encourage wild ideas

Go for Quantity

Be Visual

Headline!

Stay on Topic

Build on the Ideas of Others

Defer Judgement -
NO Blocking

WHY brainstorm?

Brainstorming is a great way to come up with a lot of ideas that you would not be able to generate by just sitting down with a pen and paper. The intention of brainstorming is to leverage the collective thinking of the group, by engaging with each other, listening, and building on other ideas. Conducting a brainstorm also creates a distinct segment of time when you intentionally turn up the generative part of your brain and turn down the evaluative part. Brainstorming can be used throughout a design process; of course to come up with design solutions, but also any time you are trying to come up with ideas, such as planning where to do empathy work, or thinking about product and services related to your project – as two examples.

HOW to brainstorm?

Be intentional about setting aside a period of time when your team will be in “brainstorm mode” – when the sole goal is to come up with as many ideas as possible, and when judgment of those ideas will not come into the discussion. Invest energy into a short period of time, such as 15 or 30 minutes of high engagement. Get in front of a whiteboard or around a table, but take an active posture of standing or sitting upright. Get close together.

Write down clearly what you are brainstorming. Using a How-Might-We (HMW) question is a great way to frame a brainstorm (e.g. HMW give each shopper a personal checkout experience?).

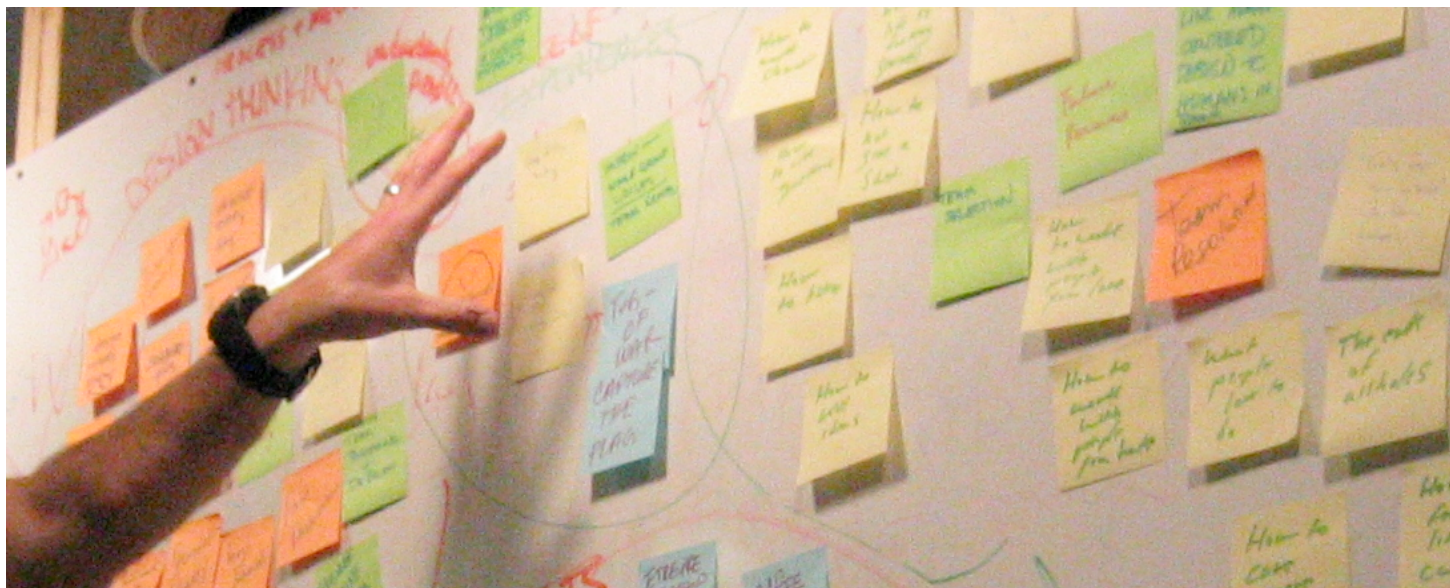
There are at least two ways to capture the ideas of a brainstorming:

Scribe: the scribe legibly and visually captures on the board ideas that team members call out. It is very important to capture every idea, regardless of your own feelings about each idea.

All-in: Each person will write down each of his or her ideas as they come, and **verbally share it** with the group. It is great to do this with post-it notes, so you can write your idea and then stick it on the board.

Follow and (nicely) enforce the brainstorming rules – they are intended to increase your creative output.

selection



WHY select with intention?

Your brainstorm should generate many, wide-ranging ideas. Now harvest that brainstorm, so those ideas don't just sit there on the board. Harvesting is straight forward for some brainstorms (pick a couple of ideas), but when ideating design solutions give some thought to how you select ideas. Carry forward a range of those ideas, so you preserve the breadth of solutions and don't settle only for the safe choice.

HOW to select?

In the selection process, don't narrow too fast. Don't immediately worry about feasibility. Hang on to the ideas about which the group is excited, amused, or intrigued. An idea that is not plausible may still have an aspect within it that is very useful and meaningful.

Different selection techniques can be used, including these three:

1. Post-it voting – each team member gets three votes and marks three ideas that he or she is attracted to. Independent voting allows all team members to have a voice.
2. The four categories method – the method encourages you to hang onto those crazy but meaningful ideas. Elect one or two ideas for each of these four categories: the rational choice, the most likely to delight, the darling, and the long shot.
3. Bingo selection method – like the four categories method, this is designed to help preserve innovation potential. Choose ideas that inspire you to build in different form factors: a physical prototype, a digital prototype, and an experience prototype.

Carry forward multiple ideas into prototyping. If an idea is so far out there that it seems pointless to test, ask yourselves what about that solution was attractive, and then test that aspect or integrate it into a new solution.