



## **Finding opportunities**

Opportunities don't just drop out of thin air and magically appear – you've got to go looking for them! So this activity is to help you get started with that process and give you some tools to begin your search.

A reminder – innovation ideas come from all sorts of directions, but they resolve into two types – pull and push. Pull triggers are those which start with the problem or need and work out ways to solve it. And push triggers start with bright ideas or new technologies – a solution looking for a problem. The key message is that we need both – think of a pair of scissors and it's pretty clear that cutting something is much easier if we use both blades.

So here's a simple process based on jumping backwards and forwards between these two approaches to generate plenty of possible opportunities.

### **Step 1 – why? What's the need, what's the challenge you're trying to address?**

Innovation is about change, turning an idea into something which has impact, creates value. So what do you want to change? It might be that you have a burning problem, something you need to fix. Or it might be that you see someone else with a problem and think you might be able to come up with something which would help them. Or you're worried about the way the world is going and you'd like to do something to help make it a better place. Or your boss has just given you an assignment and you're trying to find a way of delivering on it. Or you've just invented something the world has never seen before and you're wondering how to put it to use?

Whatever it is you've got a purpose, maybe very clear and focussed, maybe a general sense of 'I want to change something'. You want to innovate. So let's look at a simple process for helping move from that initial trigger to coming up with a possible innovation to work on.

For example, you might decide you want to do something about 'sustainability' - that's a huge field so you have plenty of scope! With wildfires raging all over southern Europe, torrential rain and flooding in north America, deserts and drought threatening crops across Africa – it's pretty hard to ignore the threat to our planet which is coming from global warming. We're running through resources at a rate which would require 3 or 4 spare planets – but we've only got one. Finding even fish in the remotest oceans contain plastic nano-particles points to a pretty serious pollution challenge. And so on.

There's plenty we need to change and urgently – plenty of scope for innovation. So start by targeting where you'd like to focus in terms of a broad challenge. Don't write an essay – instead try to express it as a newspaper headline.

Maybe moving towards better, more sustainable consumption? Or enabling recycling and the circular economy? Or raising awareness and helping behaviour change? At this stage try to find a broad area you'd like to focus on – 'save the planet' is a worthy objective but it does make the task of finding a specific opportunity difficult!

*(If you're stuck for a challenge try this. Pick a service activity of some kind – maybe a bank, a restaurant, a shop, a gym, whatever. Now try and sue the process to explore opportunities to improve it).*

**Step 2: Brainstorming** – that's a word you've almost certainly heard of and it's a very powerful technique originally developed 70 years ago by Alex Osborn. It builds on the idea that we're all creative but that shared creativity can help us generate more ideas and more different ideas than any single individual. It works well when we pay attention to some simple 'ground rules':

- If it's worth thinking, it's worth saying! - any idea however strange is worth sharing
- Quantity breeds quality - the more ideas we have to share the more we can build on promising possibilities
- Postpone judgment - we're very good at saying 'yes, but...' in many different ways. These are idea killers, they stop people in their mental tracks just when we want them to be accelerating. So avoid judging ideas too early - that doesn't mean we won't critically explore them but we'll defer that process until later
- Yes, and ... is a powerful way of dealing with this. Anytime someone says something and you want to react to it with a criticism, try to build instead, using the 'yes, and..' formula. This means you don't criticise directly but offer ways of strengthening or developing their idea...
- 'Hitch-hiking' is a way of moving fast down the ideas road - build on other people's stimulus to keep the momentum going
- Wild ideas are OK - sometimes the craziest suggestion can prompt thinking in powerful new directions
- Listen to others, don't just push your own ideas....

Brainstorming was developed for working in teams, so if you've already recruited some others to help you with your journey now is a good time to involve them. Or else you could

grab a few friends and ask for a little of their time to help you think things through. You can also brainstorm on your own but it works better with others simply because we all see things differently and so have different ideas and insights to bring to the party.

Here's a suggested pattern for your first brainstorming session...

***5 minutes: Reframe the problem***

Start with your banner headline, your trigger challenge. What are you wanting to work on?

Think of how you might express that problem/challenge in different form. Look at it from a new angle, try and open up the different dimensions in it. Begin on your own, thinking about the question and writing down on a post-it note any ideas that come into your head. Post your ideas on to the wall, a flipchart (or Miro/ Mural board if you want to do this online) and keep going.

