

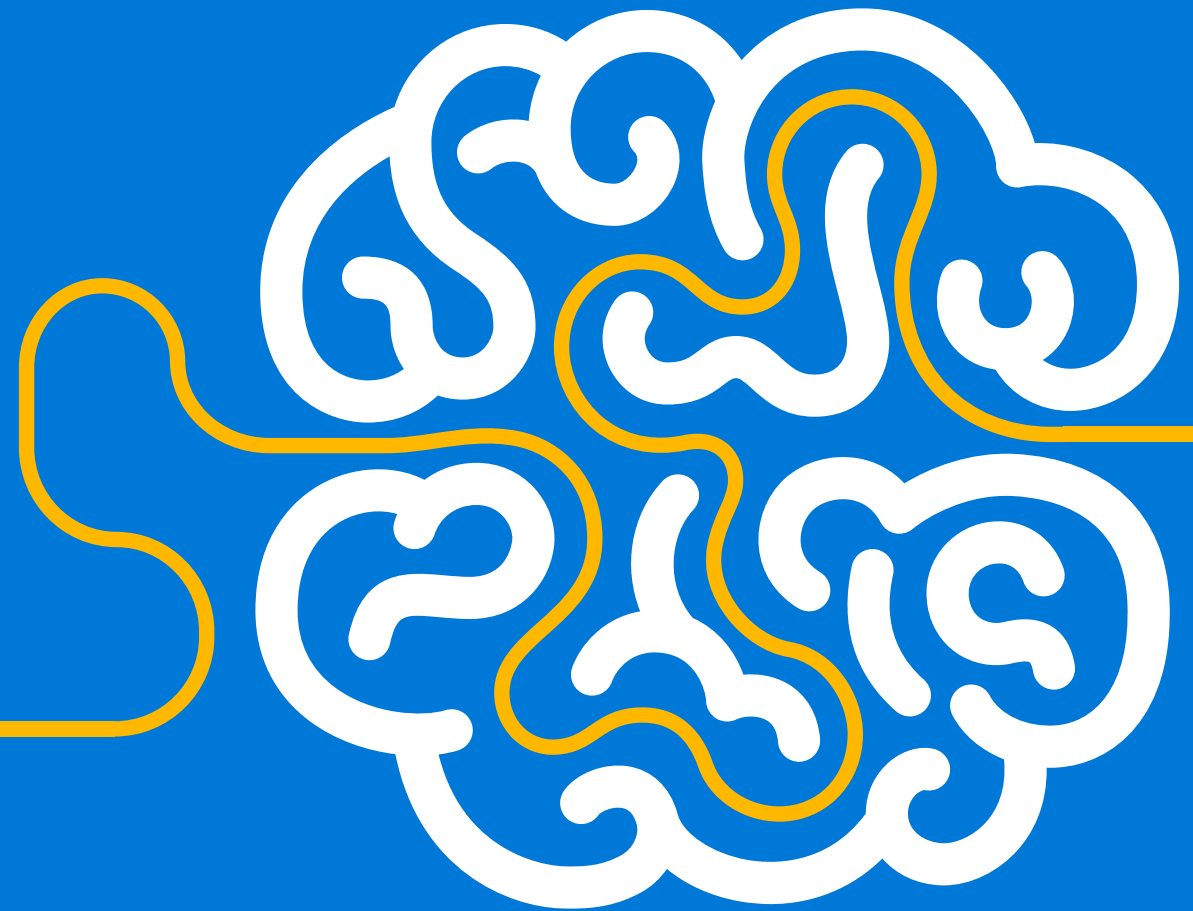


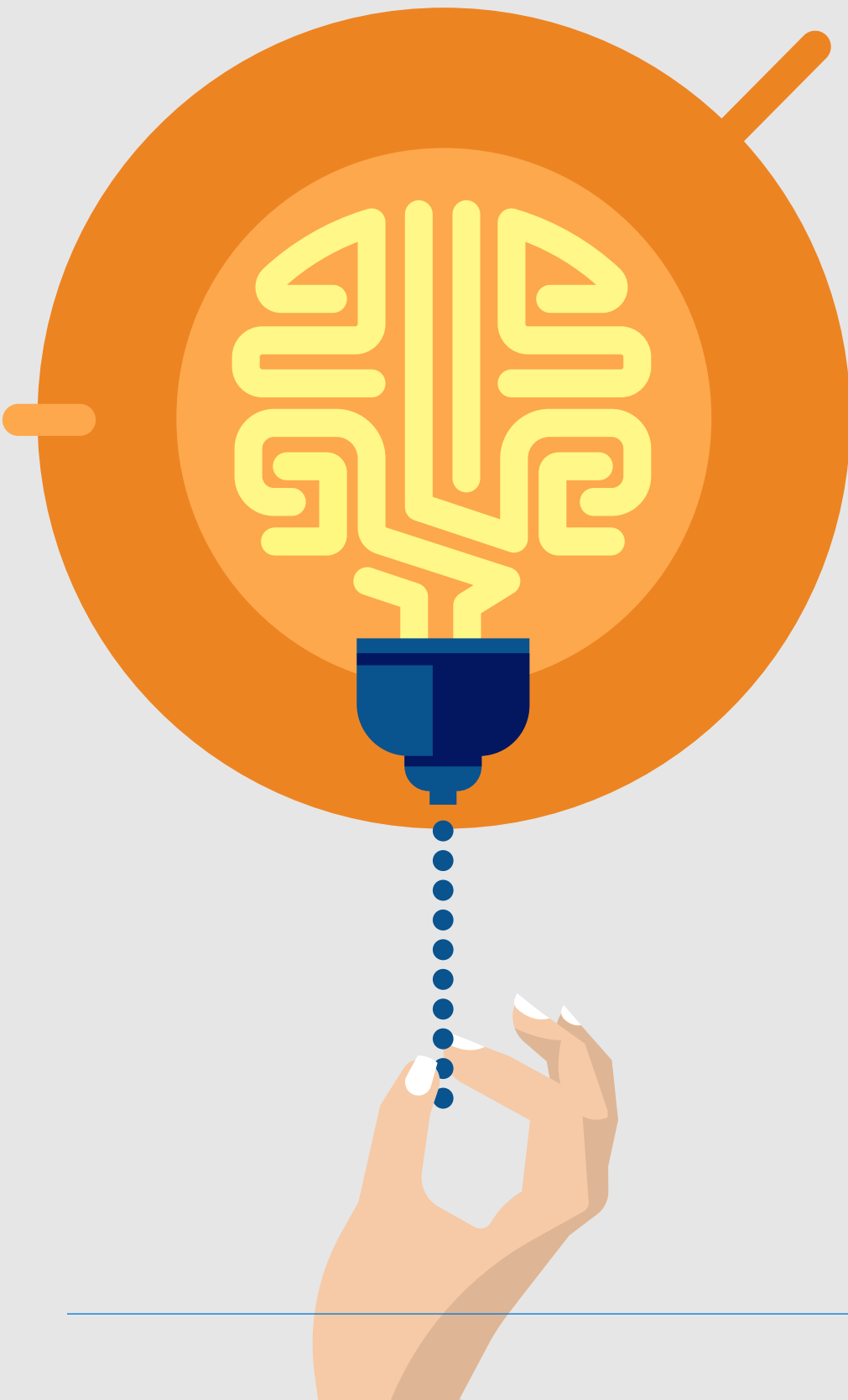
Storm out:
thinking beyond
the brainstorm



“Those who do not believe
in magic will never find it.”

Roald Dahl.





Creating buzz

Creativity has lots of different interpretations. But let's keep it simple. It's the use of imagination to create something. And, today, it's probably a more popular topic than it has been for quite a while. Why? Ok, buzzword alert: innovation, disruption – they're two of the most popular words in business at the moment.

New products. New ways of doing things. They're part of the reason that just over half the names in the Fortune 500 have disappeared since 2000. The World Economic Forum calls it the "Fourth Industrial Revolution". And it predicts that by 2020 creativity will be in the top three most important skills.

You can learn loads more about the topic in *Creativity in Business – the Essentials*. In this piece, you'll get more how than why. It's all about ideas – where they come from and how to come up with them. Over the next few pages, you'll:

- Learn about the origins of brainstorming
- Find 10 alternative approaches to traditional brainstorms
- Get instructions and materials for running those sessions.



The thinking behind brainstorming

Where do ideas come from? It's rarely an isolated flash of inspiration. Steven Johnson in *Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation*, explains how innovation is usually the product of lots of little steps. For example, could you imagine YouTube taking off before high-speed internet and cheap video cameras came along?

Johnson also talks about how the cultural climate needs to be just right. He highlights seventeenth-century coffee houses and the internet as good examples of fertile breeding grounds for ideas. That's all well and good, but most businesses can't just wait for the conditions to be right. So, what do they do?

An idea about ideas

