

When introducing the technique of formal brainstorming to a group, spend a little time discussing the value of *suspended judgment*. Then ask each participant if s/he is willing to follow these ground rules. If one or more members are not, encourage the group to modify the ground rules to fit the needs of all members.

FACILITATOR TIPS FOR BRAINSTORMING

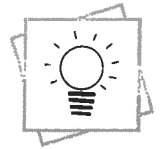
DO

- Do a lot of *mirroring* to keep the pace brisk and lively.
- Do remind people to suspend judgment. No critiquing allowed.
- Do treat silly ideas the same as serious ideas.
- Do move around to hold people's attention and boost the group's energy.
- Do encourage full participation: "Let's hear from someone who hasn't spoken for a while."
- Do repeat the purpose often: "Who else can explain why our office systems are so inefficient?"
- Do start a new flipchart page before the previous one is full.
- Do give a warning that the end is approaching.
- Do expect a second wind of creative ideas after the obvious ones are exhausted.

DON'T

- Don't interrupt.
- Don't say, "We've already got that one."
- Don't say, "Ooh, good one!"
- Don't say, "Hey, you don't really want me to write that one, do you?"
- Don't favor the "best" thinkers.
- Don't use frowns, raised eyebrows, or other nonverbal gestures that signal disapproval.
- Don't give up the first time the group seems stuck.
- Don't simultaneously be the leader, the facilitator, and the chartwriter.
- Don't start the process without clearly setting the time limit.
- Don't rush or pressure the group. Silence usually means that people are thinking.

SURVEYING THE TERRITORY

STARTING POSITIONS**WHY**

This activity is perfect for helping people deal with a contentious issue – especially when their conflict is fueled by a wide range of opposing perspectives.

When people are brought together to resolve a dispute, many participants arrive with strong opinions and well-rehearsed arguments. They need to be given a chance to express their opinions fully, so they can let everyone else see where they stand.

When people aren't able to speak without being interrupted or discounted, it is predictable that they will insert their positions into the discussion at every opportunity. Conversely, when people *are* supported to state their positions fully, they frequently become more able to listen to one another. This often leads to better mutual understanding, which is a precondition for finding creative solutions to difficult problems.

HOW

1. Introduce the activity by indicating that there may be several diverse perspectives in the room. Encourage everyone to give each other the time and the attention each person needs to express his or her views.
2. Using a go-around format, ask each speaker to take a turn answering the following questions from his or her individual perspective:
 - What is the problem and what solution is s/he advocating?
 - What are his or her reasons for taking this particular position?

Note: This step is often done by having each speaker come up to the front of the room and present his or her ideas standing up.

3. When each person has had a turn, ask the group for observations and reflections.

RAISING DIFFICULT ISSUES

**IS THERE ANYTHING I'M NOT SAYING?****WHY**

People refrain from saying what they're really thinking for a wide variety of reasons. Sometimes they hold back because the risk is too great. But people also keep quiet because they aren't sure whether their ideas are worth saying or because they can't turn the kernels of their ideas into fully formed presentations. In other words, there are many occasions when group members – if they were given a little support, a little permission, a little nudge – might go ahead and say what's on their mind. Yet without that support, they often stay quiet.

This activity helps group members take a look at the thoughts they've been having (but not speaking) during a discussion. It also gives members an opportunity to reflect on whether the group would be served if a person did open up and share his or her perspective.

HOW

1. Describe this activity. Explain why people can benefit from structured activities that give them permission to speak up. Obtain agreement from the group to proceed.
2. Have the group break into pairs. Ask each partner to answer this question: "During this discussion, have I had any thoughts I haven't said aloud?" Assure people that no one is required to say anything they don't want to say.
3. Next, ask everyone (still in pairs) to answer this question: "Would the group benefit from hearing your partner's thinking?"
4. Return to the large group. Ask for volunteers to share any of their own thoughts that might be useful for others to hear.

CREATIVE REFRAMING



INTRODUCING REFRAMING TO A GROUP

WHY

Once someone perceives a problem in a particular way, s/he may find it difficult to see that problem in any other way. Our minds tend to lock into a pattern of thought. For example, many job recruiters routinely decline to hire a talented applicant because of the applicant's appearance; yet in some companies, this habit persists even when recruiting for technical positions, when appearance has no impact on performance.

When tackling difficult problems, most people reach conclusions quickly. They believe they have explored every option for a solution and that it would be pointless to waste more time. The idea that it might be possible to reframe a problem – that is, to dramatically alter their understanding of the nature of the problem – is, for most people, a paradigm shift.

