Having gained an understanding of the importance of creative thinking and its role within public relations in Topic Guide 4.1, we now move on to the practicalities of generating lots of ideas, then analysing and evaluating them.

We start with the origins of brainstorming, which is not simply a catch-all phrase to describe idea sessions in general. It is important to understand that effective brainstorming is about discipline and structure (two things that tend to be missing from many brainstorming sessions).

We explore the three progressive levels of brainstorming, helping to dispel one of the most damaging misconceptions about the technique, which is that it is all about lateral thinking, thinking outside the box and wacky ideas. Lateral thinking has an important part to play in the creative process, but you need to know how and when to ‘go lateral’. Here you will find a wide range of techniques, together with the inspiration to develop more of your own. Finally, having found out about ways to generate a multitude of ideas, we will look at the separate process through which to analyse and evaluate your ideas to sort out which have the potential to be winners.
1 Brainstorming

Origins

Some people object to the use of the term 'brainstorming', saying it is offensive to those with mental health problems, and suggest other terms such as thought showers. However, Andy Green, trainer in creative thinking for the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, carried out research with mental health charities and their attitudes to the term. Not one objected and Epilepsy Action even issued a press release to say as much (see Further reading on page 22 for more information).

Brainstorming has roots that go back to 1941 when American advertising executive Alex Osborn first coined the term. Brainstorming, he insisted was strictly for generating lots of ideas; it was not for analysis or decision making. Key to making the process effective was:

• Being very specific about the objectives of the subject you are brainstorming. You may have to break it up into several smaller objectives. If, for instance, you decide you need to improve your company’s green credentials, you will probably achieve little with an objective such as ‘become more green’. You are likely to be more productive with a series of bite-sized objectives focusing specifically on areas such as transport, staff, customers, packaging, outlets, suppliers and so on. All of this will contribute to the wider objective.

• Having a clear definition of the problem or opportunity you are addressing so that you can begin to see it in a positive light; this way a problem could soon start to look more like an opportunity. A good way to achieve this is to start by framing your problem as a ‘challenge’.

• Avoiding giving example solutions whereby you say ‘Here is the brief and the sort of things we have in mind so far are X, Y and Z’. By giving examples you can restrict the thinking of your team to the areas described. You want to start off with the belief that all thoughts are valuable and anything is possible – blue sky thinking, if you like.

Above all, apply and stick to the rules set out on the following pages, a ‘how to’ guide to brainstorming and the creative thinking process. Refer to the useful planner on page 22 if you need to recap the process at any stage.

The rules of brainstorming

1 No criticism of ideas
2 Quantity, not quality
3 Encourage wild and exaggerated ideas
4 Build on each other’s ideas
5 Equal status for all.
These rules take Osborn’s brainstorming principles as inspiration. They are simple but very effective.

- **Rule 1 – No criticism of ideas** – this is by far the most important rule, for two key reasons, the first being that you must keep a positive mood and you simply cannot expect to generate lots of ideas if you pick them apart as you go. The second reason is that this is a very difficult rule for brainstormers to abide by. As explained in Topic Guide 4.1, the main reason creative thinking is difficult is that it goes against the way our brains work. As soon as something doesn’t feel quite right – possibly because it is unfamiliar - the ‘caution mechanism’ kicks in and we raise our concerns. We cannot allow that to happen in a brainstorming session so we need to underline Rule 1 and enforce it rigorously, probably with the help of a ‘no criticism mechanism’.

- **Rule 2 – Quantity, not quality** – again, you don’t want your team to hold back, they should let their ideas flow out. Above all, bear in mind that you should expect to throw away 90 per cent of the ideas you generate, so unless you have lots of ideas you will have little to work with.