In the 1930s, advertising exec Alex Faickney Osborn couldn't afford to wait for creative ideas from his team of ad-agency creatives. Working individually, his people struggled to come up with ideas. So, he introduced group-thinking sessions. The results were good. They came up with more ideas and the ideas were better.

Michael Diehl; Wolfgang Stroebe (1987). "Productivity Loss in Brainstorming Groups: Toward the Solution of a Riddle". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*

Osborn refined his method and outlined it in the 1948 book *Your Creative Power* and popularised the term brainstorming in his 1953 book *Applied Imagination*. The four basic principles of Osborn's 12-person sessions were:

- Aim for lots of ideas
- Don't criticise – no idea is a bad idea
- Welcome crazy ideas
- Put ideas together and improve them – we're talking $1+1=3$

Stormed out

Research has since refuted a lot of Osborn's ideas. A study* by Michael Diehl and Wolfgang Stroebe in the late 80s found that rather than producing more ideas, brainstorming produced fewer than individuals working on their own. So, is brainstorming still a good way to come up with ideas? And, if it isn't, what are the alternatives?

Whether the storm

Brainstorming has clearly been successful. So, why wouldn't you use it to come up with ideas? In its traditional form it can be quite an expensive exercise. And, if you have lots of people in a room, it's hard to make sure everyone has a voice. Quite often, the most powerful or most senior people dominate proceedings. What's more, traditional brainstorming discourages criticism, which isn't always a good thing.

Part of the problem with the traditional brainstorm is, it's too easy to do it badly. Get a room. Get loads of people. Then, go for it. With a little more thought upfront, people see much better results. After all, if you want to be creative, why not take a creative approach to brainstorming?