For each idea simply use the formulation '*how to....?*'

***5 minutes: look at the ideas***, ask for any clarification but (see above 'rules' no criticism! If something you see stimulates a new thought, write that down and add the post-it to the chart.

***5 minutes: focus on your key problem statement***. Do this by voting for the top one – everybody gets three votes. (use sticky dots or coloured marker pens) ones – you can use your three votes on three different ideas or put them all on your favourite.

***5 minutes: final choice*** Now put all the 'winners' together and vote on them again – this time you only have two votes. Cluster those 'winning ideas' and repeat a third time with only one vote. Try and get some convergence on your target challenge area.

**Step 3: Generate solutions**

Now you should have a 'how to..?' statement which defines the challenge your team want to work on. So the next stage is brainstorming ideas for solutions – and anything goes. Wild ideas are welcome because they might be a bit crazy but they might open up new directions for the group. There isn't a 'right' answer and 'quantity breeds quality' – the more ideas you have the more you might find a really good one.

If you want clarification of someone's idea, ask them; if you want to build on it, use the 'yes, and...' approach outlined above. Remember no criticism at this stage but you can adapt or suggest ways to strengthen an idea.

Keep going until you feel the momentum is slowing; by now you should have plenty of post-its on the chart full of ideas!

But maybe a little nudge might help the group find even more. At the bottom of this page you'll find some 'impulse' inputs to help you move your thinking in new directions, stimulate you to add new ideas. You don't have to use all of them, but think of it like a workout at the gym – you want to work up a bit of a 'mental sweat', get your creative juices running!

#### **Step 4: Choose!**

This is the hardest step – as a group you've come up with lots of ideas and you might be excited about several of them. But you need to come to a shared decision about the opportunity you're going to work on. Use the same kind of voting process as above with the coloured dots – but this time think about a couple of criteria as you are doing so. For example:

- How well does it build on what you know or think you as a team can get access to in the way of resources, people, technology, etc? (For example, if you're thinking about designing and building an eco-friendly car that's probably outside your scope – but a new way of encouraging people to use public transport would be well within it).
- How big an impact might this have?
- How long might it take and how easy would it be to put the basic idea into practice?

#### **Step 5: Capture it!**

Before you close down your brainstorming session work on a brief description of your challenge, why it's going to help with your big purpose question, what the basic concepts are, etc. You might want to do this as a picture or a mind-map – anything to help capture your thinking. Because we're going to start working these up in the next module where we'll start to put some flesh on the bones of your idea.

*Some impulse inputs to help nudge your brainstorming along...*

There are many powerful tools to help us think more creatively – here is one simple set. Think about your problem, the challenge you're working on. Now try to brainstorm around it coming up with new ideas triggered by the following questions:

**Related worlds** – sometimes the problem we're trying to work on is in fact the same kind of problem that someone else has experienced in a different world. You might not think there's much in common between operating theatres at children's hospitals, low cost airlines, car factories and Formula One motor racing. But you'd be wrong. What they all share is a common problem – turnaround times.

In busy hospitals the challenge is to use expensive operating theatres efficiently which means when you've finished an operation getting the patient out, cleaning everything up, preparing and sterilising things ready for the next patient. The faster you can do that, the better.

Which is the same problem as low cost airlines have – how to speed up the time between landing and taking off on the next flight. Change over the people, clean the plane up, fill it with fuel and off again.

Which is the same problem as a car factory has, stopping machines making one type of car and changing everything over to make another model.

Which is the same as a Formula 1 pit stop where you want to change the tyres, fill up with fuel, make adjustments before the car goes back on the track. Ferrari can do this in less than six seconds!

If we step back we can see these are all versions of the same problem – and so a solution which works in one world might offer useful new insights on the problem we're looking at in our world. (That's what Great Ormond St. children's hospital did, inviting the pit stop team from Ferrari to help them very successfully reduce the turnaround time in their operating theatres!)

So think of related worlds and brainstorm around that.....

### **Random juxtaposition (!)**

Sometimes creative ideas come from apparently crazy connections. And that's what our brain is good at, making stories which join together impossible things – think about your dreams and what's possible in them!

