



Team Creativity The 'secret sauce' of effective brainstorming

In brainstorming, a group of people committed to solving a problem, which requires a creative solution, come together and contribute ideas which are recorded on a list. The ideas generated are evaluated, then used singly or in combination to formulate a solution to the problem.

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Team Creativity – The ‘secret sauce’ of effective brainstorming

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Effective idea formulation and problem solving is an important capability of successful teams at work.



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Brainstorming was pioneered as a technique to generate ideas in the 1950s by an advertising executive, Alex Osborn. He formulated four rules of brainstorming to benefit idea generation (Nemeth, 2018):

1. Go for quantity of ideas
2. Build on the ideas of others
3. Engage in ‘freewheeling’, and especially
4. Do not criticise the ideas of others.

Brainstorming is a process which optimises the creativity and problem-solving capability of a team as well as strengthens and unifies a team. Brainstorming brings the team members' diverse experience into play. It increases the richness of ideas explored, which means that a team can often find better solutions to problems. Team members

are more likely to buy-in and be more committed to solutions that they had a part in developing. And, because brainstorming is fun, it helps team members bond, as they solve problems in a positive, rewarding environment. (Markman, 2017)

Over the decades that brainstorming has existed, there have been many suggestions on how the technique can be enhanced for better results. Markman (2017) describes the following three approaches:

- **The 6-3-5 method**

Based on acceptance of the fact that brainstorming must be propelled by divergent thinking, the 6-3-5 method incorporates individual thinking with sharing of ideas. Six people sit around a table and write down three ideas. They pass their stack of ideas to the person on their right, who builds on them. This passing is done five times, until everyone has had the chance to build on each of the ideas. Afterward, the group can get together to evaluate the ideas generated.

- **Slow the process down**

It's important that groups have time to explore enough ideas that they can consider more than just the first few possibilities that people generate. Ideas should not be evaluated until everyone has generated ideas and has had a chance to build on them. This rule must be laid down at the outset of the process.

- **Allow people to draw**

A combination of drawing and writing is ideal for generating creative solutions to problems especially when a solution involves spatial relationships. Using drawings to express ideas considers that a large amount of the brain is devoted to visual processing, so sketching and interpreting drawings increases the



involvement of those brain regions in idea generation.

The Mind Tools team (2019) identify many brainstorming variations that teams can apply for better results: The Stepladder Technique, Brainwriting, Online Brainstorming (also known as Brain-netting), Crawford's Slip Writing Approach, Reverse Brainstorming, Charette Procedure, Round-Robin Brainstorming, Rolestorming.

The 'secret sauce' of superior brainstorming

All the brainstorming approaches outlined above are typically applied within the framework of Osborn's 4 rules of brainstorming. Particularly the 'don't criticise rule'. Nemeth (2018) notes that the four rules are intuitively plausible. The assumption is that people will shut down if their ideas are criticised. Nemeth and colleagues tested this assumption in a study they conducted in the United States and France.

The study findings were contrary to what researchers expected. Allowing debate and criticism during a brainstorming session led to significantly more, not fewer, ideas. There is worth in not being constrained by a 'no criticism rule'. Dissent has value, even when it is wrong because it fosters independent thinking and breaks the hold of 'group think'.

“Allowing debate and criticism during a brainstorming session led to significantly more, not fewer, ideas.”

Charlan Nemeth

An effective work team must have the capability to creatively problem solve. That capability will be enhanced by smart use of brainstorming with the 'secret sauce' of allowing criticism added to the mix.

HR Excellence

An outsourced solution

This note presents a case for business enterprises to outsource elements of the human resources function. External specialists with competencies across the HR spectrum can provide need-matching professional and cost-effective expertise to support business success.

Organisations of different sizes and stages in the business growth cycle can benefit from outsourced HR expertise. HR consulting services may provide timely support for an entrepreneurial organisation, which has grown through its start-up phase without HR input. Or, in a well-established large organisation, HR consultants may supplement the capabilities of an inhouse team. Outsourced HR services are available in the administration, operational and strategic dimensions of HR practice.

Business leaders will want to know what business impact can be expected from HR consultants. There are three primary HR contributions to business success. (1) Optimise total employment costs. (2) Reduce people related risks. (3) Increase employee productivity. Most business leaders will agree that managing employees is one of their more challenging and enduring focus areas. Management consultant and author, Richard Koch (2013) noted that “On both sides of every business transaction you find people. And people are the toughest part of any business.”

