Continuous Improvement Toolkit

to Support Improvement and Innovation in Higher Education

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Section 1 - Introduction

This toolkit has been developed by Manchester Metropolitan University as part of a small development project funded by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.

The toolkit is designed to provide practical tools for staff who are involved in the facilitation of continuous improvement activities, the facilitation of creativity and innovation or of change in general. This could include managers, project leads or members of implementation teams.

The need for improvement and innovation

The period since 2003 has been marked by rapid and significant changes, not least of which being the creation of a greater ‘customer’ focus in higher education through the introduction of variable fees in 2006, the Browne Review and the introduction of new models of HE funding resulting in increased tuition fees for 2012.

The creation of a ‘free market’ in higher education has created an environment where significant change is inevitable and the capacity for universities to embrace that change has become absolutely critical to their future.

What is ‘continuous improvement’?

There are many different definitions of continuous improvement but in relation to the two small projects undertaken at MMU the following description seemed most relevant:

Continuous improvement is an ongoing effort to improve products, services and processes to provide excellence and added value for the customer. It is important to emphasise that continuous improvement isn’t one particular system or specific way of doing something, it’s a mindset, based on the knowledge that there is always a better way of doing things and therefore a journey that never ends.

Whatever form continuous improvement initiatives and activities take, key features remain the same. Organisations need to focus on continuously meeting customers’ requirements through releasing the potential of all employees and, given the recent changes in Higher Education, the need for continuous improvement in HE is neither a luxury or optional.
There are many different approaches to continuous improvement which can include:

- Undertaking process mapping and improvement
- Benchmarking internally or externally to identify best practice
- Adopting models and frameworks such as Investors in People, Customer Excellence or the EFQM Excellence Model to self assess and drive improvement activities
- Applying creativity and innovation tools
- Using customer and staff surveys
- External and internal audits

It is also important to recognise that continuous improvement activities take place all the time and can range from small incremental improvements introduced by individuals, to large organisational projects around process change test.

The tools and techniques provided within this toolkit lend themselves to more directed or facilitated improvement activities. These are the key ones used within the two projects undertaken at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Many other tools are available.
Divergent and Convergent Thinking

As mentioned above, continuous improvement and innovation goes on all the time and at many levels, but it can also be guided and facilitated through deliberate directed interventions. This usually involves supporting individuals or groups through a process. One model that is often used is that of getting the group to follow alternating cycles of divergent and convergent thinking.

**Divergent thinking**
Expanding the list, purposefully looking for more, looking from a variety of directions

**Convergent thinking**
Reducing the list, looking to condense, summarise or focus

### Divergent and Convergent Cycles

![Diagram of divergent and convergent thinking cycles]

**The 3 Stage Model**

For the two projects at Manchester Metropolitan University, we adopted a 3-stage model that was used within facilitated continuous improvement interventions with groups of staff and managers.

The tools described in the next section support the different stages of thinking and have been grouped under the 3 stages but many of them can be used interchangeably.

1 **Stop before you start** - Used to encourage the fist phase of divergent thinking and ensure the problem or issue is fully explored from a number of different perspectives before converging to reframe and restate the problem/issue.

2 **Idea generation** - Used to encourage the second phase of divergent thinking and to generate as many ideas as possible.

3 **Review, refine and test out** - Used to support a second phase of convergent thinking and select those ideas to be taken forward.
Preparing for Continuous Improvement and Innovation

Before commencing a facilitated or directed improvement activity there are a number of considerations to be made that help with preparation and planning, including:

• Identify a general theme, topic or service area in which you want to improve and innovate.
• Identify a series of statements that describe what you want to achieve in terms of outcomes
• Consider key questions such as:
  > Where are we now? Where are we starting from in terms of current position?
  > How do we want to be seen by customers, staff, stakeholders?
  > Where do we want to be? Developing a motivational description of the future

It is extremely important not to skip this stage and dive straight into improvement and innovation activities as this may result in time and effort being spent working on the wrong problem or area. At this stage information may be considered from a number of sources such as:

• Customer or staff surveys
• Process maps
• Audit / performance reports
• Self assessments such as Investors in People or EFQM (Business Excellence)
• Data gathered from sponsors, stakeholders, project leads and staff

As a facilitator it is extremely important to consider and agree how staff will be involved in identifying and deciding on the area or topic to be improved. Also to agree at the start, with the sponsor, what outcomes they are seeking and what stages will be included.
Section 2 - Tools and Methods

This section of the toolkit includes a number of techniques and tools that have been used at Manchester Metropolitan University to support the drive for continuous improvement and innovation. The tools have been grouped to support the 3 stage model and also to encourage the process of divergent and convergent thinking, but many of them are interchangeable.

Overview of Tools for Stage 1 - Stop before you start

This stage is essential in order to fully understand the issue or problem prior to diving in. It can be part of the preparation stage and acts to ensure the problem or issue is well defined. It can also help a team to step back and to see things differently. There are many ways to do this, but below are some suggestions to help get you started:

**OPV - Other people's view**
This activity helps to describe the issues and opportunities from a range of different viewpoints; it can help to identify key stakeholders and to look at situations from a different perspective.

**Visioning Activity**
What will it look, sound, feel like. This activity helps to explore and define a vision for the future; it encourages input into defining where you are now and where you want to be, by imagination.

**Values Activity**
This helps to establish a team’s or group’s perceived values and can be used to explore values that will encourage and support a culture of continuous improvement and those that may hinder it.

**Process Mapping**
This improvement method / technique can be applied at a range of levels from a major, complex and detailed process mapping project to a quick high level review.

**SWOT / PESTLE**
This well known method is another tool that helps to explore the issues and opportunities from a wide range of angles considering internal and external factors.
OPV - Other People’s View

**OPV - Other People's View** - is one of a collection of three-letter abbreviation tools developed by Edward de Bono.

**Synopsis**

The OPV tool helps us look at other people's viewpoints; it is an exploration tool and helps us to describe the issue, opportunity or theme of interest from a variety of perspectives. How might other people view or describe the situation?

Consider:

- Service users
- Families and friends of service users
- Students
- Staff
- An observer who knows nothing about the process; identify those directly or indirectly involved.

The goals are to generate 5-10 statements of the issue/opportunity, whilst avoiding getting locked into the usual way we look at it. We are seeking to describe things from many different angles, using different language than what is typical. This may stimulate a creative connection later.