Thus, facilitators who decide to encourage their groups to undertake creative reframing often find it quite challenging to motivate people to invest the time. This tool is designed to help facilitators overcome that initial wall of resistance.

HOW

1. Hand out copies of page 250, *Two Ways of Looking at the Same Problem*.
2. Ask people to discuss the differences between a perceived problem and a reframed problem. Remember that many people will be thinking about this concept for the first time ever; as part of digesting a new idea, they may say things that sound rigid or naive. Expect remarks like, "As far as I'm concerned, this whole idea is ridiculous." Remember to honor all points of view and remain supportive throughout the discussion.
3. After several minutes say, "Now let's apply this theory to our own situation. Could someone please state *our* perceived problem?" Write the perceived problem on a flipchart. Then ask the group to brainstorm a list of *reframes* of the problem. Record all answers on flipcharts.
4. After the brainstorm, encourage members to discuss the implications of their new ideas. Say, "As you review this list, what are your reactions?"

TWO WAYS OF LOOKING AT THE SAME PROBLEM

PERCEIVED PROBLEM

It's them.

It's a problem.

Our goal is unachievable.

Our product won't sell.

We don't have enough resources.

We need to gather more input.

Our employees are incompetent.

We don't have enough money.

We can't get along with each other.

We don't have any power in this system.

We don't have enough time to do all of these things.

REFRAMED PROBLEM

It's all of us.

It's an opportunity.

We don't have our goal broken into realistic steps.

We're trying to sell our product to the wrong people.

We are wasting the resources we do have.

We need to pay more attention to the input we're already getting.

Our employees don't have enough time to do a quality job.

We haven't figured out how to find new sources of money.

We haven't made the commitment to work through our feelings toward one another.

We haven't found our leverage points in this system.

We have to decide what to do now and what to do later.



CREATING SHARED CONTEXT

BACKING UP FROM SOLUTIONS TO NEEDS

WHY

When an argument seems to be going around in circles, it can be *extremely helpful* for everyone to stop arguing over proposed “solutions” and start talking about their individual needs instead.

For example, consider a dispute between three administrators over whether to schedule an important meeting in New York or Boston. The problem (where to meet) had two solutions (New York or Boston). But beneath the superficial solutions were everyone’s individual needs. One person needed to stay near his office as much as possible because his assistant was on vacation. A second needed to keep her commitment to attend three other meetings that had long been planned. A third was expecting a drop-in visit from the regional director; she needed to be available “just in case.” Once everyone understood each other’s needs more clearly, they stopped imagining that the disagreement was due to “power struggles” and “turf battles.” They realized that meeting on a Saturday would work for everyone no matter *where* they met.

As the example shows, it becomes easier to develop proposals that meet a *broader range of needs* when those needs have been made explicit – and, therefore, understandable to everyone.

HOW

1. Make sure everyone understands the difference between “their proposed solution” and “their actual need.” For example, “holding the meeting in Boston” is a proposed solution; “honoring prior commitments to attend three other meetings” is a need. Take time, if necessary, to teach this distinction to group members.
2. Ask everyone to answer these questions: “What are my needs in this situation?” and “What do I think *your* needs are?”
3. Continue until everyone feels satisfied that their own needs have been stated clearly. Then ask the group to generate new proposals that seek to incorporate a broader range of people’s needs.

STRENGTHENING GOOD IDEAS

**WHO ELSE NEEDS
TO EVALUATE THIS PROPOSAL?****WHY**

Most decisions do not just affect the people who make them. Obviously, not everyone who will be affected can participate in making a decision and planning its implementation. Nonetheless, it can be very, very costly to overlook the perspectives of those who did not participate in developing the reasoning that led to the decision.

This activity helps a group to think proactively about the question, "Who else needs to be consulted?" *It usually takes a group two or three hours – sometimes longer – to go through all the steps.* Obviously this is a significant investment of group time. To decide whether to do this activity, ask, "How much time will we lose if we don't do this thinking?"

HOW

1. Have group members generate lists of people who:
 - Will be directly affected by this decision.
 - Have final sign-off authority.
 - Have to implement the decision.
 - Could sabotage the process.
2. Take a few moments to examine the list. Discuss the following questions: "What's the likelihood that any of these stakeholders would disagree with our ultimate decision? If any of them did not support the decision, how might that affect our ability to implement?"
3. Next consider each person or group on the list. Who needs to be consulted before the final decision is made?
4. For each person or group who will be consulted, decide on the best method for doing so. Some methods for including other stakeholders are interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, and an invitation to a core group meeting.