

Break your team out of a rut with these brainstorming techniques



Maybe you found your team in a rut and lacking a clear direction or unable to make a decision. It can be challenging to get your team to collaborate effectively, especially with strong personalities and different levels of seniority in the group.

Some of the team may be reluctant to stick their neck out when they have a valid opinion or point to bring up, as well. To get over such a hurdle, we've brought you some ideas to shake up your brainstorming efforts and their thinking. A good shake-up can be just what it takes to get the original and innovative ideas flowing and get everyone feeding off of each other's energy.

These ideas and techniques aren't new but practiced in many Lean Six Sigma projects around the globe. These techniques are used to brainstorm improvement ideas. You will discover that they are not exclusive to the world of Six Sigma. They can be used anytime you need to shake up the train of thought.

Here are our ideas for you!

What would a six-year-old do?

Thinking like a kid comes from Roger Van Oech's book "[A Whack on the Side of the Head.](#)" A child likes to dream of what life would be like without rules. Thinking like a kid encourages the group to think beyond the corporate paradigms and structures that are likely holding you back from being truly innovative. Here's an example exercise you can use to try this technique:

1. Set your team a deadline of five minutes with no rules to develop any solution, no matter how zany or impossible.
2. Then list all of the barriers (getting rid of excuses) to running with that solution.
3. Work one by one at getting rid of those excuses and remove the barriers.

Throw your hat into the ring

I'm talking about the six thinking hats, otherwise known as deBono hats. This exercise forces your group to think with differing perspectives, then trade one perspective for another. Pass out ~~6~~six different colored cards, markers, or actual hats.

1. **Blue represents process**
They are looking at the big picture, where they are now, where they need to be, and how to get there.
2. **Red represents feelings**
Feelings include intuition, hunches, and instinct, too. How do I feel? What do I like or dislike about what I'm hearing?
3. **Yellow represents benefits**
They are focused on the positive aspects and advantages. Why is this a good idea, and how will we benefit?
4. **White is just the facts**
This person sorts out what is known and what information is needed, then proceeds on ways to find what they need.
5. **Green is creativity**
Just like the six-year-old, they will give the pie in the sky ideas. What new ideas are possible? How can we make changes and improvements?
6. **Black is caution**
They focus on the negatives and look for all possible problems. They do keep us out of trouble, however.

The idea is to trade colors two or three times (or however long it takes) to get people to consider different angles to resolving an issue. This is a great exercise to get conversations moving in the middle of a stalemate.

Affinity mapping

This technique is a favorite for making decisions free from bias and gives the quiet participants an equal voice because ideas are dispensed anonymously. It's also a great technique if you have a large and lively group of people because it quiets them down to get right to work.

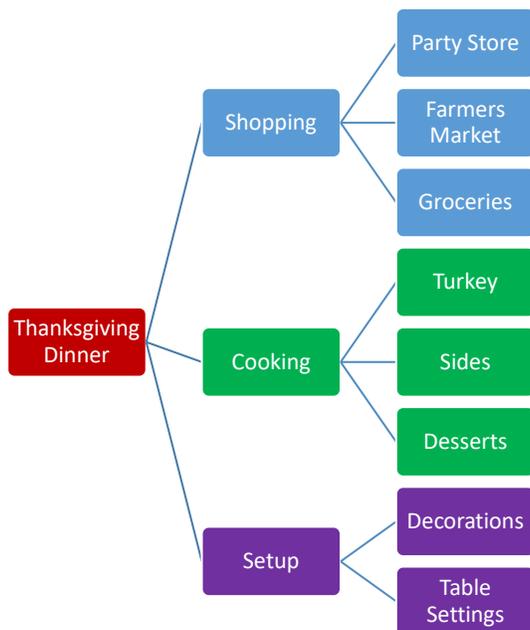
The leader starts with defining the problem to be resolved and hands out sticky notes to everyone on the team. Each team member will write down an idea on each sticky note, then proceed to the wall to place theirs among the others.

The leader collects the notes and arranges them by category, taking notice of which ideas are repeated by several team members. Those ideas will be given some extra weight into consideration.

Tree diagrams

It's merely an organizational chart of the details of actions instead of people. When it comes to brainstorming a process, a tree diagram starts laying out the large tasks, then break them down (like by department or team, then individual steps) to the smaller tasks that contribute to that large-enormous task. Break your tree down to as many levels as necessary. As the team sees the process and multiple tasks organizing in front of them, they can quickly make connections to what is required. With the fall

season upon us, here's how a tree diagram might get thoughts flowing when brainstorming the process around Thanksgiving dinner.



The boxes to go to the next level of the tree would go into more detail. The shopping cluster might include what to buy at each location. The cooking cluster could break down to the recipes, order, actions, and timing. Decorations might get into the details of where to find them and what rooms to decorate.

Pugh Matrix

This matrix is another technique that removes bias from a decision. The leader gets the group to brainstorm and agree on the “most important details” of all possible solutions, rather than the solutions themselves. A weight of 1-5 (or 1-10) is given to each criteria. These details and their weight of importance are much easier to gain consensus for ever-vs.-agreeing on the total solution. With that information, the leader can compare each option to the criteria, multiplied by the importance, and identify the best solution based on pure numbers rather than opinions or other impending bias.

Try it on something as domestic as choosing a home or a car. What details are the most important over the others? Be careful with this technique. Many people experienced significant eye-openers to their own bias when their criteria matched them up with a Chevy Malibu over a BMW iSeries.

Bring about new ideas and new practices

New ideas and practices are exactly-precisely what Lighthouse Software Testing brings to our clients with our True North Assessment. Our expert PM and QA consultants assess your entire software

[development organization and discovers](#) where your team excels [as well as](#) how they can improve. [We: They take what they learn and report back to you.](#)

- [Gather dozens of findings](#)
- Identify all of the gaps
- Offer recommendations on the most significant improvements
- Help you determine your next steps

Our clients have saved millions and countless hours after implementing changes from our [True North Assessment](#). Why not you?

Engagements with ~~our software testing team~~ [the Lighthouse software testing and QA team](#) have brought about improved efficiencies that stay around long after ~~the Lighthouse~~ [our](#) team departs. [Contact us](#) today and learn how we can boost the productivity of your [team organization](#), [saving you the 3 Perils of Software Development™ \(Defects, Delays, and Dollars\).](#)

Commented [VFJ1]: I think we should nuke this last part as you don't reference it anywhere else in the article