- **Rule 3 – Encourage wild and exaggerated ideas** – in part this is used to generate lots of ideas. Let them flow out, however crazy they may seem. The real value of crazy and exaggerated ideas, however, is that they can trigger new trains of thought in the same way as lateral thinking. Once a brainstorming session warms up you will typically find a couple of your team laughing over a private joke they have just murmured to each other. If you ask them what they are laughing about they will protest ‘Oh no, it was silly!’ However, it is a good idea to note it down as you may find that you hit on a really good idea that you can track back to the ‘silly’ remark. Like lateral thinking, silly ideas can spark fresh trains of thought. Furthermore, having captured and noted the silly idea you may even come back to it and be brave enough to suggest: ‘What if we actually did that?’ Or perhaps more likely you might say: ‘What if we went half-way towards doing that?’ What may initially seem like a silly comment can become a potentially workable idea.

- **Rule 4 – Build on each other’s ideas** – this requires a mix of good management by the chairman of the session and good manners among team members. Ideas rarely fulfil their full potential until a degree of collaboration is introduced and team members are likely to have different types of skill and knowledge that help to enhance an idea in its raw state.

- **Rule 5 – Equal status for all** – this means that no one person should be allowed to dominate. While equal status should be observed it may often be that younger, more junior members have particular value to offer because they are in touch with the latest trends and their minds are less cluttered by previous experience.
No criticism mechanism

Having some kind of mechanism helps the chairman of a brainstorm session to drive the no criticism point home and enforce it. This can be applied in a playful way at the early stages, which is usually enough to establish the very important principle. Examples of no criticism mechanisms include:

- distribution of a list of typical negative phrases that are banned at this stage
- a buzzer to be activated whenever a negative phrase is heard
- a system of forfeits for negatives or rewards for successfully avoiding them.

Opening the meeting

Start by introducing everyone and confirm the time that the meeting will finish. A time limit is essential as it brings its own sense of momentum. With an open-ended meeting the pace can too easily slow down and trigger a feeling of ‘we’re going to be here all night’.

Explain the brief for the brainstorm, together with a specific objective. You can provide a degree of background detail, but try not to spend much time on this. In general, short briefs are good, for two reasons:

1. you want to spend as much time as possible brainstorming
2. a long brief may highlight many of the difficulties and create barriers to the ideas you are working to generate. You are seeking lots of quick-fire thoughts, not an in-depth analysis.

Spell out the rules, underlining the great importance of Rule 1: No criticism, and how you will seek to enforce this rule strictly.

2 Brainstorming level 1

Word associations and free thinking

Get started with the first stage of brainstorming.

- Move to the flip chart and write the (very specific) objective at the top.
- Draw a column down the left-hand side as shown in Figure 4.2.1 on the following page. Fill this (in black ink) with word associations. Insist on very quick-fire thoughts here until you have filled up the column.
- Then use the words in the word associations column to trigger thoughts – any thoughts that occur – and build on those thoughts, mind map-style, with further thoughts. These go into the free thinking section on the rest of the sheet in blue ink.
You will find it most effective if one person both chairs the meeting and records it. While you need to give the impression that you are recording everything, in reality you will be editing as you go, moving onto new topics (and starting a fresh sheet for big ones), ‘parking’ ideas that sound good but would interrupt the flow at that moment, and joining up ideas, either because they fit well together or because their juxtaposition could spark fresh new thoughts.
It can sometimes take a while to find the right key word for the word associations. If the first one is producing little, try a different one. While it is vital that you enforce the no criticism rule, it is also important that you encourage good input. Use phrases such as:
- ‘Great, let’s try it’
- ‘Let’s prove everyone else/the boss wrong’
- ‘Tell me more’
- ‘Ignore the way it’s done now’
- ‘What parts can we use immediately?’

It is also very important to use positive body language in terms of looking, listening and not interrupting.

Finally, one of Osborn’s policies was to avoid using people’s names. The reason for this is that as soon as a name is mentioned in association with an idea it can imply a sense of ‘ownership’ by that person and others might become jealous, feel inferior and stop contributing any further. Everyone should feel a joint sense of ownership, so the chairman should do all they can to ‘muddy up’ the origination of an idea by seeking further contribution from others.