There are loads of alternatives and variations out there. You'll find ten brainstorms over the following pages. They're split into three sections:

- Defining problems
- Coming up with ideas
- Making decisions





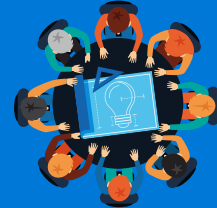
Defining problems

Great ideas. New thinking. Amazing products. It all starts with the right question. If you're not asking the right question, you won't find the right answer. On top of that, you're more likely to get a positive response from people if you ask the right question. David Sturt, author of *Great Work: How to Make a Difference People Love*, found that people who asked the right question increased the odds of someone's work having a positive effect on others by 4.1.

In the next chapter, you'll find three brainstorms to help you define problems and ask the right questions.



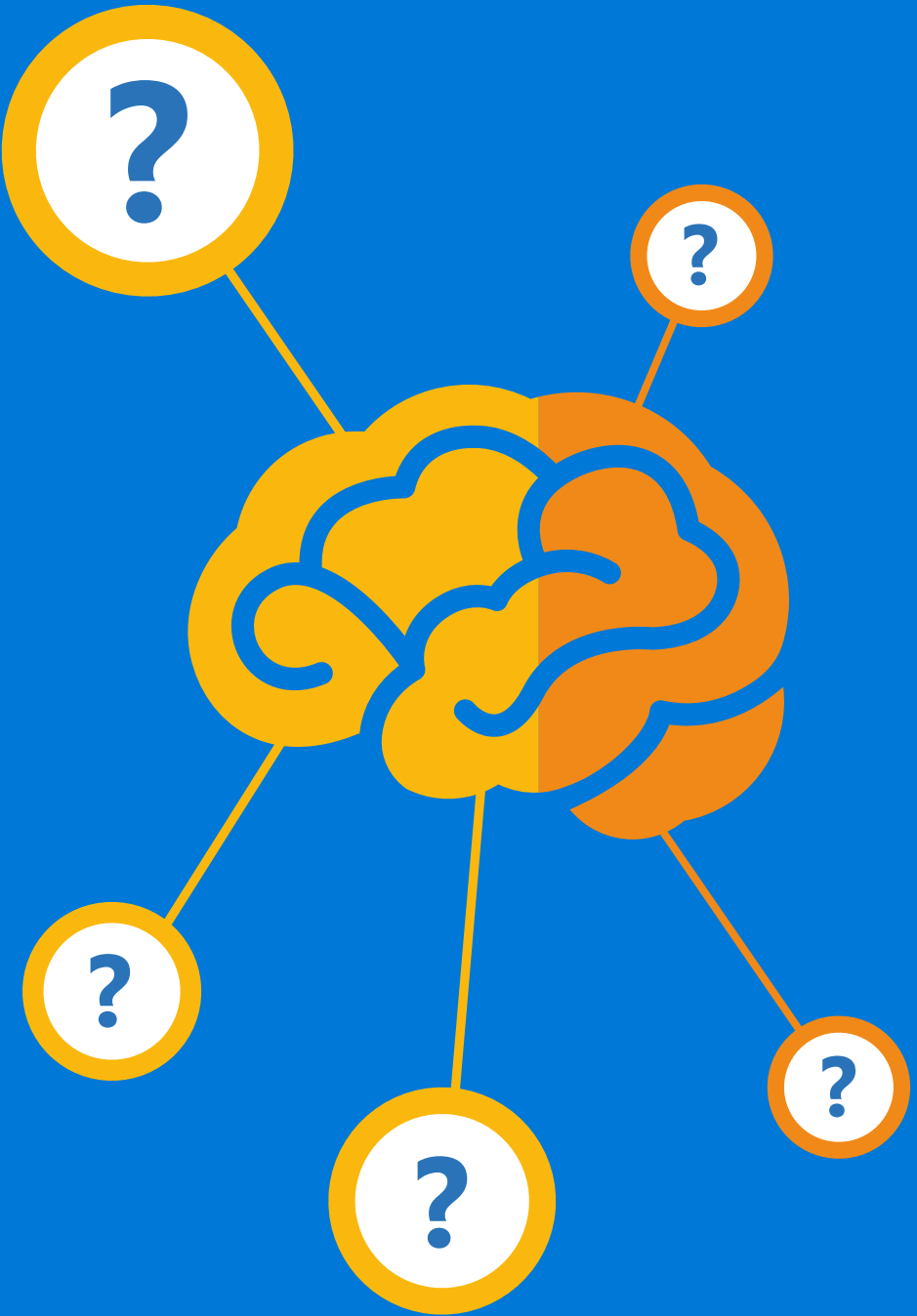
The Five Whys
this will help you get to
the heart of an issue



The Premortem
this one's for pre-
empting problems

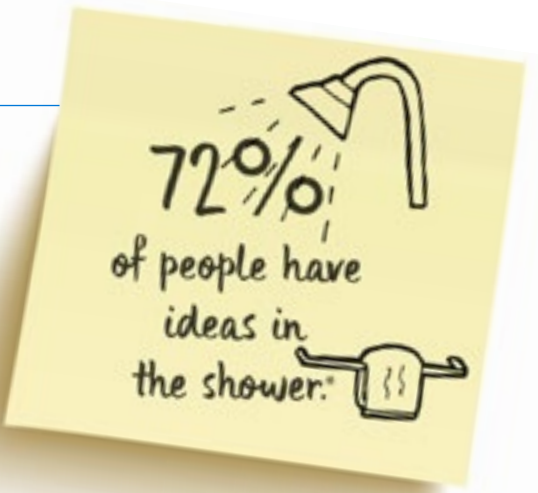


The Stapler
this will help you
define processes



DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Five Whys

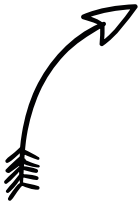


What is it?

