

Talent Development 22 Future Readiness

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Section 3.8 in the CPTD Certification program for ATD is Future Readiness. Section A reads, “Knowledge of techniques to promote, support, and/or generate innovation and creativity, for example design thinking, brainstorming, and ideation.”

Creativity is essential for forward movement in any organization. Unfortunately, the tools to have high creativity are often not used well, so the end result is

muted rather than brilliant.

One of the more misunderstood techniques to bring about creativity is brainstorming.

Do brainstorming right

The technique of “brainstorming” was developed by [Alex Osborn in the year 1967](#). His book “[Applied Imagination](#)” laid out a specific set of rules for brainstorming sessions.

Rule 1 – go for a high number of ideas – He suggested that quantity was more important than quality when creating fresh ideas.

Rule 2 – suspend all judgment while coming up with the ideas. This is the rule that most groups find difficult to follow.

The concept of coming up with “wild” or “crazy” ideas allowed a spontaneous flow of new concepts. Even though most of them were impractical or stupid, there were some nuggets among them.

Osborn suggested that people in the group “hitchhike” or create variations of the ideas of others. In doing so, mutations of different ideas would often lead to an actual practical solution that could work.

Some interesting other techniques have come along that put the concept of brainstorming on steroids. One such invention was “Morphological Analysis.”

The Technique of Morphological Analysis

This concept uses brainstorming but in a way that forces the combination of concepts that we would not normally even consider. The technique was developed by [Fritz Zwicky in 1969 at Cal Tech](#).

He would create a matrix of three or four different variables and present them on two axes. For example he might have objects on the x axis. I will use an example here of car, house, hammock, and brick. Then on the y axis he would identify some other concept, let's say emotions. So, he might have chosen love, sorrow, fear, levity.

Now he would ask people to brainstorm several different ways you might imagine the intersection of the concepts. He would ask questions like "How can we use a car to create levity?" (answer: you might dress it up like a penguin) or "In what ways can we use a brick to create fear?" (answer: suspend the brick 20 feet above someone's head using a string and light a match).

The exercise would continue until all of the intersections or "boxes" were full of crazy ideas. Think about how you would use a hammock to generate sorrow. It really stretches the mind beyond the way we normally think.

Here is another technique to get more ideas using brainstorming in a slightly different way.

One, Two, Four, All

My friend David Finger studied the technique made popular by Keith McCandless and Henri Lipmanowicz in a structure they call "[Liberating Structures](#)." Here is how David describes how he uses the technique in his work.

Step 1: Define the question that will be answered. This question must be very specific so that everyone answers the same question without interpretation. One question I recently used was, "What feature of Zoom Breakout Rooms is your favorite?". As you can see, the question is not a monumentally difficult one, in fact it should be one that EVERYONE can come up with an answer for, but that there is no one "right" answer.

Step 2: Ask each person to write down (this is important whether in-person or virtually) their best answer to the question. One answer per person, and it must be written down (I generally just tell them that part of this process is that they must write it down; I don't explain why. People comply with simple rules like that fairly quickly, if it's not a complex instruction.) Maximum time for this is 1 minute.

Step 3: Each person will be paired with another person, and together they will share and discuss their ideas with each other. Within 2 minutes, they need to agree to move

forward with ONE of their two ideas. The time limit is necessarily short so they just act without a lot of waffling. They need to decide and move forward.

Step 4: Each pair of people is now put together with another pair of people, and they will each share their agreed-upon move-ahead idea. The way I usually phrase this is, “Between the 4 of you, you have 2 ideas. Work as a team of 4 to decide which ONE idea is the best.” Also, each team of 4 will decide on who will present this one idea to the rest of the group after the decision is made. Maximum time 2 minutes to decide on one idea and assign a spokesperson.

Step 5: Each 4-person team’s spokesperson now reports their ONE idea in an all-participants session. (This is the “All” part.)

Step 6: You now have one top idea from each group of 4 people. Depending on the question and the objective, you can use multi-voting, weighted voting, etc. to choose the one idea to go forward. Alternatively, you can adopt all of the top ideas as things to work on.

The one, two, four, all technique works equally well in a virtual setting as it does in person, so this method of brainstorming may become more popular in the future as a larger portion of the workforce will likely be working from home.

Using an organized approach like the one, two, four, all technique or Morphological analysis creates a richer and more lively brainstorming session that allows the best ideas to move forward. Just remember to keep it light and have fun with your creativity sessions.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals*, *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*, *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind*, and *Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change*. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations.