The example shown in Figure 4.2.2 imagines the process that environmentalists have gone through when their objective was to find an umbrella term for the personal impact that we each have on the environment, so as to encourage greater personal responsibility.
- The key word for word associations is ‘Impact’.
- The word associations that have proved most productive are ‘trail’ and ‘injury’.
- ‘Injury’ is another, more emotive way of considering the erosion that we cause to the environment. It chimes with ‘sore’, as in the eyesore caused by litter, which can also cause injury to wildlife. It sparks the idea of ‘first aid’ for fields, forests, rivers, plants etc, which is similar to the concept that Sir Bob Geldof conceived with Band Aid – a play on words with bands aiding the Third World and Band-Aid® bandages and plasters.
- It is ‘Trail’ however, that leads us to the eventual solution – carbon footprint. A trail needs a ‘pathfinder’ or a ‘scout’, looking for ‘tracks’; the tracks might be ‘paw prints’ a special type of ‘footprints’.
- What is a footprint that harms the environment? A ‘carbon footprint’.
Activity

To help you understand how level 1 works, you could try a mini-brainstorm by yourself.

Start with something really simple, with which you have no connection. Look around your desk and pick up an item at random – a highlighter pen for instance.

Now think of an imaginary brief for that item, for instance that the brand created and led the market, but has now lost share to cheeky competitors. The brief is to come up with ideas that will help the company regain its leadership position.

Start with word associations. Write down anything that you think of immediately when you hear the word ‘highlight’ or ‘highlighter’. When you have a list of such words down the left-hand side of your sheet, pick a few at random and consider what thoughts (free thinking) they spark. You should soon be generating thoughts about new colours, special sets for colour coding, new product development, branding issues, new niche targets and so on.

For more practice, pick an issue that is reported in the week’s news. This will probably be within the marketing media rather than attempting to solve the problems of the world!
3 Brainstorming level 2

Lateral thinking

Lateral thinking, also known as thinking outside the box, is the second level of brainstorming that you can use either for boosting a session when it is flagging or for enlivening it at key moments.

Lateral thinking directly addresses the biggest barriers to creative thinking: first that our brains often tells us what we already know about the chosen topic, shutting out what doesn't fit; second, the more focused we become, the more difficult it is to spot interesting ideas that may be floating on the periphery.

We need a mechanism to overcome the brain's natural programming. Top creatives such as advertising executives, writers and film producers tend to think unconventionally as a matter of course. The rest of us need a mechanism to help us think unconventionally – when required.

Edward de Bono pioneered this field when he created the concept of lateral thinking in the 1960s. Lateral thinking forces you to approach your challenge from completely different perspectives. This gives rise to thoughts and ideas that would probably never have occurred to you otherwise.

Activity: Thinking outside the box

Look at the pattern above and draw four straight lines that join up all of the dots.
The solution can be found on page 23.

Essentially, lateral thinking works by posing questions or issuing instructions that seem a little crazy in the situation you are brainstorming. Some examples of lateral thinking are described on pages 9 to 12.
Three wishes

Imagine you were granted three wishes by a fairy godmother. Believe for a moment that it is possible. Then work backwards towards making it true. To overcome the inevitable barriers to achieving a big goal you have to imagine for a moment that it is possible. One wish might, for instance, be: ‘We wish that our product had to be used in every school’. Clearly that is impossible but, having made the wish, you can now start thinking about closing the gap – what do schools most need that we might be able to help with to get a dialogue going?

What would the movers and shakers do?

This can involve asking what the current highest profile player or greatest innovator in your sector would do? List the answers. How could you do this? What is really stopping you? How could those barriers be overcome?

Here we get into the mindset of the movers and shakers within your sector. Once you do that you can think much more freely and adventurously. You will often start to realise that you can actually do many of those things yourself. As an alternative, think about what your hero would do. This could be anyone from David Beckham to Audrey Hepburn.

Analogies

Look for similar problem solving in other fields. Where are there parallel situations, however remotely related? What solutions, expertise, alternatives and tricks have been used?