It's a technique children often employ to expose an adult's superficial understanding of the world. It's also a really useful way to get to the root cause of a particular problem. Taiichi Ohno of Toyota formally developed the technique in manufacturing. But, now, it's used in all sorts of industries to define problems.

How do you do it?

1. Identify a problem, write it up, and share it with your team.
2. Give your team five Post-it notes numbered one to five.
3. Get them to ask themselves why your problem is a problem.
4. Then, get them to ask why that problem is a problem.
5. Repeat until everyone's asked five whys.
6. Compare the answers and discuss similarities and differences.
7. Create a definitive list that best outlines the problem.
8. Organise a session to come up with ideas for solving the problem.





Why do it?


- You'll get under the skin of the problem.
- You'll understand the chain of cause and effect.
- You can then tackle the real problem rather than a symptom of the problem.


* 2014 Kaufman study


What do you need?

TIME
 Up to two hours

PEOPLE
 Three to eight

FUEL
 Caffeine

MATERIALS
 Pens and Post-it notes

ENHANCE WITH
 Microsoft Teams and OneNote

SUPERCHARGE YOUR STORM WITH



Surface Pro with Teams

Can't get everyone in the same room? No post-its lying around? Try posting your whys on a Teams channel. Or write and share them on OneNote. You could even do it from a coffee shop – Surface Pro lets you connect from anywhere with 4G.



DEFINING THE PROBLEM

The Premortem

What is it?

It's a less formal version of risk analysis – more prevention than cure. So, rather than get to the end of a project and work out what's gone wrong, you start by thinking about what could go wrong. And you work out how to tackle those potential pitfalls.

How do you do it?






1. Open with a simple question: what's going to go wrong?
2. Voice concerns and discuss them based on previous experience.
3. Rank the issues and set out a plan for dealing with them.

Why do it?

- It's really simple.
- Energy among your team will be high – it's the start of the project, after all.
- You can address issues before it's too late.



What do you need?

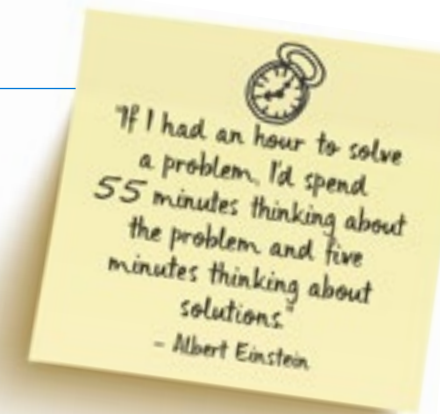
TIME	
	Two hours
PEOPLE	
	Three to eight
FUEL	
	Jelly Babies
MATERIALS	
	Pen and paper
ENHANCE WITH	
	Microsoft Whiteboard, OneNote, and Teams
SUPERCHARGE YOUR STORM WITH	



Surface Hub with Whiteboard
Everyone will be keen to contribute. So, why not all huddle round a Surface Hub with Whiteboard? That way, it's easy for everyone to share their thoughts and concerns on screen. Then, save them to OneNote and share them with Teams – so everyone knows the issues to watch out for.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

The Stapler



What is it?

This is a way of understanding a process. You'll end up with a map of the process and a better idea of where you can improve on it. The premise is that you staple yourself to an object (metaphorically) and follow that object through the process – documenting it as you go.

How do you do it?

1. Choose your object and draw it.
2. Identify a start point and end point for the object's journey.
3. Follow your object through the process.
4. Get your group to list the big steps in the process and write them on the wall.
5. Visualise the steps with arrows and simple diagrams.
6. Stick to the one process – avoid the temptation to drift into other processes.
7. Review your path.

Why do it?

- It's a great way for new people to understand a process.
- It makes it easier to spot where you can tighten up a process.
- Defining a problem is the first step in solving it.

What do you need?

TIME



Two hours

PEOPLE



Three to eight

FUEL



Biscuits

MATERIALS



Pen and paper

ENHANCE WITH



Microsoft PowerPoint

SUPERCHARGE YOUR STORM WITH



Surface Pro with PowerPoint

Get those pens at the ready. No keyboard needed here. Draw your objects on your PowerPoint slides and start tracking that process. Save and share on OneNote, for a handy process guide everyone can refer back to later.



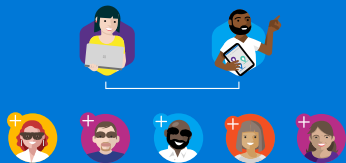
Coming up with ideas

Ideas can come from anywhere. They can come at any time. The problem is, that's not particularly helpful if you're working to a schedule or a deadline. If you are, you need to know that you'll have some ideas by a set time. And, for that, you need to make sure you know what you're trying to achieve. You also need the right conditions – think about time, space and your frame of mind. They can all play a big part in your ability to come up with ideas.