**Example... Grand Designs**

- A couple wishing to build a new house:
  - Owner
  - Architect
  - Builder
  - Planning officer
  - Neighbours
  - ????

Now describe their point of view / other thoughts that they might have

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When might I use this tool?

This is a good tool to use very early on in the process. It is simple to use and it immediately stretches people’s thinking outside the norm.

How do I use this tool? It’s simple really:

1. Prepare a list in advance of “other people” that are involved (identify specific people not just views in general)

2. Describe their points of view

The OPV requires stepping into their shoes: consider how that person might describe some of the issues in the service, process, or topic area, and express things in the language of that person - how they would say it.
**OPV Activity**

Briefly describe the problem/issue to be considered

List the other people involved

Describe their point of view
  OPV on person 1

  OPV on person 2

  OPV on person 3

  OPV on person 4

  OPV on person 5
Creating a Vision

**When might I use this tool?**

This is a good tool to use very early on in the process. It is simple to use, can be very powerful and enables participants to describe a picture of the future, for themselves, their team, and their organisation. This activity can help to tease out individuals’ hopes and expectations and can feed into a gap analysis activity in terms of looking at where we are now and where we want to be. It can help to ease or move a group into the next phase of looking at what needs to change or happen to get there.

**How do I use this tool?**

1. **Create a comfortable environment based on a specific date in the future**

Visioning requires stepping into the future; consider your participants and what they may feel comfortable with or respond to. You may wish to ask them to close their eyes and to create a quiet relaxed environment in which people can almost daydream. Consider how you might create an environment that helps to awaken all the senses, perhaps using appropriate background music, room scents/candles etc. You need to help them to imagine they are now at a specific date, time and place in the future before asking some pre-prepared questions to help them generate their vision. For example, it is Monday morning on ..., you have been up early the sun is shining, you have had a brilliant journey/commute to work, in the news this morning you listened to an article on ... Try to really create a sense of the future and the time/environment they are in, do not skip this scene setting stage and ensure you spend enough time really helping the participants to imagine they are in the future.

2. **Prepare a list in advance of questions to lead the activity**

The questions you ask will need to be designed specifically for the situation, but some general ones that can be used as thought starters include:

- What are you doing?
- What are others around you doing?
- What can you see going on?
- Who else is there?
- What can you hear?
- What are other people saying?
- What language are they using?
- Look around you, what can you see? Objects, furniture, equipment.
- What does it look like? What can you see on the walls, floor.
- What are your colleagues doing and saying?
- What are customers saying?
- What is your manager doing or saying?
- How do you feel?
- What do you feel excited or proud about?
- What can you smell? (fresh coffee, flowers, fresh air...)
3. Provide time for individuals to capture and share their vision

Once you have provided time for imagining, you need to enable participants to draw or capture their vision and encourage individuals to spend some time writing it down, drawing it or describing it to another person who captures the information. Alternatively, you can use flip charts with headings such as **Looks Like, Sounds Like, Feels Like** and ask individuals to write on post it notes to capture this feedback. Aim for as much detail as possible!

4. Discuss and share as a group

Reconvene the group and give everyone time to present their picture or describe their vision of the future. Ensure individual outputs are captured first and afterwards discuss the following questions:

- What were the common features identified?
- What were the unique features identified? (celebrate differences and value everyone)
- What picture or vision of the future is starting to emerge?

The next step is to get the group to convert individual thoughts into a shared vision.

There are a number of ways you could approach this depending on time and size of group, possibilities include:

- Splitting into smaller groups to define a shared vision for the future
- Working as a whole group on defining a shared vision for the future
- Setting up a mini project group to take the vision forward
- An individual working up the vision for consultation, circulation and agreement of others at a later date

It is not essential at this point for the group to agree exact wording but to capture the broad characteristics that will enable the shared vision to be used as a tool for planning and review so that it may become reality.

**Remember**

To visualise where you are going is deeper and more sensory than some other activities, so encourage people to share their thoughts in glorious detail, to use all five senses and to have fun/play. Encourage people to be open minded, to shift into a different space and time and to leave their current world behind. Consider your participants, and if you think the group will not respond well to this sort of activity try something else such as rich picture, appreciative inquiry or gap analysis.
Team Values Activity

Values are concepts or beliefs that determine how we live our life. At work they are major influences on how individuals approach work. Values drive our decisions and cause us to summon up energy to preserve what we believe in or what we want to defend. As such they can be principal determinants of behaviour and will impact our views about people, situations or events. When team members share the same work values, the team will have the energy to deliver outstanding performance. Where individual values clash, conflict will occur and teams are unlikely to reach their full potential.

When might I use this?

This is a good activity to use with a team who wish to engage in the process of continuous improvement or undertake specific improvement projects.

The purpose of this activity is to explore the perceived values within a team and especially to identify any values and behaviours within the team that will enable a culture of continuous improvement to flourish. So, if the dominant values identified are around independence, empowerment and equality, this is more likely to support individual and organisational freedom.

On the other hand, if the dominant values and beliefs for the team indicate a strong need for authority, conformity and compliance, this is much more likely to indicate that continuous improvement activity may be stifled because the culture is one of organisational constraint.

How do I use this?

This activity is based on a questionnaire called **Window on Work Values** that has been developed by Dick McGann (2002) to explore and understand how behaviour at work is influenced by values. The **Window on Work Values** model consists of eight core work value types:

- Authority
- Equality
- Compliance
- Empowerment
- Conformity
- Independence
- Collectivism
- Individualism

Each of these core work value types is supported by descriptors.

More information on this can be found at:

http://www.tmsdi.com/profiles/window-on-work-values/

**Activity Preparation** - This activity involves a card sort by the groups. For the Manchester Metropolitan University project, the cards used were part of a package to support the above profile which is the work of Dick McCann. If you wish to use other value descriptors then you will need to prepare a set of cards with value statements.
They can then be used to evoke discussion around values (espoused and actual), for identifying organisational/team values and then identifying actions necessary to turn values into reality. It may also lead to discussion around culture and differences in organisation culture.

