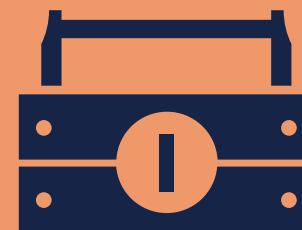# IDEATION SESSION HANDBOOK

FINNISH VERSION AVAILABLE!

A"
Aalto University
Design Factory

INTRODUCTION

This handbook with templates guide you through an ideation session step by step.

We've chosen a few of the methods that we love to use, but feel free to customize your session with any reframing and ideation methods you would like to use.

WHY?

Ideation is a great way to create a large quantity of ideas with a wide variety. Exploring solutions beyond the easy and obvious is an essential component of the design process. Although it may seem counterintuitive to consider wild ideas that are bizarre or preposterous, it is useful to embrace these as they may inspire you, paving the way for workable solutions that are smarter, more novel, and have a higher chance of success.

FOR WHOM?

These tools are free to use, created for anyone who wants to develop better solutions.

We recommend that each ideation session has an organizer and facilitator who focuses on running the session rather than producing ideas. (This is particularly important if you have more than one group working in the same session.) This handbook guides you through what to do.

However, you can use this toolkit while taking part in the ideation as well. If this is the case, share the cheat sheet and consider sharing the handbook, too, with the entire team taking part in the session. This way, if you get too absorbed in the tasks, they can help in reminding that it's time to move along.

Aalto University Design Factory

BEFORE THE SESSION

1

READ THROUGH THIS FACILITATOR GUIDE TO ORGANIZING AN IDEATION SESSION

preparations

1 hour

2

INVITE PEOPLE TO THE IDEATION SESSION

Consider inviting a diverse group of people, such as a design team, production staff, sales and customers - more diverse participants produce more diverse ideas.

- A good group size is 3-6 people, but you can have several groups in one ideation session. Aim for diversity in each group.

- If you want to take part in the tasks, is there a colleague you could invite to facilitate the session?

Explain the goal and outcome of the session to set clear expectations.

Typical goals:
- Kickstart a project: gather diverse ideas to inform the scoping of the project and get to know each other.

- Advance an ongoing project: move from user research to the solution space, develop concepts for testing.

Explain why the invitees' presence would be valued and important for the goal.

3

PREPARE THE MATERIALS YOU'LL NEED FOR THE SESSION

A short welcoming speech or presentation. Introduce the challenge or opportunity that you want to generate ideas for, as well as ways of working (more guiding questions on page 6).

Physical ideation materials: printouts of the templates, pens, post-its, flip chart paper/whiteboard, background instrumental music and refreshments, camera (e.g. on phone) to document results.

Digital ideation materials: download templates to Miro/Mural or similar digital whiteboard with the ability to have digital post-its seen and edited by the whole group.

- If you use digital platforms, make sure all of your invitees are familiar with them! If not, send a small tutorial and/or a signup link so that the session itself will run smoothly.

DURING THE SESSION

1

First, we lay the groundwork for a good session by **setting the stage**: setting expectations and looking into the challenge or opportunity that we will create ideas for.

2

Second, we generate a large **batch of ideas**, starting with a low-threshold warm up, followed by working up the quantity. In ideation, quality comes through quantity! We're looking for raw material and stepping stones rather than fully formed solutions.

3

Third, we start **taking stock** of the produced ideas, adding more into gaps we might see and creatively combining ideas.

4

Finally, we **capture** some of the most promising and intriguing thoughts more closely, to ensure that we can easily continue after the session.

2 hours

ENJOY
THE IDEATION!

IDEATION SESSION HANDBOOK

SETTING THE STAGE

30 min

INTRODUCTION

10 min

WELCOME TO THE SESSION!

1

INTRODUCE THE CHALLENGE OR OPPORTUNITY THAT YOU WANT TO GENERATE IDEAS FOR

Why is this an important, meaningful or timely challenge or opportunity?

- For example, is this tied to your strategy? Have you gotten feedback about this issue? What would solving this enable? Whose life would be improved and in what way if a great solution was found?

What do we already know about the challenge/opportunity?

- If you have any related research results, such as market surveys or user studies, now is a good time to share a few highlights.

- What are key constraints around the challenge?

- Creative ideas are encouraged, but it's good to stay focused.