When a solution to opening drink cans without the need for a sharp instrument was sought during the 1950s, they posed the question ‘what is there in nature that opens easily?’ One answer was the banana, so they thought in terms of peeling a can open and subsequently the first version of the ring pull was invented. The roll-on deodorant emerged from considering ‘what else lets out liquid, but just a little at a time in a controlled flow?’ The answer was the ballpoint pen, which had been invented previously.

Challenge facts

You can ask yourself whether accepted facts have become inappropriate. Do life changes mean improvements and developments could be made? Consider what advantages could emerge if accepted facts were not true. You can also carry out crystal ball gazing and imagine how a situation might be handled in 10, 20 or 30 years time.

We tend to carry on doing things in the same way simply because we have grown used to it. Try playing a game whereby every single element needs to stand up and justify its long-term survival or in which you imagine how things will be done in the future. Think about cheques, which have largely become a thing of the past. This may have been foreseen more clearly if, perhaps, in the mid-70s someone had posed the question: ‘How will we make payments in 30 years’ time – will we really keep writing on slips of paper and putting them in the post?’
Break/forget/un-learn the rules

At the root of almost every advance in areas such as science, cooking, medicine, agriculture, engineering, marketing, education and design has been someone who has, for whatever reason, decided to go against the grain and do things differently. Dick Fosbury broke the records in high jumping when he figured he could jump even higher if he lobbed himself over backwards rather than use the accepted ‘scissor’ style. There were only three accredited swimming strokes until one unconventional swimmer decided to try a new style that he called ‘The Butterfly’. In commerce there was initially strong resistance to allowing famous chocolate brands to adopt new concepts, such as selling smaller sizes, mixed packs or even an ice cream version. Such moves were eventually adopted throughout the industry, but the initial feelings were ‘you don’t mess with success or fix what isn’t broken’.

Escapism

In this technique you consider the wildest, most outrageous things imaginable. Forget about rules, etiquette, morals, laws and standards. Don’t worry about whether something is practical, possible or sensible. Then you review the results and consider: What has a grain of sense? What could be modified to work? ATM machines in banks are supposedly called ‘holes in the wall’ because when this approach was used to solve the problems of queuing in banks one brave soul took them at their word and suggested ‘knocking a hole in the wall and allowing customers to help themselves to cash!’ The team fell about laughing, but then realised that the general principle was good – it just needed a control mechanism.

Reversal

You can plan to do the opposite of your objectives, for example, make sales worse, and use the findings of the exercise to identify where damage is already being done and to generate effective positive strategies.

This technique was used memorably when an agency was seeking to increase the adoption of broadband within its region. Having made little progress in the brainstorm session the question was posed: ‘What would we do if we wanted less people to take up broadband?’ The team wondered for a moment about the sanity of the facilitator, but eventually responded: ‘fire the sales force, stop advertising, increase jargon etc.’ ‘How much jargon have you got currently?’ asked the facilitator. ‘Now you ask’, said one team member, ‘we’ve got so much jargon that, having secured the early adopters, it’s a wonder anyone else understands what we are on about.’ Through this crazy instruction the team had hit upon the nub of the problem and they then went on to develop a range of interesting ideas based on adopting plain language.
Distortion

Most challenges have clear spatial, numerical and time dimensions. If you imagine the dimensions to be much bigger or much smaller, you can see what scenarios and potential solutions emerge.

Suppose a PR consultancy currently has a new business target of one new client per month. Imagine now what it would do if it were to change that target to one new client a) per week and b) per year (the approach sometimes adopted by large advertising agencies). The resulting approaches would be very different from each other and from what they were doing currently. You would not necessarily adopt either, but lessons would be learned from the fresh perspectives gained.

Passion piece

With this technique you apply the rules and principles of your personal passion (e.g. film, sport, arts) to your challenge to see what ideas, inspiration and thought trains this triggers.

