

# Idea generating methods

## Summary

To grow and be innovative, creativity and idea generation is key. One way to encourage new ideas and stimulate creativity is to use idea generating methods. In this document, we have gathered some of our favorite techniques and method for doing just that. All methods have their pros and cons. For example, brainstorming has been critiqued for not being an efficient idea generating method in some settings. Reflection upon whether a method should be used is therefore advised; applying a method is not a “one-stop-solution”.

This is a living document, which means it will be updated if new, creative methods are found. Check UNIK Flow™ at [www.unikpartner.com](http://www.unikpartner.com) for the latest revision. If you have any thoughts or comments on the material, please let us know. UNIK Partner AB does not claim ownership of methods presented in this document.

## Idea generating methods for groups

A group have a huge pool of knowledge and creativity when combining all individual group members. If used right, these methods for idea generation in a group setting can leverage just that.

## Brainstorming

**Goal:** Generate as many ideas as possible within a time limit.

**What you need:**

- A whiteboard and/or pens and paper will be helpful to capture ideas, but not always necessary. It depends on the scope for the brainstorming session – if the scope and/or group is big, we recommend writing down ideas.
- A timer.

**How it works:**

1. Agree on a time limit for the brainstorming session. The minimum recommendation is ca. 10 minutes, and longer if the scope and/or group is bigger. Do not exceed 30 minutes.
2. Set and start the timer on the agreed time limit.
3. Within the time limit, the group collectively comes up with ideas. If you are using whiteboard and/or pens and paper, everyone is welcome to write or draw their ideas. No judgement should be passed on whether ideas are good or bad – the goal is to generate as many ideas as possible. Encourage everyone in the group to take part.
4. When the time is up, gather all ideas and evaluate them.

**Best suitable for:**

- Projects just starting up.
- Projects in need of new, creative input.
- Approaching a loosely formulated problem that can have many equally good solutions.

**Good to know:** If the group is larger than 10 people, we recommend splitting the group into smaller brainstorming groups (beehiving).

## Brainwriting

**Goal:** Generate and refine as many ideas as possible within a time limit.

**What you need:**

- Pens and paper.
- A timer and someone in the group responsible for keeping track of it.

**How it works:**

1. Agree on a time limit for one cycle of the brainwriting session. We recommend 2 minutes.
2. Distribute pens and paper to everyone in the group.
3. Set and start the timer on the agreed time limit.
4. Within the time limit, each group member writes and/or draws their ideas on their paper. When the timer rings, all group members pass their paper anti-clockwise to their neighbor.
5. Set and start the timer on the agreed time limit again. All group members now refine and develop someone else's ideas. It is also possible to add new ideas to other member's papers.
6. Continue this cycle until all papers are back with their original owner.
7. Let everyone present the ideas on their paper. Evaluate them together in the group.

**Best suitable for:**

- Projects just starting up.
- Projects in need of new, creative input.
- Approaching a loosely formulated problem that can have many equally good solutions.
- When you want to make sure every group member is heard equally.
- When you want to make sure ideas are written down.

**Good to know:** If the group is larger than 10 people, we recommend splitting the group into smaller brainstorming groups (beehiving). Brainwriting mainly differs from brainstorming in the way that ideas are evaluated and refined continuously in the group. Writing down ideas also take the group one step further towards formulating a solution, something that is not necessarily the case in brainstorming.

## Beehiving

**Goal:** Generate and refine as many ideas as possible within a time limit.

**What you need:**

- Separated spaces where all subgroups of the whole group can sit. If the group is divided into three subgroups, three separate spaces are needed, etc. These are the “beehives”.
- Whiteboards and/or pens and paper will be helpful to capture ideas, but not always necessary. It depends on the scope for the beehiving session – if the scope and/or group is big, we recommend writing down ideas.
- A timer and someone in the group responsible for keeping track of it.

**How it works:**

1. Agree on a time limit for the beehiving session. The minimum recommendation is ca. 10 minutes, and longer if the scope and/or group is bigger. Do not exceed 30 minutes.
2. Randomly divide the group into subgroups of appropriate size. Let every subgroup get settled into their beehive (separate space).
3. Set and start the timer on the agreed time limit.
4. Within the time limit, each subgroup comes up with ideas. To smoothen the process, the subgroups can use brainstorming or brainwriting.
5. When the time is up, gather the whole group and let every subgroup present their ideas. Evaluate the ideas together in the group.

**Best suitable for:**

- Projects just starting up.
- Projects in need of new, creative input.
- Approaching a loosely formulated problem that can have many equally good solutions.
- When you want to leverage the benefit of parallel idea generating groups.

