

Spark Design Innovation Training: Ideation

Ideation or brainstorming: generating many idea options and thoughts to address a problem space or area of focus. You can brainstorm solutions, questions that needs to be explored and insights that need to be considered.

Modes of thinking:

Open: generating all types of options, going in all types of directions without vetting or assessing

Explore: Critically analyzing ideas based on agreed- upon criteria

Close: Making decisions on which ideas/ questions to explore and dig into for further testing and gut checking

Ideation Methods

Solo ideation: Each team member generates ideas on their own in silence, before sharing with the group. Could be on their own time outside of a mtg, then come together to share, refine and make decisions. Great way to make sure all voices are heard by making sure everyone has time to process and create thoughts.

Group ideation: Team ideates together as a group, often with a dedicated facilitator. Works best as a follow up to solo ideation. Otherwise, can lead to groupthink and group criticism of ideas out loud. Group ideation can also work for doing user journey mapping like activities.

Cluster: Each team member shares the ideas they generated and groups them by similarities or themes. Re-evaluate all the groups, and find other groupings and themes pushing new patterns and observations to emerge.

Round Robin: Great way to have people build on others ideas. First person creates a detailed idea, then passes idea to next team mate. Then each person evolves the idea by: eliminating something, adding something, or adding a question for consideration.

Sketch Eight: Each person sketches 8 different visual representation of ideas that tackle the challenge space.

Five Whys: There are multiple ways to use this tool. Starting from the challenge at hand, ask why it’s happening, then why is that happening, repeating “Why”. This encourages open dialogue, to break down and uncover new insights, and helps to identify a root problem that can give rise to new ideas. Another use: starting with the idea/solution, ask “Why would someone use this/do this”, and keep repeating why.

Ideation Agreements

- Defer judgement
- Encourage wild ideas & questions
- Build on the ideas of others
- Stay focused on the topic
- One conversation at a time and build together
- Be open to being visual
- Go for quantity (1 idea/sticky)
- Don’t assess internally or vocally
- Don’t execute
- Create space for each other

Agreements can be used to set the stage, instruct everyone on how to show up, and set expectations. Feel free to choose the ones you need, and add to it.

As you practice running more sessions, you’ll see which agreements you need to lean into.



Idea Vetting & Selection

When ideas are generated, it's critical to remember that these ideas have been created by people who do not share the lived experiences of those we serve. So it's critical to test, gut check and vet ideas. But when you have 30+ ideas, it's important to narrow them down first to which ideas to explore further, found interesting, and test with audience.

So voting at this stage should be based on:

- Which idea has the most potential for impact?
- Which idea best addresses the challenge statement?

Methods of voting:

- Live: Dot voting on stickies, or icon voting on list of ideas in a gdoc
- Email: listing out final ideas in email/doc, asking everyone to send back 3-4 selections. But BCC everyone, so people can't see each others votes.

Critically analyzing ideas

Journey Mapping: Think through key moments for your audience as they experience the challenge you're solving and how they might discover, experience and respond to the solution you're thinking through. This will help identify key gaps in information, assumptions, new ideas and questions.

SWOT Analysis: commonly used for strategy, SWOT can also be used to think through what makes a direction worthwhile pursuing and questions to explore.

Strengths: how does the idea dominate or stand out from competitors?

Weakness: are there any flaws in the idea that could jeopardize its execution?

Opportunities: what else can you capitalize on based on this idea?

Threats: what are potential downfalls that could arise if the idea is launched?

Derisk ideas: Think through the best case scenario if this solution/intervention/ tool existed in the world. Then think through, what must be true for this idea to work? How sure are we about that? How can we gut check those parts of this idea using the least amount time/effort?

Ways to derisk: Interviews, rough proposal, prototype as a deck, concept, role play, conversations with friendlies, sketches

Remote Facilitation

Gather:

- Clearly defined problem space & goal of session
- user insights & opportunities
- Challenge statement prompts (1-3)
- Deadlines, budget, decision makers
- 20-30 minutes of actual brainstorming (or own time)
- Ideation Agreements
- Diverse group of expertise & POVs
- Facilitator, notetaker
- Understanding of unspoken norms

Share beforehand:

- Goal of session (O,E,C)
- Their role (be generative!)
- Challenge statement & any reading material
- Tools needed

Cultivate space:

- Environment (music ↓ vol, no devices)
- Space (wall space, moveable tables)
- Supplies (stickies, sharpies, dots, snacks)
- Collaboration space: gdoc, mural, box, chat



Pro tips: During

- Have someone facilitate (if you, don't participate)
- Capture everything (make sure there's a note taker or two)
- Focus on generating as much as possible (Open)
- Try different styles that give everyone a voice
- Use dot voting to get a sense of directions/ themes (Close, sort of)
- Be flexible. Mold & greenhouse them at the next session or vote.
- Cultivate a safe, open space for all voices.
- If needed, have a co-host who can be tech support
- Keep an eye out for disruptive and non-inclusive behaviors
- Reiterate agreements

Protips: After

- Think through what needs to be captured and shared, especially to facilitate next steps
- Clearly articulate next steps and roles
- Open > Explore > Close
- Voting criteria & voting process
- How will the ideas be tested and de-risked to hone in on few great ideas?
- Deadline for testing/ exploring
- Any other individuals who need to be looped in?

Ideation Session Gutcheck

- Did we generate a wide enough range of ideas?
- Were we able to settle on one (or a few) ideas to explore in more detail?
- Are the ideas concrete enough to prototype, articulate & gut check with the audience?
- What assumptions need to be explored to further inform the idea?
- Who else should be looped in for expertise/knowledge?