If your passion is football, you would imagine for a moment you were running a football club rather than looking at the topic you are brainstorming. If a football club is not performing well it has a number of options. It can buy new players, change formations or train harder. These options might spark a parallel thought to the topic you are brainstorming, for example, appointing new staff, switching pack sizes or pricing structures and doing some away-day planning. Sometimes it can also help you say the ‘unsayable’, such as ‘If this were a football club we would have sacked the manager by now…’

Do nothing

Don’t rule out doing nothing, it may be the best option. List reasons, benefits and implications for doing nothing. At the very least it provides a benchmark against which to judge other ideas.

Do something different

You might need to take some time out (but not for refreshment). Keep thinking about the challenge, but in different surroundings. The change of scene and chance to move around may ignite new sparks.

Role play

It can be useful to look at your challenge from someone else’s point of view. Select an occupation or role, then consider:

• How would this person think?
• What objects would they use?
• Where would they do it?
• How would they explain it?

Different people will see the same situation in very different ways. A farmer, for instance, may focus on yield in the long term; a plumber may think in terms of flow and how you get from the source to the end point; a policeman, meanwhile, may want to deal in facts, searching for evidence from a variety of sources.
Random personalities or ‘Who’s in the Bag’?

This technique uses the game ‘Who’s in the Bag’, made by Paul Lamond Games. It offers hundreds of cards, each featuring the names of three very different celebrities. Imagining what approach some of these names would take to your challenge will spark a whole variety of new ideas. The game is widely available and you only need the refill pack to make it work as a brainstorming device.

Random songs

Similarly, songs generated randomly through your MP3 player can be used to spark all kinds of fresh thoughts, memories and associations.

Simply set your MP3 player to ‘shuffle’, then think about the lyrics, song titles, artists and memories that start to flow.

Activity

Now go back to the mini-brainstorm you started earlier and carry on, this time using some of these Lateral Thinking techniques to see what additional ideas you can generate.

Activity

Do some research into the origins of famous products and you will find that many were the result of lateral thinking, albeit frequently the idea emerged by accident – what you might call a ‘happy’ accident. You will soon come to realise that lateral thinking is about proactively making happy accidents happen, rather than waiting for them. Look in particular for the origins of the following:

- Velcro® fasteners
- corn flakes
- microwave ovens
- sticky notes
- Slinky® toys
- penicillin
- cones for ice cream.
4 Brainstorming level 3

Tested strategies

Towards the end of a brainstorming session attention should turn to look at strategies that have worked before and might be appropriate for a particular challenge. Typically, the strategies shown in Figure 4.2.3 might be used.

The important thing is to wait until the end of a session before considering such tested strategies, using them as a ‘checklist’ to ensure that nothing has been missed. If you focus on tested strategies any earlier, your thinking is likely to be dominated by versions of what has been done before and you will miss out ideas that can be generated at brainstorming levels 1 and 2. Indeed, some of those ideas may well become a fresh new version of one of your tested strategies.

A useful resource is to keep examples of successful tested strategies in a consistent format so that you can refer to them for both inspiration and subsequent guidance. Such a format would be likely to include:

- objectives
- target
- tactics
- examples of results
- lessons learned
- contact details of executives involved.
Activity
Seek out some of the most successful people around you and ask them for a little time to speak to them about their most successful projects. It is a great opportunity for you to get to know your colleagues and learn from examples of great work. You could ask them the following questions about their most successful projects:

- What were they and how did they came about?
- What did they achieve?
- What were the key ingredients to making it work?
- Who were the key people involved?
- Did they use a ‘tested strategy’ – a method that they deploy regularly and has become an area of expertise for them?
- What lessons were learned in the process?

People like to talk about their successes so even very busy people might make some time for you. You can offer to write it up as a case history for them.

For you, it means you will learn from the best people, while starting to develop a bank of tested strategies that in future you can deploy at level 3 in brainstorming sessions.

Finally, consider whether any of the tested strategies you have learned about could be applied to the subject of your personal mini-brainstorm.

5 Concluding a brainstorming session

Having ensured that you have stuck to time, sessions should conclude with the chairman reviewing the thoughts and ideas generated, highlighting themes that have emerged and grouping ideas together. This is important for two reasons:

1. To create a sense of achievement among your participants.
2. As the basis for the analysis and evaluation that will follow, ideally in a separate session the next day, with as many of the same people as possible.