**Good to know:** Beehiving is often beneficial to use in combination with other idea generating methods. An example is to use beehiving as a method to brainstorm or brainwrite in subgroups.

## Idea generating methods for individuals

Idea generation is not only beneficial in a group setting. Stimulating individual creativity is just as important. It can mean the difference between staring into a wall for a whole day and taking steps towards solving the problem at hand.

### Mindmapping

**Goal:** Visualize and map your thoughts to get a better understanding of what you have to do.

#### What you need:

- A pen and paper work just fine. If you use different colored pencils, it can help differentiate connections and ideas. A whiteboard can also be used.
- If you prefer, there are multiple mindmapping tools you can find online.

#### How it works:

1. Start from your original problem or root cause. Formulate this as a sentence and write it in the center of your mindmap (i.e., your paper/whiteboard/online tool). You can also formulate it as a question. Draw a "bubble", or circle, around what you have written.
2. From the center bubble, draw lines to connect to other bubbles that are subordinate to the center bubble. If the center bubble says "How should I start project X?", one of the subordinate bubbles might say "What is the budget?" and so on.
3. From the subordinate bubbles, continue drawing new lines to new bubbles subordinate to these bubbles. This can go on for as long as needed.
4. Lines can be drawn between bubbles at different levels but try to keep a hierarchical structure to reduce the number of crossing lines (these will make your mindmap hard to read and follow). If you find that you draw too many crossing lines, you may not have placed bubbles on their suitable levels.

#### Best suitable for:

- When you want "the whole picture" on one paper.
- When you need to organize your thoughts.
- When you need a plan for action.

**Good to know:** Mindmapping is a very versatile tool which can be used for both a quick jumpstart of your brain and planning longer projects. Mindmapping can also be done in a group setting with the help of a whiteboard. A sample mindmap can be seen in Figure 1 below.

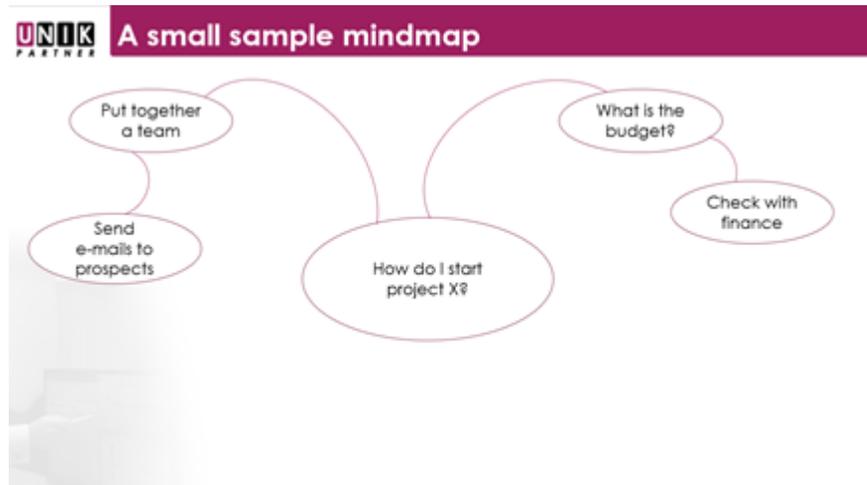


Figure 1. Mindmaps come in many shapes and forms.

### When to use which method?

As stated above, idea generating methods should be used wisely, especially in a group setting. Using one of the mentioned methods is seldom a “one-stop-solution” but used wisely it can put you and/or your team on the course to greatness. Choosing which method to use is not always straight forward. To make things a bit easier, we have summarized the methods in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Summary of the presented methods and when to use them.

Method	Best suitable for:	Best setting
Brainstorming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Projects just starting up.</li> <li>•Projects in need of new, creative input.</li> <li>•Approaching a loosely formulated problem that can have many equally good solutions.</li> </ul>	Group
Brainwriting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Projects just starting up.</li> <li>•Projects in need of new, creative input.</li> <li>•Approaching a loosely formulated problem that can have many equally good solutions.</li> <li>•When you want to make sure every group member is heard equally.</li> <li>•When you want to make sure ideas are written down.</li> </ul>	Group
Beehiving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Projects just starting up.</li> <li>•Projects in need of new, creative input.</li> <li>•Approaching a loosely formulated problem that can have many equally good solutions.</li> <li>•When you want to leverage the benefit of parallel idea generating groups.</li> </ul>	Group
Mindmapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•When you want “the whole picture” on one paper.</li> <li>•When you need to organize your thoughts.</li> <li>•When you need a plan for action.</li> </ul>	Individual

We hope this summary document and methods will help you and/or your team be successful! Please let us know if you have any thoughts or comments at [info@unikpartner.com](mailto:info@unikpartner.com).