You can do the activity as a group activity as follows:

1. Appoint a facilitator for the group (works well with 6-8).
2. Hand them the pack of cards.
3. The group task is to identify the top 8 value statements for their organisation/team.
4. The facilitator’s role is to read out or get the group to review each value statement then place it under one of the four headings (Strongly Agree, Mostly Agree, Strongly disagree, Mostly Disagree). It can help to do this in two stages, firstly by splitting the statements into two piles of cards under the headings of ‘agree’ or ‘disagree’. Secondly, prioritising all those in the ‘agree’ pile under the headings of ‘mostly agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ (there may be some that the group feel are borderline and fall in none of the headings).
5. The aim is to end up with 8 cards under each heading.
6. When the group has identified the 8 under “strongly agree”, turn them over and then look at the core work value on the reverse. Relate it to the model and key words that describe the culture/values.
7. Facilitate a group discussion around the selected values and implications in relation to continuous improvement.

Alternatively, you could devise and issue a questionnaire to explore team/organisational values such as the one below.

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**Organisational Values Survey**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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Values

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<td>Employee development</td>
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<td>Empowerment</td>
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<td>Enjoyment</td>
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<td>Excellence</td>
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## Values

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Process Improvement - Mapping Activity

Overview

This improvement method/technique can be applied at a range of levels from a major, complex and detailed process mapping project to undertaking a quick high level review. The aim of process mapping is to examine each step of an existing process in order to identify where improvements and/or efficiencies can be made for both the organisation and the customer/end user.

When might I use this?

In continuous improvement, process mapping is a valuable technique to identify process problems including: duplication, delays, errors and inefficiencies. The emphasis must focus on ensuring processes deliver high levels of customer satisfaction for the end user. It can also be a useful tool for reviewing current process practice especially if departments and teams are merging and a need exists to establish a consistent approach. Typical process issues often include:

- They have evolved piecemeal over time
- They often involve many handovers between people or departments, resulting in many interfaces where things can go wrong
- Few people, if any, understand the whole process and how it works from start to finish
- Functions or departments may optimise their individual part in the process at the expense of other teams, departments and the bigger picture
- People working in the process often do not fully understand their role or the full impact of their actions and consequences for others
- Process performance is often inadequately owned, measured or reviewed
How do I use this?

The steps and exercises below can be used with a team to undertake a quick high level review and to analyse one of your current processes.

**Step 1 - Process Selection**

The first step is to identify the process that you want to improve. To help you select which process, you may wish to consider a number of questions such as: the impact on customer satisfaction, staff satisfaction and cost savings; whether it will be easy to identify partners; and whether any performance data or measures are available.

**Step 2 - Preparation for Improvement**

The template below can be used to prepare. It is important to be extremely clear and to develop a common understanding around the process to be reviewed, including areas such as: who is the process owner and how any improvements generated will be taken forward or approved. You will need to clearly define the process boundaries e.g. where it starts and stops. You may need to break down a large complex process and look at it in smaller chunks or stages.

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When mapping the process it is extremely important to have a team that fully represents all those involved. All individuals who “touch the process” at any stage including customers, students, people from other departments, managers and staff.
# Preparation for Process Improvement

## PROCESS IMPROVEMENT PROJECT PROPOSAL

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<th>Team Members:</th>
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<th>Facilitator:</th>
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<th>Measurements to be used:</th>
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<td>Measure:</td>
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<td>Current Level:</td>
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<tr>
<th>Target Completion Dates and Milestones:</th>
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<td>Activity:</td>
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<th>Special Resources or Constraints:</th>
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Step 3 - Process Analysis

This step involves getting all those who are involved in the various stages and steps of the process together in order to review and map the process as it currently operates.

- To define all the process steps
- To identify where there are problems within the process
- To discuss, identify, select and agree on the improvements to be made.

This session can be facilitated within a couple of hours, especially if people have been given pre-work to gather information and relevant documents prior to attending. A brief guide for facilitators has been included below.

Facilitators’ Brief

Activity 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Produce Responsibility Process Flowchart</th>
<th>Time available 1½ hours</th>
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<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>• flip chart or roll brown paper</td>
<td>• card</td>
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<tr>
<td>• blu tack</td>
<td>• flip chart and pens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• sellotape</td>
<td>• glue stick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• drawing pins</td>
<td>• post-its</td>
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1. Quick introduction to the theory of process mapping and agree ground rules.
2. Discuss process boundaries and ensure clarity regarding scope of what’s in and what’s out.
3. Brainstorm all the people involved, use job title eg recruiting manager, HR Assistant, applicant.
4. Identify all the steps using a **verb + noun**. This is to ensure that you are capturing actions e.g. for recruitment and selection - "complete application form", “write advert” or “shortlist applicants”. Ask everyone in the team to write each step of the process on separate post-it notes.
5. Once every step of the process is recorded, ask the team to stick the post-it notes in order along the time line on the flipchart. Start to order the steps and discuss the tasks involved in each step.
6. Start to draw up the responsibility and steps sequence flowcharts - placing steps under people and using arrows to indicate the flow of movement.
7. Have a cup of tea.
8. Start to include additional information - stick up documents, volumes, timescales etc for each step.
9. Start to review: “walk and talk” your way through the process, check whether anything has been missed, discuss and include additional information regarding what can go wrong, eg delays and problems.

Improvements and ideas will start to come out at this stage so it may be worth capturing these on a separate flip chart ready for the second activity but equally you do want to map the process and not leap straight in with ideas for improvement until you understand the whole/bigger picture.
**Activity 2**

**Identify Improvements and Suggest Appropriate Measures**  
**Time available**  
45 mins or longer

**Resources**  
• flipchart and pens  
• process flowcharts

1. **Identify potential areas for improvement, question each step considering:**

   (a) **Can it be eliminated?**
   - Is it really necessary?
   - Why is this step done?
     - Who is it for?
     - What does it achieve?
   - What value does it add?

   (b) **Can it be combined?**
   - Combining steps or ideas
   - Is the method clearly defined
   - How is it done?

   (c) **Can the sequence be improved?**
   - What needs to come first?
   - When is it done? Why then?
     - Who does it? Why them?

   (d) **Can it be simplified?**
   - Why is it done that way?
   - What would make it easier?

   Focussing all the time on opportunities for improvement and **what the customer wants.**

2. **List areas for improvement and proposed solutions.**

3. **Discuss and identify appropriate measures.** It will be easy to suggest ideas of what you could measure but the group also need to think of the practicalities of how you would do it.

**Step 4 - Implement Improvements, Continuous Measurement and Review**

Create an action plan to implement your new process, recording timescales and responsibilities.