Remind of the goal of the day
(already shared in invitations)

2

INTRODUCE THE WAYS OF WORKING

"Yes, and" rather than "yes, but" mentality. Defer criticism, today is about finding new perspectives and generating a mass of raw ideas. The goal is to diversifying thinking around the solution to find hidden potential and promising directions, rather than to find a perfect, fully formed idea.

Unusual and wild ideas are welcome - this is the time for them, as they can be great stepping stones later on to more down-to-earth solutions. In ideation, quality comes through quantity - we're aiming for a mass of ideas to generate a few **diamonds in the rough**, rather than trying to get a good average quality.
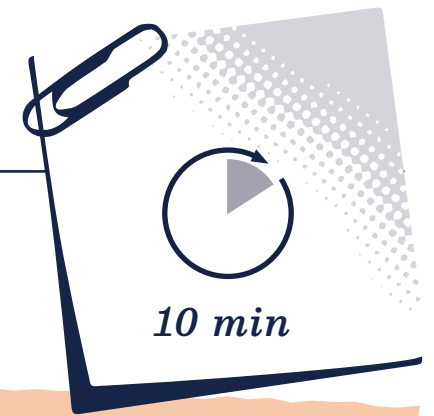
WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

Motivation hinges on seeing the value of what we are trying to do - this section clarifies why participation in this session matters and why addressing the challenge or opportunity matters.

Sharing the ways of working sets the tone of the session and can help reduce fixation (getting stuck in one direction) and self-censorship (holding back ideas).

materials:

Welcome speech / presentation
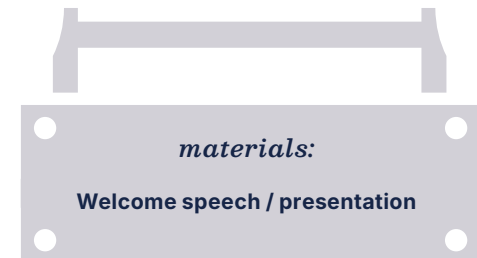
WHO'S AT THE TABLE
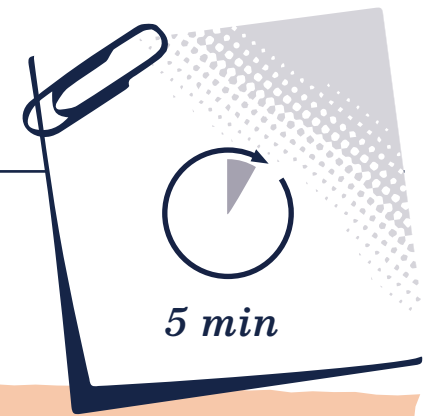
5 min

!

IF THE PARTICIPANTS DON'T KNOW EACH OTHER, HAVE EVERYONE INTRODUCE THEMSELVES TO ONE ANOTHER IN THE GROUP

You can also ask everyone to share an experience or how they are connected to the challenge.

In a face to face session where the participants don't know each other, we recommend making first-name name tags.

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

Psychological safety is needed for people to freely share their thoughts and ideas – having names and real people behind the names makes it easier!
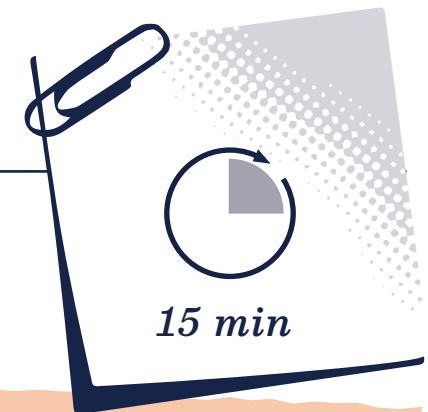
TIP!

If you do not have a separate facilitator, assign a timekeeper in the group and share the cheat sheet with the group at this phase!

materials:

If you have a larger amount of participants divided into several groups, have team tables or virtual breakout rooms prepared

Name tags if needed

FRAMING

15 min

① "HOW MIGHT WE" / INDIVIDUAL

For 5 minutes, have everyone in the group individually think of and create three different "how might we" questions related to the challenge and opportunity, using the provided templates. These are called "frames" to the challenge/opportunity.

- Start with this individual work, so that everyone can gather their thoughts and contribute their perspective to the framing.

