



Seeing tomorrow's ideas...Today

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Focus on Innovation

Focus on Innovation is a monthly electronic newsletter designed to provoke thoughts and ideas on how to bring innovation to life within the organizations in which we work.

For Those on the Run

It's not enough just to generate a large quantity of ideas for a problem you are trying to solve or a product you are trying to develop. Good brainstorming also involves an organized way to evaluate the ideas you have generated. Like brainstorming, there are some general guidelines to consider and helpful techniques to evaluate ideas effectively. Read more to find out about the how to evaluate ideas.

Innovation Tool: How to Evaluate Ideas

Similar to the rules of brainstorming, there are some general guidelines to consider when evaluating ideas.

1. **Use Affirmative Judgment.** Instead of pointing out all the ideas in which you don't see merit ("I hate that idea, and that idea, and that one, and that one, and that one. That one really sucks..."), focus on the ideas that are potentially valuable. Look for the good. Don't point out the bad.
2. **Be Brave: Consider Novelty.** When evaluating ideas, it's too easy to fall back on the safe ideas you've tried before or that you know have been done before. Innovation doesn't come from same old, same old ideas. They come from bold, fresh, new, novel ideas. Learn how to play in the uncomfortable zone and focus on looking for the novel ideas.
3. **Stay on Target.** As you evaluate ideas, remember what you're trying to accomplish. What was the original objective? Keep that in mind when you're reviewing ideas. Otherwise, it's easy to go off on tangents without getting what you want.
4. **Keep Focused.** It's easy to see one idea and latch onto it, excluding all of the other great ideas that you generated. Watch out! Force yourself to be patient enough to explore each and every idea and ponder it's strengths before moving on to evaluate the next idea.

Here are three techniques for evaluating ideas:

1. **Simple Rating Technique.** The simple rating method technique is useful for the initial sorting of large numbers of ideas, and is very useful for quick initial screening of ideas. It can be done in a number of ways:
 - a. 'Sticky dot voting'. Each participant gets 3 - 6 sticky dots and places them on the ideas which they feel are 'interesting' and/or 'might work'.

- b. **Simple/Hard/Difficult.** The group works through their list of ideas and make judgments as to the priority rating they feel is appropriate, each idea should be marked:
 - Simple: Feasible with a minimum of time and money.
 - Hard: Feasible, but a will be more expensive.
 - Difficult: Feasible but much more expensive.
 - c. **V?W.** Rate each idea in terms of:
 - V: ideas that are feasible as they stand, they are generally ideas you would be happy to show to the client/move forward on
 - ?: ideas that are not feasible as they stand, but have potential with more thought or research, or in the further or under special circumstances
 - W: stands for 'weirdo's' - ideas that are bizarre and totally unfeasible as they stand, but have the potential as de Bono 'intermediate impossibilities' for further idea generation
2. **Use Evaluation Criteria.** This technique involves three steps, (1) List the criteria for evaluation. Some common criteria include: Will it work? Is it legal? Are the materials and technology available? Are the costs acceptable? Will the public accept it? Will high-level management accept it? (2) Evaluate ideas against criteria and (3) Select the one or two best ideas. Consider using an evaluation grid, listing the ideas on the vertical axis and the criteria on the horizontal axis. Then rate each idea on a 1 (low) and 5 (high) scale according to each criterion. Tally the total scores and pick the ideas with the highest score.
3. **Pluses, Potentials, Concerns:** This is a technique that constructively evaluates an idea. It can be quite time consuming, hence, this technique is more appropriate for use on a short-list of ideas than for general screening of a large number of ideas. The steps include:
- a. Prepare your ideas into a form such as: 'What I see myself/us doing is...' Then list:
 - b. 3 or more 'plusses' (Strong points)
 - c. 3 or more 'potentials' (Spin-offs, researchable possibilities, etc)
 - d. Your 'concerns' about the idea, using the layout: 'How to...?' And putting them in order of importance.
 - e. Starting with the most important idea make notes on how you can overcome each concern (or at least the main ones).
 - Taking into account step d, try to improve your original idea: for instance:
 - How to get people to understand it and become enthusiastic for it
 - Its advantages and disadvantages (and how to surmount the disadvantages);
 - The resources required (people, materials, money...)
 - How to pre-test it (e.g. are there particular times or locations you might use?)
 - How to identify when implementation is complete
 - f. In order to keep the momentum going, put in place the opening steps of a suitable action plan, with at least one step to be done within the next day.

What's the Bottom line

Great ideas not only come from the ability to generate a large quantity of ideas but from being able to evaluate them effectively.

Some of the ideas for this newsletter came from the book, *More Lightening, Less Thunder: How to Energize Innovation Teams*, by Bob Eckert & Jonathan Vehar, 2000 (see <http://www.morelightninglessthunder.com/book.htm> for more information on the book) and <http://www.mycoted.com/creativity/techniques/index.php>.



Please feel free to pass this newsletter on to others.

If you would like more information about the ideas and topics listed in this issue, contact Judy Laws, Ph.D. at jlaws@foursightconsulting.com.

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