Once you've got all of the above, pick a brainstorm that'll give you the type of ideas you're looking for. There are four to choose from over the following pages. They all work slightly differently and give a slightly different output.



Need lots of ideas in a short space of time?
Try 6-3-5.



Want to get a broad spectrum of ideas from different people?
Try The Escalator.



Stuck in a creative rut and feel the need to mix things up?
Try Back to Front.



Looking for something unexpected?
Try The Randomiser.



SOLVING THE PROBLEM

6-3-5

What is it?

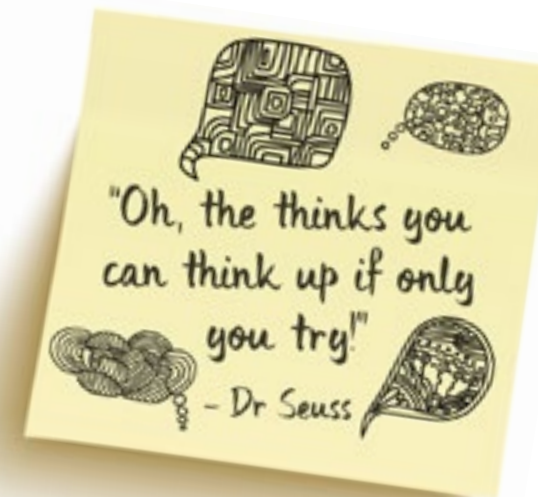
It's a brainwriting technique that gives you lots of ideas in a short space of time. The original technique, developed in the 60s by Bernd Rohrbach, generates 108 ideas in 30 minutes. But who needs 108 ideas? With our variation, you'll get 18 ideas in just five minutes.

How do you do it?

1. Get six people together.
2. Clearly outline a problem for them to solve at the top of a worksheet.
3. Give them five minutes to come up with three ideas each on that worksheet.

Why do it?

- There's less talking, but more ideas.
- Everyone contributes – it's a great way to hear what ideas your introverts have.
- It's really easy to set up.



What do you need?