② "HOW MIGHT WE" / GROUP

For the next 10 minutes, share the created "how might we" questions in the team. When all are shared, pick two questions that you will use to create ideas in the next phase.

- Note that you can also combine or create new questions as a group, rather than picking two questions exactly in the form they were written.

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

The types of problems that we tackle though ideation co-evolve - however, how we define the problem influences how we can solve it. Having a few different problem statements will help us to create more diverse and creative potential solutions.

On the other hand, no problem definition is assumption-free, and the "how might we" structure makes some of these assumptions easier to see (Why are we doing this, what are we aiming to achieve? Who are we doing this for?).

TIP!

Take a picture of all of the "how might we" questions!

materials:

Framing template

GETTING A FIRST BATCH OF IDEAS

40 min

NEGATIVE IDEATION

20 min

1

FORMULATE NEGATIVE CHALLENGE

For 2 minutes as a group, pick one of the "how-might-we" questions and turn it into a negative version. For example, *"How might we lower the threshold for sharing prototypes with customers so that our product development team can identify potential user experience challenges earlier?"* would turn into *"How might we raise the threshold for sharing prototypes with customers so that our product development team will identify user experience challenges as late as possible?"*

2

GENERATE HORRIBLE IDEAS

For 5 minutes individually, write down horrible ideas so that each idea is on its own post-it. The more the better, and vivid failures help here, too!

3

SHARE

For the next 8 minutes, share your ideas in the group. A few bursts of laughter are very welcome here.

4

FLIP INTO OPPOSITES

For 5 minutes, pick one or two of the worst ideas, and flip them around into their possible extreme opposites. For example, rather than requiring the CEOs approval for every prototype viewing session, you might have a compulsory prototype image of the week at the beginning of every customer meeting. Be specific! Spend a few minutes jotting down ideas on how this extreme idea could be achieved.

- A typical challenge here is that the opposite is left too vague (for example, flipping a crane that kills its operator into a crane that doesn't kill its operator). Go for ideating more specific or vivid opposites (such as a crane that detects and notifies of potential risks for workplace accidents at the construction site).
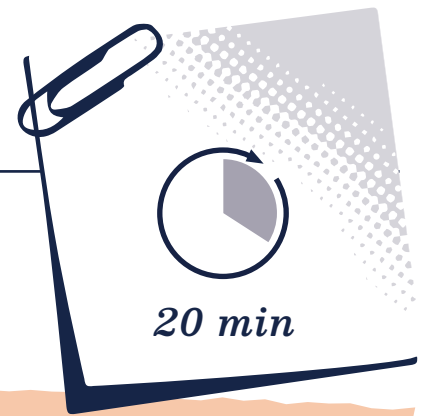
WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

We can be our own worst enemy in ideation, trying to come up with the perfect idea. Starting with negative ideas lowers the threshold for sharing ideas as they are supposed to be bad! In addition, negative ideation can give a bit of a venting opportunity to uncover things that are already covering the challenge in a bad way.

Flipping negative ideas around into their opposites can help in coming up with more extreme or surprising angles to the solution - otherwise, we easily stick to fairly obvious and incremental ideas.

4-3-5 BRAINWRITING

20 min

1 Pick the other how might we question your team created that you haven't yet ideated solutions for.

How might we | X
so that | Y
can | Z ?

2 Distribute the 4-3-5 Brainwriting template for each group member. You will do 4 rounds of 5 minutes, and should aim to create at least 3 ideas each round.

5 min

3 For 5 minutes, individually write down 3 ideas (again each idea on its own post-it) on your template. When time is up, pass the paper on clockwise.

5 min

4 When you receive a new template, read the ideas that are already written on it. In 5 minutes, add at least 3 new ideas to the sheet, either building on the ones that you read or something completely new.

Repeat two more times.