The role of an HR consultant is to take away business leaders' people headaches. And, the HR expert can proactively implement workplace people management practices to ensure that the business leader does not develop people headaches in the first place. In delivering these outcomes, the business and concern of the human resources professional today is anything and



everything to do with managing employees in organisations. (Lee, 2011)

In a 21st century working environment this, to a large extent, involves fostering a work environment that harnesses intelligence, creativity and interpersonal skills. The HR expert helps set up a work environment where people are invested and enthusiastic about their work. Studies show that happy employees are less likely to quit or call in sick. Happy employees act as brand ambassadors outside the office, spreading positive impressions of their organisation and attracting star performers to the team. (Friedman, 2014)

HR experts have an extensive menu of programmes, operating procedures and practices which they can apply through the entire employment experience. They can make sure that a business is hiring the best talent, developing, compensating and performance managing that talent and terminating employees fairly. They can give HR input into the strategic planning process of the firm. And, in the highly regulated South African labour market, HR experts can ensure that businesses comply with employment laws as required.

An astute HR consultant does not foist a full menu of HR solutions on every client. Rather, the consultant takes time to understand the client and recommends action suitable in the context of the client's business.

Outsourcing to an HR consultant ensures that a business has the right level of HR expertise, in the right amount and at the right time. It is a cost effective and flexible solution.

An HR consultant in the role of trusted partner can help a business build the bridge between employees' work performance and business success.

Hiring

CV fraudsters beware

There is a worldwide trend of increasing CV fraud by job applicants trying to get an advantage in the competition for scarce jobs. In South Africa it's a big headache for recruiters. Several high-profile public sector figures have been caught out lying about their qualifications, and their reputations have suffered through national media coverage. The private sector, where fraud of this kind tends not to grab headlines, also grapples with this dishonest practice. A leading recruiting company Quest (2017) reported that a study by a background screening company revealed that qualification fraud in South Africa increased by a staggering 200% from 2009 to 2014.

The South African government has resorted to statutory intervention to curb this malpractice. On 19 August 2019, the President signed the National Qualifications Amendment Act into law. The date on which the law will come into effect is yet to be proclaimed.

Under the new Act, it is a criminal offence for any person to falsely or fraudulently claim to hold a qualification that is registered on the National Qualifications Framework or awarded by a recognised and accredited institution. Even if you're posting it on your social media account (just to impress your friends), it's considered an offence – and if convicted in a court of law, the offender could face a fine and imprisonment of up to five years, or both. Courts must treat as an aggravating factor any person's use of qualification misrepresentation committed with the intent to gain financially, or to receive any favour, benefit, reward, compensation or any other advantage.

The stiff criminal penalties will make this new law an interesting case study on the deterrent impact of punitive statutes.



Dismissal

Legalistic procedures unnecessary

Many organisations still apply overly long, prescriptive and legalistic pre-dismissal procedures. This is not required by the Labour Relations Act or the Code of Good Practice: Dismissal. This principle was recently reinforced in the Labour Court (2019).

“It is rare to be utterly astounded by the stance of a litigant. This is one of those occasions.”

H. Rabkin-Naicker – Judge of the Labour Court

The facts of a dispute between a dismissed employee (the applicant) and the Department of Social Development (the respondent) were that the applicant was employed by the respondent in the Free State Province, as a social auxiliary worker, since 1980. On 14 September 2011, the applicant was sentenced to direct imprisonment for charges of bribery and corruption. The applicant’s term of imprisonment was 4 years. The applicant was incarcerated from 14 September 2011 until 2 July 2012 when he was released. While in jail, on 14 March 2012, he was issued with a written notice by the respondent stating that his services were terminated based on incapacity. The applicant approached the Labour Court to get his job back. The applicant said he did not have a fair pre-dismissal hearing and the respondent did not prove there were reasons justifying his dismissal.

The applicant did not persuade the judge who noted. “It is rare to be utterly astounded by the stance of a litigant. This is one of those occasions. The applicant seeks to be reinstated after, on his own version, he was found guilty

beyond reasonable doubt, in a court of law, of bribery and corruption in relation to his ‘clients’ i.e. those people in the community in need of health and social services from the state.”

The Labour Court found that it is imperative to avoid rigidity in the application of labour law. Facts and circumstances of a case before an arbitrator or adjudicator must always be considered. While there is a distinction between criminal and disciplinary proceedings, in this matter the criminal charges were directly related to the applicant’s conduct as a social worker auxiliary in the respondent’s employ. By dismissing the applicant’s case with costs, the Labour Court reinforced the wisdom of avoiding rigidity when applying the principles of labour law.

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- Peter Fisher is the writer of these HR notes. His opinions expressed in the notes do not necessarily reflect the views of Tennant Human Capital Solutions (Pty) Ltd or other companies within the Tennant Group.

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Case

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5. Fair dismissal	Execute all aspects of the disciplinary process including investigation, charge formulation, initiation, charring.

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**the most
valuable of all
capital is that
which is
invested in
human beings**

- Alfred Marshall