BRAINSTORMING PROTOCOL

Brainstorming is an idea-generation technique devised by advertising executive Alex Osborne in 1939 as a way of practicing the philosophy that "It is easier to tone down a wild idea than to think up a new one." Brainstorming leverages the power of people in a group to trigger ideas in one another, and by encouraging individuals to build on one another's ideas, rather than attempting to come up with the "best" idea on one's own. In a brainstorming session, some of the best ideas often emerge when the group starts to reach for "far out" or humorous ideas.

Procedure

1. Clarify the definition of the problem or central question and write it down.

2. Start by having everyone take a few minutes to jot down some ideas.

3. Start the interaction by going around the group, each person in turn, collecting ideas (one idea per person).

4. After a few times around the room, open it up to everyone.

5. The facilitator writes each idea down on the flipchart, board, or on a Post-It note, and posts the ideas at the front of the room (Post-It notes are good because they enable later grouping of the ideas into clusters by topic or theme).

6. When idea-generation is finished, the facilitator, with help from the group, clusters ideas into categories, eliminates duplicates, and leads the group in a discussion to clarify any unclear ideas, rank the clusters based on their overall value, and plan any follow up action.

7. Variation: When the group is reaching "saturation," the facilitator may suggest a slight variation of the question to jump-start the stream of ideas.

Brainstorming Rules

The following rules must be enforced at all times during the idea-generation part of the exercise:

1. NO CRITICISM, EVALUATION OR JUDGMENT.

2. BE CREATIVE.

3. FREEWHEELING IS WELCOMED. GO FOR QUANTITY, NOT QUALITY.

4. PIGGYBACK ON OTHERS' IDEAS. COMBINATION AND IMPROVEMENT ARE SOUGHT.

5. GO BACK AND CLARIFY EACH IDEA AT THE END OF THE IDEA-GENERATING PART OF THE SESSION.

6. EVALUATE AND RANK THE IDEAS.

Russell W. Scalpone, Ph.D.
russ@scalponeinfo.com