Now you should have a total of at least
12 NEW IDEAS PER GROUP MEMBER.
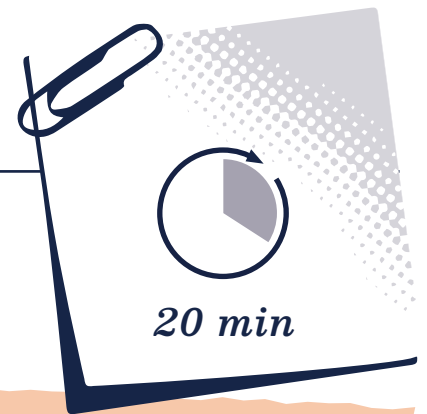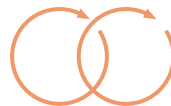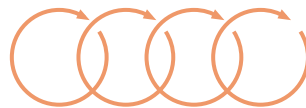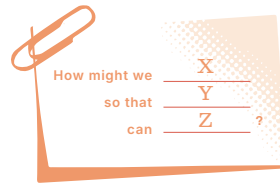
WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

4-3-5 brainwriting is a structured ideation tool, combining some of the benefits of traditional brainstorming (awareness of others ideas and being able to build on other) with the more equal contribution opportunities of structured working and efficiency of individual ideation.

The original name of the method is 6-3-5, coming from 6 people producing 3 ideas each per 5 minutes.

materials:

4-3-5 Brainwriting template
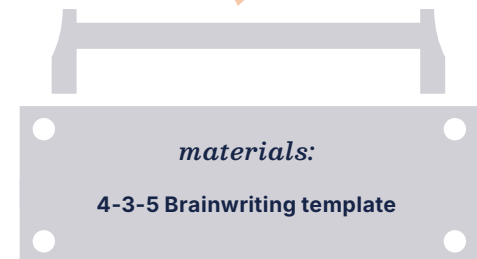
BREAK

This is a good moment to have a short coffee break
to come back refreshed to the final work stages!

5-10 min

TAKING STOCK

25 min

CLUSTERING

15 min

① CLUSTER ALL IDEAS

For 10 minutes, as a group, cluster all of the ideas produced so far into groups based on how similar they are to each other.

You are looking for underlying similarities in the "mechanism" or "logic" of the solutions. Think of names that capture what the ideas have in common - for example, you might have categories related to online solutions, customized tools and service personnel.
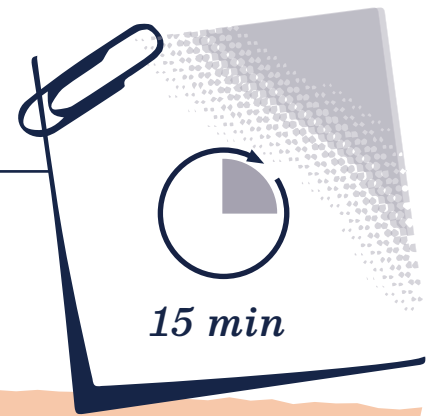
Usually, you're looking for groups with roughly 4-6 ideas in them. If the group is larger, can it be split into meaningful subgroups?

② ADD MORE IDEAS

Then, for 5 minutes, individually see what categories are smaller than the others.

Are there any new ideas you could add there? Or what is left outside of the categories completely? Add a few more ideas into the idea space.

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

Ideation sessions produce raw ideas rather than complete concepts. Recognizing patterns can help you to identify different solutions and directions, then combining them and imagining them to different degrees. This is the time to make sure you're not too stuck within a narrow scope of solutions!

Looking at patterns of underlying commonalities instead of individual ideas can also help to evaluate the promising directions, as at this phase all of the ideas are still unpolished.

materials:

Pens, post-its, and a white board or flip chart paper for placing the post-its on

SELECTING

10 min

1 PLACE VOTES

For 5 minutes, Individually go over the produced ideas and vote for the 3 most interesting ideas. Individually, put a dot on the ideas you would like to continue working with.

2 CHOOSE TOGETHER

Then, for 5 minutes, as a group, pick 2 ideas to document in more detail. Which ideas got the most votes? Can you combine them somehow?

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

Ideation sessions produce a mass of ideas, and it's not worth your time to document and develop every single one of your ideas further. Voting shows which ideas the group is enthusiastic about.