Establish the following and record it on an action plan:

- **What** you need to do
- **Who** is going to do it
- **Target date** for completion
- **Measures** of success
- **Review method** and date

Remember to consult with key stakeholders including customers and the process owner to ensure approval for any actions.
PESTLE and SWOT

Overview

PESTLE

PESTLE analysis is a strategic analysis tool that helps organisations to explore/anticipate external influences on their organisation or department from several perspectives.

SWOT

SWOT analysis is an analytical tool that can be used to help organisations establish their present situation and evaluate potential options.

When might I use these tools?

PESTLE and SWOT can be used at the start of any continuous improvement activity to review a strategy or position, the direction of the organisation, a marketing proposition, or future business and product development initiatives. They can be used to look outwards and inwards and provide the wider context before selecting and commencing on the improvement journey.

How do I use these?

PESTLE

Consider the following external forces and how they might impact on the organisation:

Political factors

The organisation should consider existing and forthcoming government regulations and legal issues that define both the formal and informal rules under which it must operate such as:

- tax policy (e.g. tax rates and incentives)
- employment laws (e.g. minimum wage, maximum working hours and safety legislation)
- environmental regulations
- trade restrictions and tariffs
- government term and change
- home and international pressure groups

Economic influences

Factors affecting the purchasing power of potential customers and cost of capital that the organisation might have to consider include:

- economic growth
- interest rates
- exchange rates
- unemployment rate and skill level of workforce
- seasonality and weather issues

Sociological trends

Demographic and cultural factors affecting customer needs and the size of potential markets might include:

- population growth
- age distribution
- attitudes towards career, family and health
- lifestyle trends such as leisure interests and work–life balance
- consumer attitudes and opinions

Technological innovations

Organisations may want to consider:

- automation
- technological influences (e.g. email, the Internet)
- rate of technological change
- impact on cost
- associated/dependent technologies
**Legal implications**
Organisations will want to look at the effects any legal and international legislation may have, such as:

- employment law, relating to health, data protection, race, sex, disability, employment rights, employment relations
- consumer law, such as description of goods, sale of goods, and safety of goods
- corporate law, such as company law, and fair trading

**Environmental factors**
As part of its PESTLE analysis, an organisation should assess the impact of local, national and international environmental issues, such as:

- global warming
- pollution
- unsustainable development
- methodologies and processes (farming, nuclear power)
- stakeholder power and influence

**SWOT**

**Strengths**
What things do we do well? (Think about your people, systems, culture and the organisation in general)

- What positive feedback have we had?
- What is our unique competitive advantage?
- What are our core competencies?

**Weaknesses**

- What could be improved? (Again, think about your people, systems, culture and the organisation in general)
- What is done poorly?
- Perhaps others perceive weaknesses that you do not see? Do your competitors perform better?

**Opportunities**
What opportunities do you see which might be exploited?

- Are there any interesting market-based or technological trends, changing government policy or local events you might exploit?

**Threats**

- What obstacles do you face?
- What is the competition doing?

**Review Activity**
Once these questions have been answered, it is important to spend some time analysing the results, looking particularly at the causes and impact of the information generated and what needs to be done as a result.

*A PESTLE or SWOT analysis should end with the linking of this analysis to specific continuous improvement projects or action points to be picked up and followed through.*
Tools for Stage 2 - Ideas Generation

By the end of the first stage “Stop before you Start” you should have enough information to reconsider, reframe and restate the problem or issue to be resolved. You should have worked through the first two cycles of divergent and convergent thinking to have clearly identified an area for continuous improvement.

Stage two is all about generating ideas - lots and lots of ideas - and therefore this relies on people’s ability to be creative, to imagine, to escape from their day to day activities and to come up with ideas and suggestions.

“It is better to have enough ideas for some of them to be wrong, than to be always right by having no ideas at all.”

Edward de Bono

There are many ways to stimulate creativity, the following tools are just a few of the ones used at Manchester Metropolitan University that could help get you started. This stage of idea generation should be fun and help people to escape the confines of their job and to imagine new ways of doing things. In most of the idea generation tools outlined below the example includes a warm up activity which can help to get people started.

CAF - Consider all Factors
The CAF tool helps us to explore all the factors in a situation; its aim is to seek out information especially **what we do not know**. It can be used to explore a situation fully before coming up with ideas.

Brainstorming / brain writing activity
This is probably the most well known tool for generating ideas but it does have limitations if not used well. You can use the basic ground rules and principles of brainstorming but run the activity individually.

T - Thinking
This activity helps to make novel connections by aiming to think like someone else and can therefore generate ideas that may otherwise have been overlooked.

Challenge Assumptions or Breaking the Rules
Often people operate and work within a set of rules and regulations. Sometimes these are actual, written organisational procedures but often they are espoused and have developed through the grapevine over a period of time; yet they may have become widely recognised. If these rules are discussed and challenged, this can provide many new ideas and options.

Flower Activity (random word association)
Words, pictures and objects can all help to associate away from the issue or problem and by moving away from the bonds of current reality this can encourage creativity - letting the imagination run free.
CAF - Consider All Factors

CAF is one of a collection of three-letter abbreviation tools developed by Edward de Bono.

Synopsis

The CAF tool helps us to explore all the factors in a situation. The CAF scan should consider everything that you can think of and its aim is to seek out information including: what should we bring to mind? What must we not leave out? What do we not know?

Example... Buying a new car

A person reads a promotional article in the paper, goes off to the car showroom, buys a new car and drives home happily, they consider the following factors:

- Price
- Number of doors
- Space for others
- Fuel economy
- Colour

What other factors have they left out?

- ..............................................................................................................................................
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When might I use this tool?

This is a good tool to use very early on in the process. It can be used to explore a situation fully before coming up with ideas.

How do I use this tool?

1. Define the situation
2. Prepare a list in advance of the key/relevant factors
3. Write a list of questions for each of the factors
The CAF requires a checklist approach and works best when you have done the preparation indicated above. By doing this, you should end up with a prompting checklist and questions to point you in the right direction.