TIME



Five minutes

PEOPLE



Six

FUEL



There's no time for snacking with this one

MATERIALS



Pen and paper

ENHANCE WITH



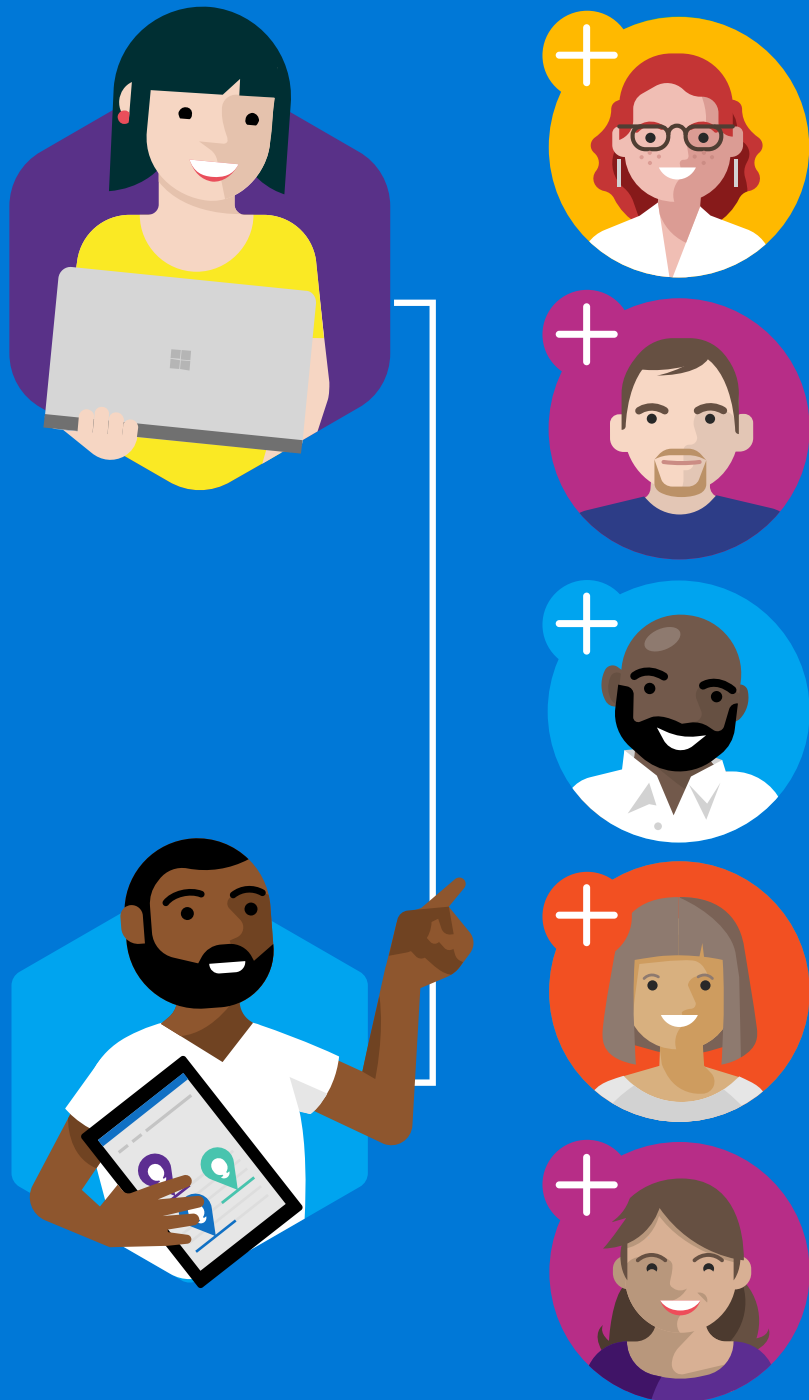
Microsoft Teams and Sketchable

SUPERCHARGE YOUR STORM WITH



Surface Book 2 with Teams

Even if all six of you can't get together in person, this brainstorm works great over Teams. And if you're more of a visualiser when it comes to having ideas, detach your Surface Book screen and draw and doodle with Sketchable instead.



SOLVING THE PROBLEM

The Escalator

What is it?

Ever been in a big brainstorm and wondered why you're only hearing from the same old people? This is the antidote to that. It's a way to ensure everyone has a say. So, it starts small. And you gradually add new people with new ideas – one at a time.

How do you do it?

1. Give your group a problem to think about before your meeting.
2. Start your meeting with two core people.
3. Add a person to the core group – they'll present their ideas first and hear the core group's second.
4. Get everyone to discuss the ideas.
5. Repeat the process with the rest of the group.
6. Review what you've got at the end – once you've heard from everyone.

Why do it?

- You'll get a broader spread of ideas.
- You'll hear from more junior people and your introverts.
- You'll get a better idea out of it.



What do you need?

TIME



Up to four hours

PEOPLE



Six to eight

FUEL



Doughnuts

MATERIALS



Pen and paper

ENHANCE WITH



Microsoft Teams and SharePoint

SUPERCHARGE YOUR STORM WITH



Surface Book 2 with Teams and SharePoint

Post your problem in a Teams chat and tell everyone what time they should join the meeting. Pass the Surface and pen around so everyone can scribble their notes. Then once they've presented their ideas, you can collate them in SharePoint – straight from Teams.

Back to Front

What is it?

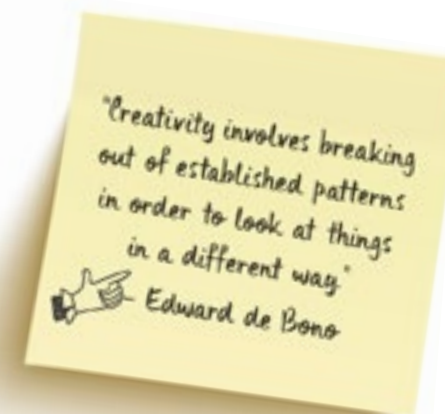
It's a normal brainstorm you do in reverse. So, rather than thinking about how you solve the problem, you think about how you could create it. Then, once you've got a list of problems, try to solve them. This is a good one to try when you're stuck and need some inspiration.

How do you do it?

- 1 Write down your problem or challenge.
- 2 Come up with ways you could cause the problem.
- 3 Let the session flow freely and get as many ideas as you can.
- 4 Take your list of problems and come up with solutions for them.
- 5 Evaluate your list of solutions.

Why do it?

- It'll get you thinking in a different way.
- You'll come up with robust solutions.
- It can get you out of a rut if you need a change of pace.



What do you need?