Look back at the flip chart sheets you have drawn up. Using a purple pen to circle the key themes, join them up where appropriate and highlight ideas that stem from those key themes. Capture any further ideas that are sparked as you go. You should also highlight areas that have potential for further development. See Figure 4.2.4 for details.
When you have done this, thank everyone and plan when you can reconvene for an analysis session. Ideally this should be separated from the brainstorming session so that you can embark on the analysis and development stage feeling fresh and objective.

Make sure that you capture any ideas that are generated post-meeting – people’s brains are not going to simply switch off. Consider sending your team away with a completely new thought to ponder with their friends and family that evening.

Now is the time for refreshment if appropriate. It is useful to know that alcohol during a brainstorm session tends to slow things down rather than accelerate the thinking process!

Finally, be sure to keep and protect all the ideas generated. Also, be seen to be doing. It is incredibly important for your team to know that their ideas and contributions are valued.
6 Stimulating creative ideas day to day

Inspiration from your surroundings

Inspiration is all around us. If we take the time and trouble to look, think and take note, we can gain inspiration from performance art, bars, restaurants, clubs and shops – everything that is around us.

Inspiration from the media

When working in PR you should aim to be a ‘media junkie’: consuming, analysing and evaluating media of all types. Making a regular habit of reading the news and saving press cuttings and links for online news stories will generate a useful bank of ideas to call upon in brainstorming sessions.

Inspiration can come from all types of media: cinema, theatre, newspapers, magazines and, of course, the internet. When you watch a TV series such as Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant’s The Office you can see how they have taken inspiration from the likes of The Simpsons and Laurel and Hardy and Woody Allen films, and it is shot very much in the style of This is Spinal Tap.

When reading, biographies can be very useful as you often come across little quirks that contributed to the subject’s success. Finally, whatever line of work you are in, be sure to keep up with the most popular titles on the news stand and internet. Whatever you happen to think of them, they reflect the current mindset of a large majority of the population.

Inspiration from social media

Using and keeping up to date with developments in social media is another essential for anyone working in PR today. Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, blog sites and other platforms can all provide inspiration, news and trends, together with contacts you can tap into when developing ideas. Also, almost any PR programme you pitch for or work on will have or want its own social media outputs, so you need to be fully conversant with latest developments and able to make recommendations.

One word of warning, however – search engines are not a useful tool in brainstorming sessions as they can restrict thinking to the very linear responses of the internet. It is therefore sensible to restrict use of search engines to background reading and development work.
Proactive inspiration

Use simple exercises such as the following to generate your own inspiration. This will allow you to see life in a slightly different way and many new ideas will emerge as a result:

- take a different route to work
- try a different sleeping or working pattern
- force yourself to consume different media
- try different recipes
- go on holiday in a different season
- change your break habits
- set yourself a different observation test each day, for example, ‘Today I am going to look out for things that are green’.

Activity

Simply try some of the proactive exercises for yourself and see the fresh perspectives that result.

7 Analysing and evaluating creative ideas

The psychology of decision making

To understand the importance of using a special process for analysis and evaluation you first need to appreciate the cultural instincts that lie behind decision making. It is important to nurture ideas. Argument introduces a mix of emotions, logic, hope and creativity. Think of any typical business meeting where decisions need to be made. Invariably each person comes at it from a slightly different angle: one loves the idea; another hates it; a third person can’t see past a specific difficulty and another doesn’t quite understand it; one person is taking a very practical and pragmatic approach, while a colleague at the end worries about how it is going to impact on their own favourite project. If everyone pulls in different directions it can disrupt the process. It is important to get your team to pull in the same direction at the same time.

Looking in the same direction

Edward de Bono, who pioneered lateral thinking, has a useful thinking process called Six Hats, which ensures that everyone is looking in the same direction at the same time. His technique ascribes a time for looking at facts, a time for expressing likes and dislikes, a time for criticism and so on. Each element needs to take its own turn so that team members are focused exclusively on that element at the same time. To bring the principle to life, de Bono instructs teams to imagine that they are wearing a series of different coloured hats.