**The use of manipulative verbs can help to identify factors and questions:**

Osborn (1953) defined a set of verbs to stimulate the imagination during brainstorming. Koberg and Bagnall (1981), Higgins (1994) and von Oeech (1986) have added to this list:

- magnify
- minify
- rearrange
- alter
- adapt
- modify
- substitute
- reverse
- combine
- harden
- multiply
- divide
- subdue
- squeeze
- separate
- transpose
- compare
- rotate
- invert
- soften
- by-pass
- widen
- thicken
- protect
- integrate
- dissect
- eliminate
- repel
- flatten
- symbolize
CAF Activity

**Briefly describe the problem/issue/situation to be considered**

e.g. need to improve customer service

**List the 3-6 main factors and questions to be answered eg:**

- Existing standards/service level agreements
- Current complaints/issues
- Impact/outcomes
- Staff involvement

Identify lists of questions for each key factor e.g. What data do we have on customer satisfaction levels?

**What do we not know?**

**What ideas has this generated**

e.g. need to survey customers to establish what they want
Brainstorming Activity

History

- Invented by Alex Osborne
- Developed in the 1940’s and 1950’s
- Psychologist J.P. Guilford identified 5 key traits in creative behaviour
- Osborn sought to develop a method to bring out these five traits in everyone

What is brainstorming?

A model to support the generation of creative ideas, it follows a series of steps and works best when facilitated:

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<tr>
<td>Ability to generate many ideas in a set time.</td>
<td>To rapidly free associate.</td>
<td>To express uncommon ideas.</td>
<td>The willingness to try without fear of failure.</td>
<td>To see beyond the immediate facts.</td>
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4 Key Rules

- Criticism is ruled out
- Freewheeling is welcome (the wilder, the better)
- Quantity is wanted - no idea is a bad idea
- Combination and improvement are sought - build on good ideas

Rule number one is critical; one of the secrets to successful brainstorming is the ability of group members to defer judgment and to separate out idea generation from idea evaluation!

“A new idea is delicate. It can be killed by a sneer or a yawn; it can be stabbed to death by a quip and worried to death by a frown on the right man’s brow.”

Charles Brower
Limitations of the approach

- Individuals may lack the confidence to share their thoughts and ideas in front of others
- Time pressures without proper preparation may make it difficult to generate ideas
- The group may be influenced by individual members who have higher status
- Members may feel reluctant to share “wild” ideas for fear of criticism or ridicule
- Discussion and judgement starts to take place during idea generation

Key tips for facilitators

1. Spend some time preparing participants
2. Plan specific sessions to work on particular concepts
3. It may be useful to post the four rules of brainstorming so that you can refer to them often as you facilitate the group
4. Aim for quantity - go wild - no editing
5. Ban criticism
6. Stay focussed - no stories or justification of ideas
7. Combine and improve - build on what you’ve got
8. What are the strengths of each idea?
9. How novel or feasible are the ideas?
10. Give clear reasons for your views
11. Keep end goal in sight - to generate a handful of ideas
12. Agree next steps and plan implementation

What is the alternative - Brainwriting?


The main difference in this technique is that ideas are generated silently and in writing by individuals, using a range of techniques. As a first step this can help to overcome some of the limitations described above

Variations include:

Always start with a “quiet” or “silent” round where individuals are given time to independently record their ideas (can use post-its or cards for this). These can then be:

- collated by the group onto a flipchart (optional to number)
- voted on or ranked
- passed around the group and used to stimulate additional ideas
- combined and integrated

Another variation is individuals keep a notebook and they write down one idea per day or teams may have a notice board where individuals write/post ideas. These are then periodically collected, collated, discussed and reviewed.
**T- Thinking**

**What is it?**

This activity helps to make novel connections by aiming to think like someone else and can therefore generate ideas that may otherwise have been overlooked (Yeung, 2010). It is similar to OPV (Other Peoples Views) as described in stage 1 but can be more helpful for encouraging idea generation as the perspectives explored can be completely random and this may generate more “off the wall” ideas that can then be explored.

**Summary of steps:**

- Define the issue/problem
- Randomly select alternative viewpoints (at least 4-6 but no limit), and predict how these individuals would respond to the following questions:
  - What would be important to them here?
  - What aspect of the topic would they focus on?
  - What ideas and approaches might they have?
- Reflect on these and examine the applicability to our current context; would this work in ... ?

**As a warm up activity you could try the following –**

You are creating a new map of Greater Manchester; what would go on it if it was for...

- A police officer
- A tourist
- A student
- A farmer
- Staff at the German Consulate
- A 7 year old boy
- A lifeguard
- Wayne Rooney
- An Eskimo
- A burglar
- A vicar
- The mayor of Manchester
- An archaeologist
- A Meteorologist
- A train driver
- Katie Price (aka Jordan)
- The Queen

**The aim of this activity is to generate ideas around your stated problem**

Follow this by exploring the ideas generated to reflect on them and examine the applicability to your current context; would this work in ...?
Challenge Assumptions or Breaking the Rules

Overview

Often people operate and work within a set of rules and regulations, sometimes these are actual, written organisational regulations and procedures but often they are espoused and have developed through the grapevine, over a period of time. Yet they still may have become widely recognised, so if these rules are discussed and challenged, this can help to provide many new ideas and options for better service delivery.

Therefore, a way to stimulate creative thinking for idea generation is to:

1. Identify the current rules and underlying assumptions. There are a variety of ways to do this:
   - Simply list them through group discussion.
   - Ask what are the unwritten rules and thinking that maintain the status quo?
   - Review a process map and at each step ask, “Why is that step here?” or “What seem to be the underlying assumptions behind what is going on here?”
   - Sit in the workplace and observe behaviour on a daily basis and ask the questions above.
   - Tell stories about the organisation and ask the questions above.

2. Creatively challenge the simple rules. There are several ways to do this:
   - Propose an alternative simple rule.
   - Suggest that the government have passed a law making the rule illegal and ask, “What would we do under those circumstances?” (Example: “It is illegal to enrol students online or by email; now what will we do?”)
   - Ask how someone else might think about a particular simple rule e.g. How might a small business entrepreneur think about this rule? How might they state it or modify it? Now, what ideas does that give us for what will might do?

3. Walk around in the new world and see what new ideas you can generate. Play out the scenario as to what you would do if the assumptions or rules were suddenly altered; capture ideas as you go.

When might this tool be useful?

- When things have been done the same way for quite a while.
- When limiting thoughts and assumptions are inhibiting the development of new ways of working.
- On a topic where there are repetitive structures and processes that everyone knows about (for example, there is always a reception desk or student information point where you have to go first; Why is that? What is the “rule” there?)
Facilitator’s tips

Give several examples of simple rules in daily life and work to assure that participants understand the basic concept.

