

Techniques for Generating New Ideas

Several techniques are used for generation of new ideas for products and services. Some of these techniques are:

- 1. Brainstorming:** It is the process of generating all possible ideas about a specific topic. In a formal brainstorming session, the leader of the group asks the participants to share their ideas in a freewheeling manner. No criticism or negative comments of any idea is allowed in the initial stage. A flip chart or an electronic white board is used to record all the ideas, however, illogical they may be. The participants may be people planning start-up, employees of an existing firms, customers, etc. The ideas generated during a brainstorming session are later on analyzed and evaluated to choose the most promising ideas.

Some rules for a formal brainstorming session are as follows:

- Criticism inhibits creativity and free flow of ideas. Therefore, allow no criticism either by spoken words or through body language.
- Encourage carefree expression of ideas. The more ideas the better as even crazy ideas may ultimately lead to the solution of a problem. There should be no restriction or rules.
- Focus on the essence rather than on details of an idea. Never permit the pace to slow down.
- Use one idea as a means of jumping forward quickly to other ideas. This is called leapfrogging.

- 2. Focus Groups:** A focus group consists of 5 to 10 persons who are familiar with the issue. They participate in a group discussion to throw light on the issue. Focus groups are often used as a follow-up to brainstorming. The general idea for a business is refined in a focus group. For example, a bookstore in which coffee is sold might conduct a focus group of frequent book buyers. They may be asked “what change do they want in the coffee outlet.”

- 3. Problem Inventory Analysis:** In this technique new ideas are obtained by focusing on the problem. Consumers are given a list of problems in a

general product category. They are then asked to identify and discuss products in the category that have the particular problem. Once a complete list of problems is prepared, consumers can easily associate the existing products with the problem.

4. **Reverse Brainstorming:** Reverse brainstorming is similar to brainstorming except that criticism is allowed. As the focus is on the negative, it is necessary to maintain the group's morale. Fault finding is done by asking questions like "In how many way can this idea fail." Once faults are identified in an idea, discussion is held to find ways of removing the faults.
5. **Rawlinson Brainstorming:** In this type of brainstorming members of the group interact individually with the leader.
6. **Collective Notebook Method:** In the collective notebook method, a small notebook that easily fits in a short pocket is prepared. It includes a statement of the problem, blank pages, and any pertinent background data. Selected individuals consider the problem and its possible solutions, recording ideas at least once but preferably three times a day. At the end of a month, a list of the best ideas is developed, along with suggestions, if any. This technique can also be used with a group of individuals who record their ideas, giving their notebooks to a central coordinator who synthesizes the data and summarizes all the materials.
7. **Heuristics:** Here the ability to discover through a progression of thoughts, insights and learning is needed. Quite often the entrepreneurs must settle for an estimated rather than certain outcome of a decision. It involves locating all relevant concepts associated with a given product area and generating a set of all possible combinations of ideas.
8. **Garden Technique:** In this technique the group does not know the exact nature of the problem. This ensures that perceived ideas and behavioural patterns do not cloud the solution. The group responds by expressing a number of ideas. Then a concept and related concepts are developed under the leader's guidance. Then the actual problem is revealed to the group to refine the final solution.
9. **Free Association:** A new idea is developed through a chain of word associations. First, a word or phrase related to the problem is written down.

Then word after word is added to give something new to the thought process. This chain of ideas ends in a new idea.

10. Value Analysis: In this technique a new idea is developed by evaluating its worth or value to the new venture.