Creative solutions often come down to novel combinations of conceptually distant solution directions, so this phase is not just about evaluation but combinations, too. If your favorite idea doesn't make the cut, don't worry too much - ideating these raw ideas into more developed solution concepts often pulls from the wider pool of ideas generated.
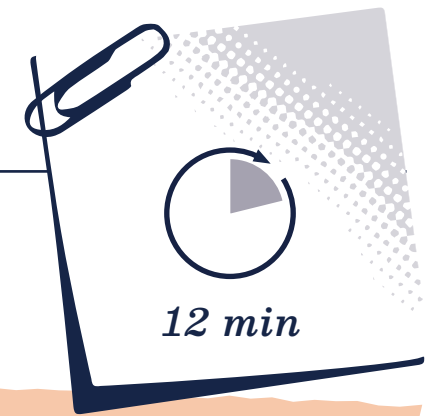
materials:

Pens

CAPTURE

20 min
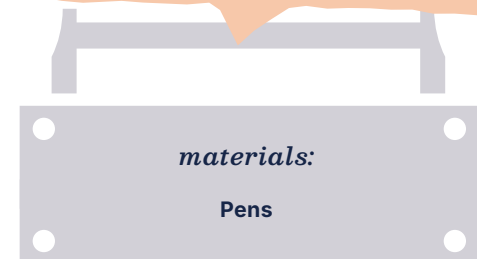
IDEA DEVELOPMENT

12 min

1 SPLIT UP THE GROUP INTO TWO

2 FILL OUT THE TEMPLATE AND RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

?

What's the idea and how could it potentially work in practice (giving a bit more flesh around the bones)?

?

What makes the idea promising or interesting to you?

?

What remains uncertain or what challenges will you likely have to overcome in relation to the idea?

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

A lot of good discussion around ideas often goes uncaptured in ideation sessions. Documenting a few ideas in more detail helps to cultivate the promising ones further and will make it easier to communicate the ideas further after the session.

This is also the first step of developing a raw idea into a solution concept that can then be prototyped and tested!

materials:

Idea Documentation template

WRAP-UP

SHARE YOUR NEXT STEPS WITH THE IDEATION SESSION PARTICIPANTS:

1

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE IDEAS NOW?

**Will you share them with the participants and/or with someone else? How?**

- If you have more than one group in the session and you can reserve more than 2 hrs, it's a good idea to have groups share one-minute pitches of their final 2 ideas immediately with everyone present in the session.

2

HOW WILL YOUR DEVELOPMENT EFFORT PROCEED?

What's the next step in your project? Will the ideation session participants hear from you again later on in the process?

- If you are organizing the session with your project team, you can use this time to decide on these matters!
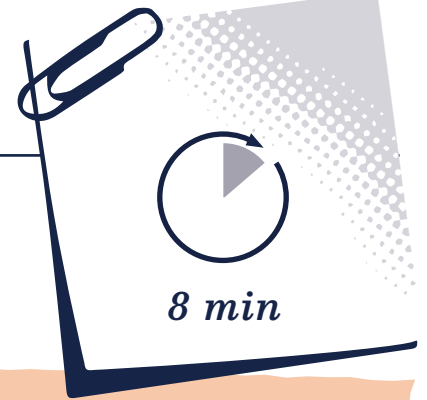
WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

A sense of progress is the best predictor of subsequent development motivation, so you want to make sure everyone knows what their efforts have contributed towards.

Thank the participants for their time and insights!

AFTER THE SESSION

< 1 hr

AFTER THE SESSION

1

IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE SESSION ENDS:

Take photos of produced ideas and templates or save digital files to make sure you can later return to all of the great ideas produced in the session.

For other steps, overviews are enough, but for the two final documented ideas, you might want to add notes on anything else you remember related to them from your group discussions.

2

SOON AFTER THE IDEATION SESSION:

With permission from the participants, summarize the results of the ideation session and share the ideas documented in more detail with at least all of the participants of the ideation session.

Consider also who else might benefit from hearing about these potential solution directions.

Someone in your organization working on similar issues, who could use the inspiration? Communicating progress to project management and leadership? Offering sneak peeks behind the scenes to your customers or collaborators?

Just make sure you have the participants' permission to share anything that might identify them.

3

LATER ON:

Try to follow up with your session participants. What have you already done with the ideas since the session and what are you working on now?

It's always nice to see what comes out of initial efforts, and it will be easier to get people excited about taking part the next time around when you show the progress you've made.

CONTENT:

Tua Björklund   **Floris van der Marel**

GRAPHICS:

Anna Kuukka

BACKGROUND:

Aalto University Design Factory

QUESTIONS?

**Don't hesitate to get in touch with us!
designfactory.aalto.fi**