• Traffic in a city centre: trying to describe the movement of individual vehicles would be enormously complex but we all know that what is really going on is that individual drivers are following a few simple rules regarding which side of the road we drive on, what to do when you approach a roundabout, and so on.
• Consider also giving the group you are working with an example that you think is a simple rule for their topic or system.

Warm Up Activity

• A quick and simple activity is to write the letters T E M P H on a flip chart or white board.
• Then ask participants to consider - which of these letters do you perceive to be the odd one out?
• Ask individuals to then share with an explanation of their choice.
• Typical answers may include E because it is a vowel or H because TEMP is a word.
• Use the exercise to discuss how we all make assumptions or design our own simple rules.

“Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing, taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes, and having fun.”

Mary Lou Cook

Note some rules are, in fact, formal rules in the sense of laws or regulations. But even these might be challenged to see if there are some creative things that one can do within the limits of the rule.

Not all simple rules need to be changed in the end. But it doesn’t hurt to think about them a bit.
Flower/Word Association

Overview

The language and images we use to talk about a topic can simply reinforce our usual way of thinking, resulting in the generation of ideas that are not very different from what we already have.

A randomly introduced word, picture or object activates thoughts that we do not usually associate with the topic and, thus, gives the possibility of a novel connection. The goal of this activity is to associate away from the core of the question or issue and then to generate new thoughts and ideas based on the associations.

When might this tool be useful?

It is a general purpose tool that can be used on any topic or at any time, either individually or as a group. It is very easy to use, can be a fun activity and may generate some wild ideas and scenarios. Some individuals/groups may find it difficult to come up with ideas once they have associated away.

Summary of Steps

- Prepare a large piece of paper with a flower drawn on it with lots and lots of petals and a kernel (centre). Fill the whole paper and ensure the petals are large enough to write in.
- Write the most important word from the challenge/topic/issue in the centre of the flower.
- Start to play word association and associate away from the original word in the centre. You can do this in a group by going around and asking everyone to simply call out the first word that comes into their thoughts, following the preceding word.
- Keep going until every petal on the flower has something written in it.
- Choose one word/association from the page that has no link whatsoever to the initial topic.
- Ask the group to generate ideas linked to that new word, they can shout them out or write them down.

Facilitator’s tips

The best words to use are nouns.

If you do not want to use the flower activity to associate away from the topic simply use a book or magazine and let it fall open to a page then pick the first noun or picture that you see. Discuss what is in the picture and talk about what it makes you think.
Tools for Stage 3 - Review, Refine and Test

By the end of the second stage “Idea Generation” you should have exhausted everyone and created a long list of amazing ideas to consider.

You cannot implement everything that comes out of your idea generation sessions. This stage is about beginning to narrow down the list in order to identify those that deserve a bit more thinking, and perhaps testing out. It is important for teams to understand that the hundreds of ideas generated in order to get to the few that are implemented is not a failure of the creative process.

It is not enough simply to have creative ideas: ideas alone do not really change anything. Improvement only occurs when ideas are put into action. This is the hardest stage!

**Decision Matrix**

By selecting criteria and plotting ideas onto a matrix you can quickly sort a long list of ideas into those which you may wish to take forward.

**Dot voting**

A simple method that uses group consensus to select those ideas to be implemented.

**Plus, Minus, Interesting (PMI)**

PMI is one of a collection of three-letter abbreviation tools developed by Edward de Bono. The PMI tool helps us to consider all sides of a matter before a decision or commitment is made and it is an important evaluation tool.

**Action Planning**

Questions and templates to help turn ideas into action.

Once again there are many ways to approach stage 3 and these ideas are simply a few suggestions that could help get you started. There are many others which you may prefer to use or to research before you begin.
Decision Matrix

By selecting criteria and plotting ideas onto a matrix you can quickly sort a long list of ideas into those which you may wish to take forward.

**When might this tool be useful?**

When you have many ideas to choose from and want a simple way to compare them. You can quickly see the ideas that give you the greatest returns on your efforts; and adopt the most appropriate.

**Summary of Key Steps:**

The principle behind using the tool is that you score each idea you have generated according to two criteria - in this example we have selected the **impact** the activity will have and the **effort** involved.

1. Determine a definition that the group can agree on for both impact and effort e.g. major/minor improvement or easy/difficult to achieve
2. Plot every idea on to the matrix, ensuring there is group consensus on this
3. Use the definitions below to discuss and agree on those to be taken forward
4. Establish leads or owners for each idea, individuals or groups who will responsible for implementation

![Figure 1: Action Priority Matrix](image)
Quick Wins (High Impact, Low Effort): These are the most attractive projects, giving you a good return for relatively little effort. Focus on these as much as you can.

Major Projects (High Impact, High Effort): While these give good returns, they take a long time to complete - meaning that one "Major Project" can crowd out many "Quick Wins". If you’re engaging in these, make sure that you complete them quickly and efficiently and that you disengage your effort as soon as you can.

Fill Ins (Low Impact, Low Effort): Don’t worry too much about doing these – if you’ve got spare time, do them, but drop them if something better comes along.

Thankless Tasks (Low Impact, High Effort): Avoid these, not only do they give low returns, they crowd out time which would be better used elsewhere.

Harvesting Matrix

Alternatively: Author Simon Majaro has developed a nine cell screening matrix that can be helpful. Ideas are placed on the grid based on subjective ratings for “attractiveness” and “compatibility”. Ideas that fall in the shaded cells are the best ones to move forward for further development.

• Attractiveness refers to the idea’s impact on the external and internal customers, or the public at large. Will people like it? You can define this term more explicitly for your effort. For example, you might want to put the emphasis on a high score on the depth of innovation scale, on something that will really be noticed and appreciated as innovative by service users, or whatever is appropriate for your situation.

• Compatibility refers to your assessment of your ability to implement the idea. In other words, can you do it? You will want to stress that you ought to be stretching your thinking about what you can do; implementing creative ideas will be hard, but you ought to stretch yourselves to do it. At the same time, you do need to be realistic and note that an idea that will require several million pounds and fundamental breakthroughs in technology might not be something that you can tackle at this time, no matter how creative the idea.

Facilitator’s Tips

It is important to achieve consensus on which ideas fall into the desirable cells, so allow plenty of time for discussion of minority opinions. Involving everyone in the decision making process is critical in terms of generating ownership to ensure engagement when it comes to the next step of implementing the ideas.