TIME



Up to four hours

PEOPLE



Six to eight

FUEL



Fresh fruit

MATERIALS



Pen and paper

ENHANCE WITH



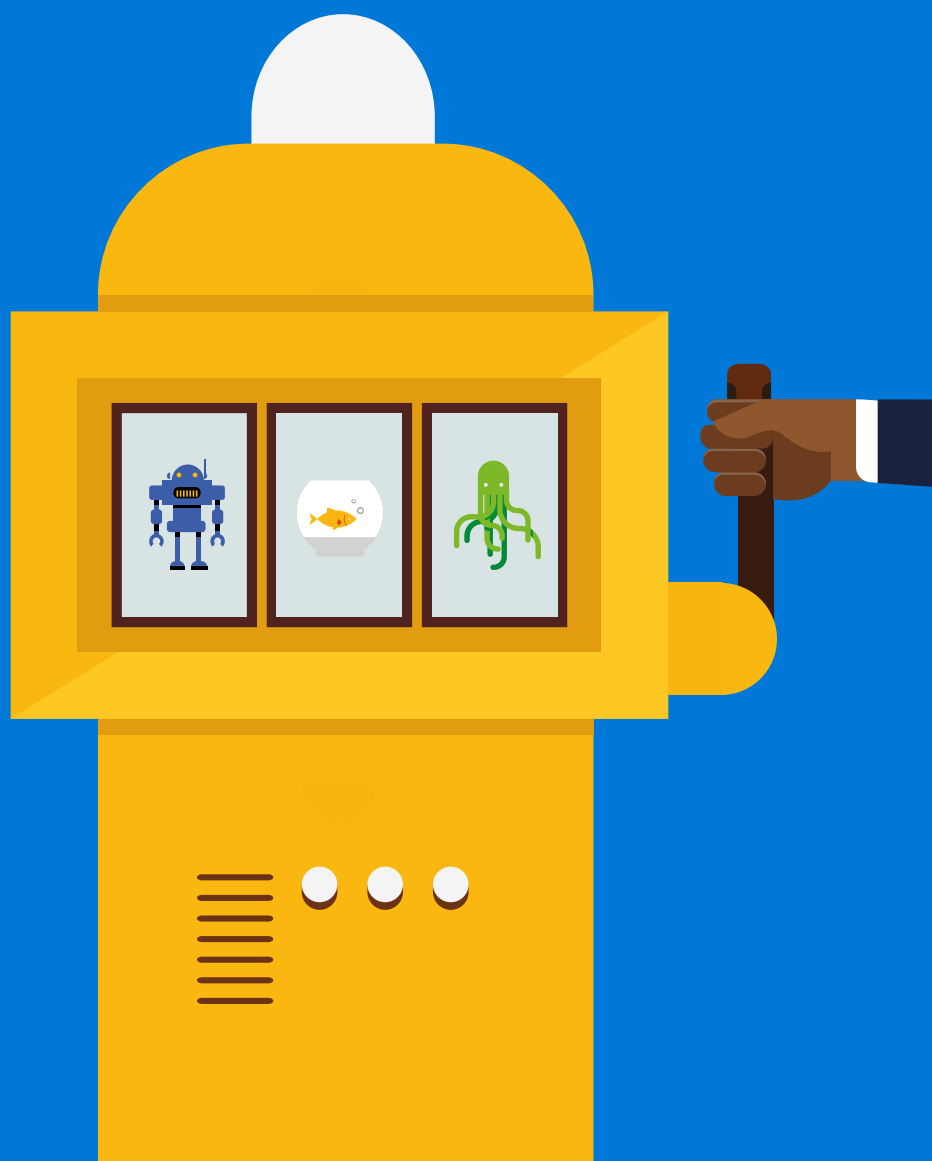
Microsoft Whiteboard and Teams

SUPERCHARGE YOUR STORM WITH



Surface Hub with Whiteboard

Try this one around a Surface Hub. That way, everyone can have their turn creating the problem and writing notes on the screen. Then share the list of problems and invite everyone to come up with solutions on Teams.



SOLVING THE PROBLEM

The Randomiser

What is it?

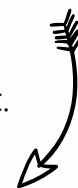
This is where it all gets a little random. Inspiration can come from anywhere. At least, that's the thinking with this one. You take a random starting point and see where it takes you. It helps to get you out of the same old patterns and ways of thinking.

How do you do it?

1. Pick a random noun from the dictionary (a book, magazine or newspaper will work too).
2. Use that noun – it should be something physical rather than abstract – as your starting point.
3. See where your random object takes you.

Why do it?

- It stops things becoming too formulaic.
- It'll give you a fresh perspective.
- It's pretty easy to do.



* Department for Digital, Media, Culture and Sport

What do you need?

TIME



Up to two hours

PEOPLE



Three

FUEL



Noodles

MATERIALS



Pen, paper, and source material

ENHANCE WITH



Sketchable and Microsoft OneNote

SUPERCHARGE YOUR STORM WITH



Surface Studio and Sketchable

Gather round. It's time to get creative. This is a stand-up session around a Surface Studio. Take it in turns to draw your random masterpieces with Sketchable, then save and share them with OneNote to see what the rest of your team thinks.



Making decisions

In his 1878 book, *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche said: "All great artists and thinkers are great workers, indefatigable not only in inventing, but also in rejecting, sifting, transforming, ordering." Coming up with a good idea is important. But, it's probably not any more important than spotting a good idea.

Deciding what is and what isn't a good idea is difficult. There's the obvious problem of subjectivity – people find it hard to think beyond their own experience a lot of the time. People often don't give the evaluation stage as much time or importance as the generation stage. And often there's no criteria for what constitutes good.

This next section has three ideas for how to evaluate ideas:



Six Thinking Hats
make sure you've
covered perspective.



Starbursting
stress test your idea with
a structured session.



The NUF Test
bring some objectivity
to your decision making.



MAKING A DECISION

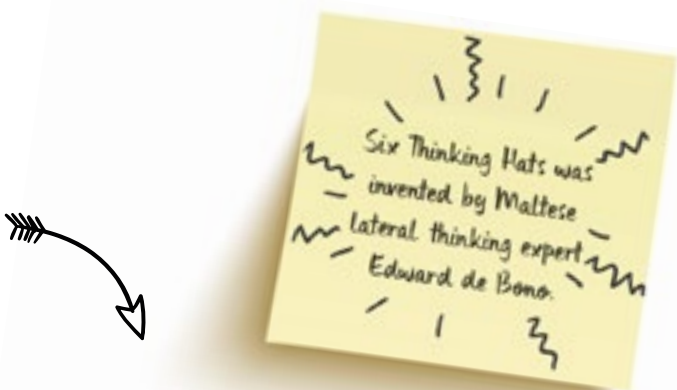
Six Thinking Hats

What is it?

It's not just an opportunity to raid the dressing-up box. It's a parallel thinking process that allows you to make better decisions and consider a problem from a variety of perspectives. In this one, everyone in the group takes a metaphorical hat, which represents a type of thinking or attitude.