Key term

Six Hats – a complete methodology for creative thinking that can be especially useful for analysis and evaluation.
Analysis process – Stage 1

A simplified version of the Six Hats process is very useful and effective for the first stage of analysis and evaluation of the ideas you have generated. It uses just the three hats described in Table 4.2.1.

Table 4.2.1: Three hats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Red hat</th>
<th>Yellow hat</th>
<th>Black hat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| When wearing a red hat you should:  
  • ask yourself whether you like the idea  
  • let your personal feelings flood out.  
| When wearing a yellow hat you should:  
  • ask yourself what’s good about the idea regardless of whether you like it  
  • remember that there must be something good about an idea, even if you do not like the general principle.  
| When wearing a black hat you should:  
  • ask yourself what’s bad about the idea regardless of all the good points you have identified  
  • ask yourself what you should be concerned about.  

The ‘hats’ should be used in this sequence. The chairman of the session can give people actual hats or caps, but the use of marker pens in matching colours is also successful.

1 **Red hat thinking**: mark the title of the idea you are analysing in red at the top of the flip chart sheet.
2 **Yellow hat thinking**: look for benefits and write the responses you receive in yellow pen in a column down the left side of the flip chart.
3 **Black hat thinking**: write responses in black on the right side of the flip chart.

An example of this process applied to the original carbon footprint brainstorm example can be seen in Figure 4.2.5.

Figure 4.2.5: Example of an analysis and evaluation process using ‘hats’

- carbon footprint
  - simple
  - works for all ages
  - ‘paints pictures’
    - trample etc.
  - imagery potential
  - working for travel
    - key area
    - good for maps
  - memorable

- carbon understood?
  - too focused on emissions?
  - doesn’t cover all categories
When using this system you will often find that yellow predominates. The positives have been captured and allowed to live and breathe rather than simply be shouted down.

Some responses are likely to crop up in both columns and some comments in the black column may have a question mark against some the terms, for example: ‘carbon understood?’.

In cases where there are question marks against some of the yellow and black hat thinking you can call for a fourth hat – the green hat.

4 Green hat thinking: this is the creative thinking hat. Use this hat to brainstorm ideas to get around the potential problem and/or research the information you need for clarification.

Once you have established the concept of the hats with your brainstormers you can use the ‘language’ of the hats to request a particular type of thinking, for example: ‘I think we need some green hat thinking on this’ – rather than ‘come on – we’ve got to be more creative’. Similarly, if everyone is getting a bit overexcited about an idea they favour, bring them back to reality with: ‘OK, that’s great but now let’s put our black hats on and consider how we might pay for this’.

Checklist
The additional hats in Edward de Bono’s Six Hats thinking process are defined below. They are both valid processes for a creative thinking session, but are less relevant at this analysis stage.

1 White hat – ‘neutral’ thinking used at the early stages of creative thinking when participants need to absorb information pertinent to the session, such as research, sales to date and competitive activity.

2 Blue hat – the ‘overview’, essentially worn by the chairman or facilitator of a session to define the thinking processes and keep discipline.

Analysis process – Stage 2
Having achieved a broad brush analysis of your idea, you now need to apply a ‘fine filter’ that looks at the pros and cons in greater detail and from a variety of perspectives. This can be done in the same way as applying yellow and black hats, but this time is done by assigning a score of one to five for the importance of each element. If an element is very important it receives 5; if it is of little important it gets 1. This process is often referred to as ‘force field analysis’.

Objectives in the brief
Start by looking back to see how closely your latest idea meets the essential objectives and requirements that were spelled out in the original brief. In all the excitement of developing a new idea it can be all too easy for specifics to be forgotten or sidelined. Marking here would be 5 for closely meeting the brief, 1 for ‘peripheral to the brief’.
Risks versus benefits
You have will have highlighted may of the risks and benefits at stage 1. During stage 2 analysis you need to look at the risks and benefits in greater detail and assign them a score to identify the most and least significant.