If anyone feels strongly that an idea does not belong in the desirable cell, you must think carefully before proceeding with it.
Dot Voting

Overview

Group members simply vote for some pre-determined number of ideas from the list, that they feel best meet the criteria to be refined and tested out.

When might I use this?

If using a decision matrix seems too cumbersome or formal, Dot Voting is a quick alternative. It creates energy as participants have to get up and move around and it enables every individual to vote for the ideas that they feel are worthy of further consideration or implementation. It is easy to see those ideas which are popular at a glance.

How to use it?

1. Ensure all ideas are recorded and visible (use flip charts and post its)
2. Ensure everyone in the group understands them all
3. Consider clustering and combining similar ideas
4. Discuss and agree broad criteria for selection and rough number of ideas wanted
5. Give participants a set number of ‘votes’ (eg sticky dots, ticks)
6. Individuals then vote for ideas based on the criteria
7. Identify the most popular ideas (preferably ones that received votes from over 50% of the group)

Note - another round of voting may be needed but only considering those ideas which received a certain number of votes, until there is clear consensus on ideas to be taken forward.

Assign each person a different colour dot

This means that you can see who has voted for what, which may be important if you have a group that includes representatives from different areas or managers and staff. This allows you to discuss why certain ideas have been prioritised.

Give everyone fewer votes, but anticipate several rounds of voting as you eliminate items each round that got no or few votes

This takes longer, but can build better consensus. The list to choose from gets smaller and the chances that everyone can see at least one of the ideas that they voted for make it through increases.

Allow a person to give an idea multiple votes

This allows people to express strong preferences, but has the downside that you may end up with an item that got lots of votes, but only because 1-2 people gave it all of their votes. If you combine this with the idea of assigning each person a different colour vote, you will be able to detect this easily and can then discuss it.

There are many different ways to facilitate a dot voting activity, some alternative approaches include:
PMI - Plus, Minus, Interesting

PMI is one of a collection of three-letter abbreviation tools developed by Edward de Bono.

Overview

The PMI tool helps us to consider all sides of a matter before a decision or commitment is made. It is an important evaluation tool. Key points include:

- When doing a PMI set out to first explore all the **plus** statements until you have exhausted your search
- Then explore the **minuses** until exhausted
- Finally set out to explore in the **interesting** direction

(It does not work well to do a general list and then start putting them under the 3 headings).

The goals are to generate as many statements as possible, remembering that two people may see the same statement differently. This may stimulate a creative connection later.

Example... Employees choosing which 5 days of the week to work

<table>
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<tr>
<th>INTERESTING</th>
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</table>
When might I use this tool?

This is a good tool to use when you are choosing between alternative ideas. It is simple to use and it immediately encourages assessment and evaluation.

How to look for the interesting points

This part is important as it helps consider matters that may be neither positive or negative but that are worth noting and commenting on. It can be helpful to start with using phrases such as:

“What is interesting about this is……………….”

“It would be interesting to see……………….”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Briefly describe the idea/suggestion to be considered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Plus                                                 |
|                                                     |

| Minus                                                |
|                                                     |

| Interesting                                         |
|                                                     |
Action Planning

Overview

This section includes more general information to support the most difficult stage of the idea generation process, which is getting commitment to next steps and ensuring that plans are made that will enable ideas to be taken forward.

Often this is at the end of the day/session, people are tired, energy levels may be low and it is easy to underestimate and not allow enough time for this vital activity.

Experience, knowledge and skills around action planning, implementing change and project management are all helpful at this stage. It is impossible to try and go into depth for any of these substantial topics so in this section you will find some simple checklists that will prompt thinking and enable the basic planning process to begin.

When to use

At the end of a session, when you have decided on some ideas that are to be taken forward to the next stage of development, piloting or full implementation.

At a follow up session, if you choose to separate idea generation and action planning into two stages. This could be with the whole group or champions who have agreed to take forward specific ideas.

How to use

Prior to commencement of any facilitated sessions or workshops, you should have predetermined with the event sponsor exactly what outcomes they want to achieve by the end of the session. Therefore you should be clear about what stage you need to reach with the group/team.

1. Agree some format, like the one below, for capturing action items.

Action Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Name:</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action, Task or Milestone</td>
<td>Person(s) Responsible</td>
<td>Completed by when</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


2. Ask for a volunteer from the group to take responsibility for recording actions

3. Consider allocating ideas to smaller mini project teams or pairs to identify actions

4. Use the questions below as a handout to provide guidance for action planning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Can we improve on the initial idea to better suit our needs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Can we do anything to get more benefits from the idea? (Any enhancements?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>What are the pluses and minuses for this idea?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>What can we do to develop the pluses and limit the minuses?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>What resources will be needed to implement this idea?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Are there any other weaknesses in relation to this idea?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>What are the risks associated with this idea? What could go wrong? How can we overcome or limit these?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>What impact will it have on others? Consequences/knock on effect of the idea?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Who else do we need to influence or get on board?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Who might like to pilot this idea or try it out on a smaller scale?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These questions are generic and are intended to make you think about key issues that are often overlooked in developing ideas, action planning or implementing change. Consider them as a quick guide and be aware that the list is not comprehensive and not all the questions may be relevant. You may wish to develop your own checklist.

**Business Case**

An alternative activity can be to draft a business case to present to key stakeholders. This could include the following:

- **A headline:** aim to capture the idea in an intriguing way.
- **The idea:** stated in concise, attractive language (just a sentence or two).
- **This allows us to...** capture how this idea supports and enhances other key priorities that the decision makers are familiar with.
- **Why we like this idea...** list the key benefits; try to pre-empt any objections.
- **How we might trial it...** describe how the idea can be piloted on a small scale with willing participants.

**Tips for facilitators**

*Do not forget to review and refine ideas.* Many creative ideas fall at the first hurdle in the rush to try them out before they have been thought through.

*Encourage critical thinking at this stage.* Seek out the Belbin Monitor Evaluator role in individuals, as early challenge is important in developing the idea and getting it fit for action.
Engage lots of people in this thinking process. The team does not have to figure it all out alone. For example, if you are not sure who will object and for what reasons, conduct a quick survey or focus group rather than guessing. Test your ideas by simply telling others what you are thinking about doing and asking what they think. In the end, it would be great if, when you are finally ready to pilot the idea, everyone is saying “Well, it is about time! We have been talking about this enough, let’s give it a go!” rather than “You want to do what?”