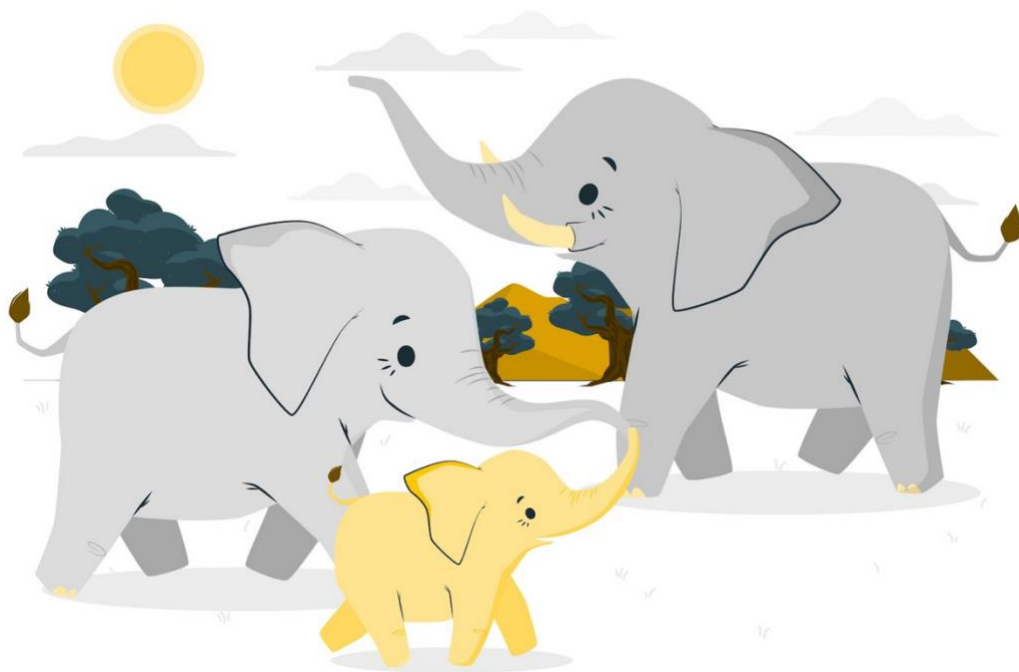
What can help our creativity is to give our brains a bit of a jolt, force them to make new neural pathways and connect unlikely synapses. This kind of random stimulus can open up apparently odd but surprisingly interesting ways of looking at our problem.

Try this. Get a newspaper, magazine or book. Now pick a number – and turn to that page number. Now get someone else to pick another number between 1 and 20 – and go to that line. Now get someone else to pick another number between 1 and 10 – and go to that word.

You've arrived at a word through random jumps – now your challenge is to find a connection between the word you've just found – let's say it was 'elephant' – and the problem you're solving.

It'll feel strange at first but stay with it, force a connection and you'll be surprised at the insights you can discover. Keep on pushing until you have a whole list of random connections – and then go back to brainstorming around your problem. For example why is our problem like an elephant? Elephants have big feet, can we stomp on our problem in some way to force it into a smaller shape, easier to work on? Elephants make a lot of noise, can we broadcast our problem loudly so others can help with it?

And so on....



## **Radical thinking**

Imagine you are an alien from the planet Zog and you've just arrived on earth to be met with someone posing a problem they're trying to solve. In your world the 'normal' laws of earthly physics don't apply, there are different social rules, in fact everything is different and possible. So with this radically different perspective what solution ideas might you offer.

The trick here is to suspend your disbelief – anything is possible and see where that takes your thinking. The idea once again is to get fresh perspectives on the problem you're trying to solve here on earth...



#### **4Ps of innovation space**

[Take a look at this short video](#) describing the 4Ps innovation compass

Can you think of product or service ideas which address your challenge and on which you can build and improve?

Can you think of process innovations – ways of delivering value in different ways?

Can you think of ‘unserved’ markets – people who you might provide access to products or services who don’t yet?

Can you think of new business models – ways of reframing the game – which might open up new opportunities? Think of Spotify asking the question why people need to own music as

opposed to paying a subscription and 'renting' what they enjoy. Or AirBnB revolutionising the accommodation world by enabling 'couch-surfing' on a giant scale.