Costs versus benefits
Stage 1 analysis will produce high-level thoughts about costs. At stage 2 you should look at the costs in greater detail and, score them specifically against benefits.

The elevator pitch
Finally, you need to persuade others, be they colleagues, superiors or clients, to embrace your idea. The analysis process will have provided you with plenty of material to support your case, but you still need to ‘sell’ the idea.

An elevator pitch is a useful tool to employ to ensure the idea can be immediately understood, appreciated and remembered, enabling others to enthuse and talk about it accurately.

To construct an elevator pitch:
• write down all the words that describe it
• prioritise these words into must haves/good to haves/would like to haves.
• start to eliminate non-essential words until you have:
  1 a headline
  2 a strapline that provides supporting information
  3 snappy dialogue that fleshes out the idea once you have gained people’s attention and top-line understanding.

Make sure that your idea has a name to give it more weight than a concept.

Key term
Elevator pitch – a distilled form of communication. The term comes from the idea that in the short space of time it takes to travel in a lift, you can make another person understand, remember and act upon your message or idea.

Activity
Revisit your personal mini-brainstorm for a final time. Look through the ideas you generated.

1 Wear an imaginary red hat to find the ideas you like.
2 Go through the yellow and black hat processes to establish what’s good about the idea and what you should be concerned about. You are likely to have many more results in the yellow column than the black.
3 Can you reduce the impact of the black statements with a little green hat thinking?
**Brainstorm planner**

1. **Send out invitations**

2. **Gather equipment**
   - flip chart, coloured pens, sticky-tack, no criticism device

3. **Collate the brief**
   - brief briefs are best

4. **Display the rules**
   - spell them out

5. **Brainstorming level 1**
   - divide flip chart sheet into one narrow column on the left and a wider column on the right
   - place the key word from your objectives at the top of the column on the left
   - under the key word use a black pen to record word associations to generate raw material
   - use the wider column to record free thinking using a blue pen
   - use word associations to trigger thoughts and ideas

6. **Brainstorming level 2**
   - when energy or ideas start to flag use lateral thinking – it forces you to address your challenges from completely different perspectives
   - use another colour pen to link and contrast ideas

7. **Brainstorming level 3**
   - use the tested strategies that work best for you, but not until this stage
   - build up your own personal armoury of techniques

8. **Analysis and evaluation**
   - Select specific ideas and analyse with different ‘hats’ on. Use a separate flip chart sheet to do this. Use a coloured pen for each hat.
   - red hat – do we like it?
   - yellow hat – what is good about it?
   - black hat – what should concern us?
   - green hat – areas for development.
Unit 4: Understanding the creative process to generate ideas

Portfolio activity 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4

1 For the PR industry:
   - assess the importance of creativity in general and specifically in generating solutions
   - analyse the key theoretical concepts that explain creativity in individuals
   - give examples of and explain current social influences on creativity.

2 Think about the use of creative techniques to generate ideas for given challenges and:
   - evaluate the extent to which different meeting arrangements can enhance creativity
   - discuss the use of techniques to generate and document ideas to different challenges
   - evaluate the effectiveness of a brainstorming session in generating ideas
   - assess how creative ideas are analysed and evaluated for implementation.

Further reading

Books

Websites
Epilepsy Action press release on the term brainstorming
http://www.epilepsy.org.uk/press/facts/brainstorming-offensive
4.2: Understanding how to use creative techniques to solve PR challenges

Solution to the lateral thinking puzzle

No one said you couldn’t go outside the box!

Author biography

Nick Fitzherbert spent 20 years in PR consultancy, working at several top-ten consultancies and running his own PR firm, SFB, for seven years. Focusing on clients in the drinks industry, the media and the public sector, he developed a reputation for both creative thinking and pioneering the concept of thought leadership. Now working in the training field he has been a coach for the CIPR, IPA and PRCA.

Credits

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