How do you do it?

- Start by giving everyone one of the following 'thinking' hats:
 - **White** – focus on the facts.
 - **Red** – use your intuition. You can be emotional.
 - **Black** – focus on the negatives. Play devil's advocate.
 - **Yellow** – focus on the positives. See the opportunities.
 - **Green** – embrace creativity. Let the ideas flow freely.
 - **Blue** – take the lead. Run the session and keep everyone involved.
- Tackle the issue as a group.



Why do it?

- You'll cover most, if not every, angle.
- People can break with their normal way of thinking.
- You'll get a balance of emotional and rational thinking.

What do you need?

TIME



Up to two hours

PEOPLE



Six

FUEL



Popcorn

MATERIALS



Pen and paper (you don't need any hats)

ENHANCE WITH



Microsoft Teams

SUPERCHARGE YOUR STORM WITH



Surface Laptop with Teams

This one works whether you're together, or working remotely. Get a Teams chat going, assign everyone a hat, and let the brainstorming commence.



MAKING A DECISION

Starbursting

"A wise man can learn more from a foolish question than a fool can learn from a wise answer."
- Bruce Lee



What is it?

It's a way to understand a new product or idea. You focus on coming up with questions that will challenge and fireproof the new idea. It brings a bit of order to proceedings and stops you bombarding colleagues who've had a new idea with a random barrage of questions.

How do you do it?

- Draw a star on a piece of paper – it'll need six points.
- Put the name of the product or idea in the middle of the star.
- Write who, what, why, when, where, and how at the tip of each point of the star.
- Come up with as many questions as you can – they need to start from each tip of the star.
- Set up another session to go through and answer the list of questions.

Why do it?

- It'll help you understand a new idea.
- It gives you a systematic way of challenging and stress testing something new.
- It makes life easier for colleagues who've come up with something new.

What do you need?

TIME



Up to three hours

PEOPLE



Three

FUEL



Bag of sweets

MATERIALS



Pen and paper (you don't need any hats)

ENHANCE WITH



Microsoft Paint 3D and Teams

SUPERCHARGE YOUR STORM WITH



Surface Laptop with Teams

Use Paint 3D to draw your star on a Surface Laptop. Then gather round for half an hour and get those questions flowing. Once you have them, post your results in a Teams group and send an Outlook invite for the follow-up.

The NUF Test

What is it?

Short on time? Just want to crack on with your idea? Still need to make sure it's going to solve your problem? It's time for the NUF Test. It's a quick checklist that'll tell you whether you're on track ... quickly. It stands for **new, useful, and feasible**.

How do you do it?

- Create a matrix with your ideas and three categories to score them on.
- Rate each idea according to the criteria: new, useful, and feasible.
- Score them out of ten.
- Discuss ways you could improve the scores in specific categories.

Why do it?

- It'll help you fireproof ideas.
- It'll ensure your idea works in practice.
- It can throw up issues you might not have considered.



What do you need?

TIME



45 minutes

PEOPLE



Two to four

FUEL



Chocolate

MATERIALS



Pen and paper

ENHANCE WITH



Microsoft OneNote and Teams

SUPERCHARGE YOUR STORM WITH



Surface Hub with OneNote

Build your matrix in Excel and save it to OneNote so people can work on it before, or during, your meeting. Once you're done, bring it up on your Surface Hub and start rating – or post it to Teams so everyone can get involved.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a white laptop. The person is wearing a blue and white patterned skirt and a brown top. The laptop has the Windows logo on the lid. The background is a light-colored, textured wall.

Creativity and technology

Creativity conjures up romantic images. From back-of-napkin doodles to spindly prototypes, some of our associations seem curiously analogue. But, creativity and technology have always been inextricably linked. Innovators are quite often early adopters of other technologies. It's one of the reasons you'll find the supercharge your storm sections earlier in this e-book.

Everett Rogers, a professor of communication studies, came up with a theory for how, why, and how quickly ideas spread. It's called the diffusion of innovations. It considers four critical elements: the innovation itself, communication channels, time, and a social system. With that in mind, it's no surprise that the digital age has seen ideas spread more. Today, it's easier to get information, discover new influences, share ideas, and make those ideas a reality. And that's all down to technology.

Open minds

We believe anyone can be creative. But, they need the right conditions. In the *2017 Steelcase Global Report*, around a third of people identified processes (32 percent) and workspaces (28 percent) as obstacles. So, how do you unlock creativity? Technology can play a big part. We see it first hand at Microsoft – whether it's sharing ideas in Microsoft Teams, sketching out an idea on Surface Pro, or getting the team around a Surface Hub in a purpose-built collaboration space.

If you want to learn more about creating the right conditions for creativity in business, here are three resources to help you:

Creativity in Business – the Essentials

You'll learn why creativity's important and how to make it happen in your business. It looks at everything from how to get people in the right state of mind to overcoming common obstacles to creativity.



Designing Your Modern Workplace

You'll learn how to unlock creativity with the right technology and spaces. There's loads of good practical advice in here.



Sleep Well + Dream Big

You'll learn how Microsoft 365 can help your business become more creative and more secure. That's the idea behind *Sleep Well and Dream Big*.

Thanks for reading. Happy storming.