**Implementing Ideas Checklist**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Who needs to be involved in planning and doing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Who will be responsible and for what?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Who are they accountable to?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>How will decisions be made? By whom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Who will be consulted? Who else do we need to engage? How will we secure commitment and buy in?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tips for facilitators**

The above questions link closely to aspects of change management. Encourage the group to start with any one of the questions, to identify their own and work with what seems to make sense.

Consider using other project management tools at this stage such as stakeholder analysis, force field analysis, cost/benefit analysis and communication plans.

You might need to do this over several sessions as you might find that you don't have the time or the right people in the team and may need to add members.

**Do not forget to talk about monitoring and review!**

It is important to discuss with the sponsor how the initial energy, motivation and drive will be maintained in the workplace. It is helpful to facilitate a discussion with the group on the following:

- How progress will be monitored and reported?
- What are realistic timescales and periods for reviewing progress?
- What support they would like or need, from whom and when?
- What would help and hinder individuals and groups to progress actions?
- What resources they need?
- What would motivate them to keep on track?
- How energy for implementing the idea will be maintained?

The template below can be a useful tool.
### Reporting on Progress

**Group**

**Name of improvement initiative/mini project**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Progress to date</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific activities completed</td>
<td>Results achieved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities Remaining</th>
<th>By whom?</th>
<th>By when?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What still needs to be done</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anything that is stopping you making progress (Blockages, barriers)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What can we do to help?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How are you feeling now?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any ups and downs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Any other comments or questions</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Section 3 - in Summary

10 Final Tips for Facilitators of Creativity and Innovation

1. Quick warm up activities and examples are a good way to engage participants in having a go with each tool, before applying it to their issue or scenario. Keep these brief and fun.

2. Use the basic ground rules of brainstorming: every idea is a good one and no judgment or criticism allowed. Seek a volunteer to police this rule.

3. You might also want to refer to De Bono’s Six Thinking Hats® and use these to maintain a positive atmosphere (Yellow Hat) in the group.

4. Be patient and expect that it may take a while for a group to get rolling with a particular tool. Resist the urge to step in too soon or to direct.

5. Capture every idea, appoint a scribe.

6. Keep the pace lively. Seek to switch to another tool or provocation before the energy runs out of the one that you are on.

7. Environment is important. Try to find a venue that takes people away from their usual place and way of working. Remove tables, use comfy chairs around a flip chart. Lots of usable wall space to keep the group’s ideas visible is helpful.

8. Observe groups constantly, mix and match individuals so that the energy stays high.

9. Thinking creatively is hard work and people will get tired if you go on too long. Intersperse activities with frequent breaks or inputs.

10. Always build in time for review, refinement and action planning - it is extremely frustrating for people if things stop at the idea generation stage. After an event, people return to the world of work, energy and motivation can be lost and often the ideas disappear into a “black hole”.
Summary - MMU Project Critical Success Factors

The following critical success factors were identified following a small development project which was undertaken at Manchester Metropolitan University and funded by LFHE. The project was called “Continuous Improvement – A top down/bottom up approach?” and involved two teams taking part in facilitated improvement interventions. Evaluation of these two case studies identified a number of critical success factors, primarily that successful continuous improvement involves inputs from both the “top” and “bottom”. These success factors are:

1. Management Commitment

For a bottom up approach to be successful there is a clear need for strong leadership and a definite role for senior managers and managers to play. Their key role is to provide drive and focus to improvement activities by:

- Dedicating space and time for specific improvement activities to take place within the team. This could be one off events and workshops or by allocating time slots within existing activities such as team meetings or 1:1s to focus on idea generation and improvement activities.
- Considering all suggestions thoroughly and providing timely feedback on those to be taken forward and those that can’t, with a clear explanation of why not.
- Establishing and communicating improvement priorities and objectives.
- Allocating improvement objectives to groups or individuals.
- Allocating any resource necessary for improvement ideas to be implemented, especially time.
- Ensuring clear processes are agreed for reporting on progress, monitoring implementation and reviewing impact.
- Providing overall project management.

2. Facilitation Skills

In order for staff to feel that they are able to openly talk about concerns, problems and improvement suggestions, there needs to be a culture of openness and trust. Both managers and staff involved in the two projects at Manchester Metropolitan University reported that it was extremely beneficial having an external facilitator who was not a member of the team. The facilitator’s role included:

- creating a space and environment in which staff feel able to contribute
- ensuring all suggestions and ideas raised are captured and considered
- maintaining equal status within conversations and group discussions
- ensuring active listening
- providing processes and interventions to help members identify and achieve their goals and make quality decisions
Many managers have excellent facilitation skills which they could use to support other teams across the organisation. In committing to embedding a culture of continuous improvement into the DNA of the organisation, it might be helpful to establish a resource of trained facilitators and provide them with a toolkit of creativity, innovation and improvement materials.

3. Involvement

There is evidence from the two case studies to suggest that early involvement prior to the implementation stage increases staff commitment and decreases staff concern about imposed change/improvements.

Further, by working as one team including senior managers, managers and staff, a key benefit of early involvement was the sharing of knowledge and experience that enhanced understanding, enabled informed discussions and increased team learning.

Feedback emphasised the need for involvement to extend beyond any initial involvement (event) and stressed the need for an agreed plan regarding how involvement would be maintained, including clear information about:

- Who will be involved in decision making and how?
- Who will be involved in implementation?
- How everyone involved will be kept informed and updated

4. Communication

Evaluation of the two case studies revealed that whilst those who had been closely involved in implementing improvement ideas and actions had a clear awareness of progress made, those who had not been directly involved were unable to give details of outcomes or improvements.

This highlights a clear need for:

- clearly communicating those improvement ideas which are a priority and how they are to be taken forward alongside any that are not to be taken forward and why
- providing regular progress updates for all staff involved
- planning activities to celebrate successful outcomes
- developing a communication plan alongside any project/implementation plan

Maintaining communication with all those involved is critical. Otherwise, staff may perceive their involvement or the project to be a waste of time and effort. Without feedback, staff will believe that nothing has changed or that senior managers do not listen or act on suggestions raised by staff, which leads to a culture where innovation and continuous improvement is stifled.
References and Recommended Reading

Advanced Practical Thinking Training (1997) 
*Edwards do Bono’s Direct Attention Thinking Tools*, USA: The McQuaig Group.


