

3 Ways to Generate Ideas



Lacking Imagination? These Techniques Will Help You Generate New, Original Ideas

These methods are part of the innovator toolkit used at Forward Partners. For more tools and guidance, visit www.forward-partners.com.

When we have an idea, we tend to stick to it, but it's unlikely that this idea is the best solution for the given context. To find a better solution, you must explore different options from your idea and later select the most promising one.

Before searching for new ideas or solutions, you should have a good understanding of the problem you're hoping to solve with your idea. This will guide you in imagining new solutions and ideas.

Generating and selecting ideas is two-step process

1 Idea Generation

Come up with as many ideas as possible using techniques that encourage exploring new concepts, without taking any limitations into account.

Explore new possibilities

Create choices and open options

Playful mindset. Child brain.

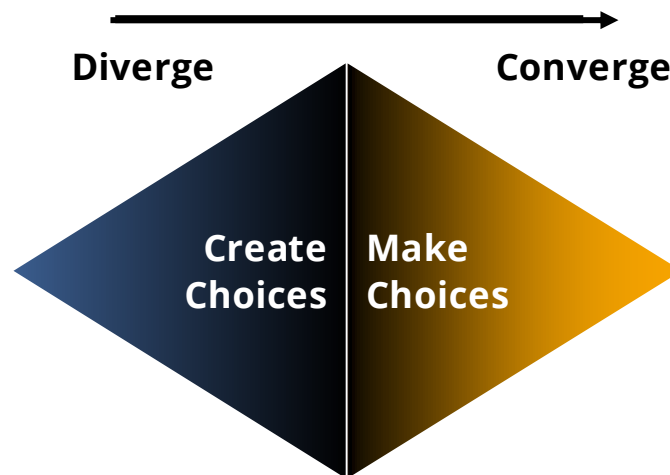
2 Idea Selection

Once you've generated various ideas, establish criteria that will help you select the best one based on your understanding of the current situation.

Decide what to pursue

You make choices and close options

Rational mindset. Adult brain.



Divergent and convergent thinking are distinct steps in the process of generating ideas. They are commonly referred to as the "diamond" in the design thinking toolkit.

Generating ideas can take anywhere from one hour to a few hours. It is a fun, enjoyable, and rewarding activity.

Next, we will explore the process of generating ideas.

Generating ideas

Generating ideas comes naturally to some people, while others may find it challenging. Luckily, there are a few tools and principles that can assist you. Below are some principles that will aid you in generating good ideas.

Don't judge your ideas

Allow yourself to let your mind wander and explore silly ideas. Actually try to intentionally generate silly ideas, because they can lead you to other ideas that are completely different and maybe even quite innovative. It helps to voluntarily adopt a playful mindset and environment. Don't worry, you can eliminate bad ideas later in the process.

Play with constraints

Constraints spark creativity. Some of the techniques below leverage that principle. For example, if you are asked "how can you build a house?", you may propose a few solutions. But if you add the constraint of building the house in one day, you will be forced to get creative and find new ways to accomplish the task.

Use more than one brain

Working with one or more partners can generate more ideas. It's important to find someone who thinks differently than you do, as diversity of thought is key. Collaborating with others can lead to solutions that you would never have thought of on your own. Build on each other's ideas. For each idea proposed, suggest a new idea, whether similar or different.

Capture everything

Take note of all proposed ideas, even the bad ones. Use post-it notes to display them on a wall where everyone can see. Illustrate them with drawings to make them clearer for everyone to understand. By capturing all ideas during the generation phase, you will have a variety of options to choose from during the selection phase, instead of being limited to only what you can remember.

Let's now explore three techniques for generating ideas

01 What if ...

02 Bad Ideas

03 SCAMPER



This set of trigger questions provides new angles to explore and generate ideas. By reframing constraints as opportunities, this list of questions helps you come up with creative options.

So, what if...



What if you had an unlimited budget for your solution?



What if your solution had to be physically impossible?



What if your solution operated without tech and electricity?



What if your solution made the problem worse?



What if your solution had to be completely autonomous ?



What if your solution had Artificial Intelligence?



What if people had a chip in their brain?



What if your solution was illegal?



What if everyone was on drugs?



What if you had no budget?



What if you could control people?



What if your solution has to be deployed next month?



What if your solution has to be ready tomorrow?



What if teleportation existed?



What if your solution could be used by a 4 year old?



What if your solution was built in the 80s?



What if your solution copied the Uber model? (or Apple model)



at if your solution was designed by users?



What if you removed intermediaries completely?



What if you had to outsource everything?



What if no staff was required?



What if Google had a solution?



What would Einstein do?



What would Elon Musk do?



What would a Monk do?



What would Superman do? (try this question with other superheroes too)

You can create your own "What if..." question and add it to the list.

To discover new possibilities, try reverse thinking. Take a different perspective and explore a new approach to the question. Here's how you can do it.

Instead of trying to solve a problem, imagine that you want to make it worse. Generate ideas that would exacerbate the issue. Aim for at least 10 bad ideas, and then a few more.

Now, turn each bad idea into a good solution that matches the initial question.

Let's take an example.

1 Start with a question

How can we attract more customers to our shop?

2 Reverse the question

How can we discourage customers from coming to our shop?

How can we make our shop less appealing to customers?

3 Solve the reversed question

Only open the shop late at night

Keep the entrance very dirty

Don't display the products that are sold

4 Reverse from bad to good ideas

Extend opening hours early mornings

Make the entrance clean and inviting

Have products nicely displayed for the customer to see



This creativity method aims to generate multiple new ideas from an initial concept or idea. It provides a structured approach to thinking outside the box by using a checklist of changes that can be made to an existing idea to generate new versions of it.

To use this method, start with your initial idea and apply the SCAMPER questions to create evolutions of that idea. Let's take a closer look at each of these questions.

S**SUBSTITUTE**

replace an element with another

*What can I substitute to improve this?
Can I replace a component with something else? Are there alternative materials I can use?*

C**COMBINE**

merge with other concepts

Combine different elements to create something new? Merge two ideas to make a more innovative solution?

A**ADAPT**

change the context

How can I adapt this idea to a different context or situation? Can I modify this concept to better suit a specific audience?

M**MODIFY**

make alterations or redesign

Change the color, size, shape, or other attributes? Adjust the timing, sequence, or process to enhance it? Tweak the elements?

P**PUT TO ANOTHER USE**

same idea, different function

Other applications or markets for this idea? Repurpose this concept for a different need? Can this idea serve a different function?

E**ELIMINATE**

streamline, simplify

What to remove to simplify the concept? Unnecessary steps, components, or features? Streamline the idea while maintaining value?

R**REVERSE (or REARRANGE)**

backwards, upside down

Flip the order or sequence of steps? What if I approach the problem from a different angle? Can I invert the process?

Selecting ideas

Once you've generated a lot of new and innovative ideas, it's time to assess and choose a few to concentrate on. This can be a challenging task that involves making decisions, compromises, and finding common ground among different perspectives. Fortunately, there are a few techniques that can help.

1 Dot Voting

Use collective intelligence and your team's intuition


2 Ranking

Establish criteria for evaluating your ideas


3 Matrix

Classify ideas in relation to each other on a 2x2 matrix


1 Dot Voting

1. Begin by laying out all the ideas being considered.
2. Distribute 5 stickers to each member of the team as voting markers.
3. Each participant votes (by adding 1 or multiple stickers) on their favorite ideas.
4. The idea with the most stickers is selected as the winner 

2 Ranking

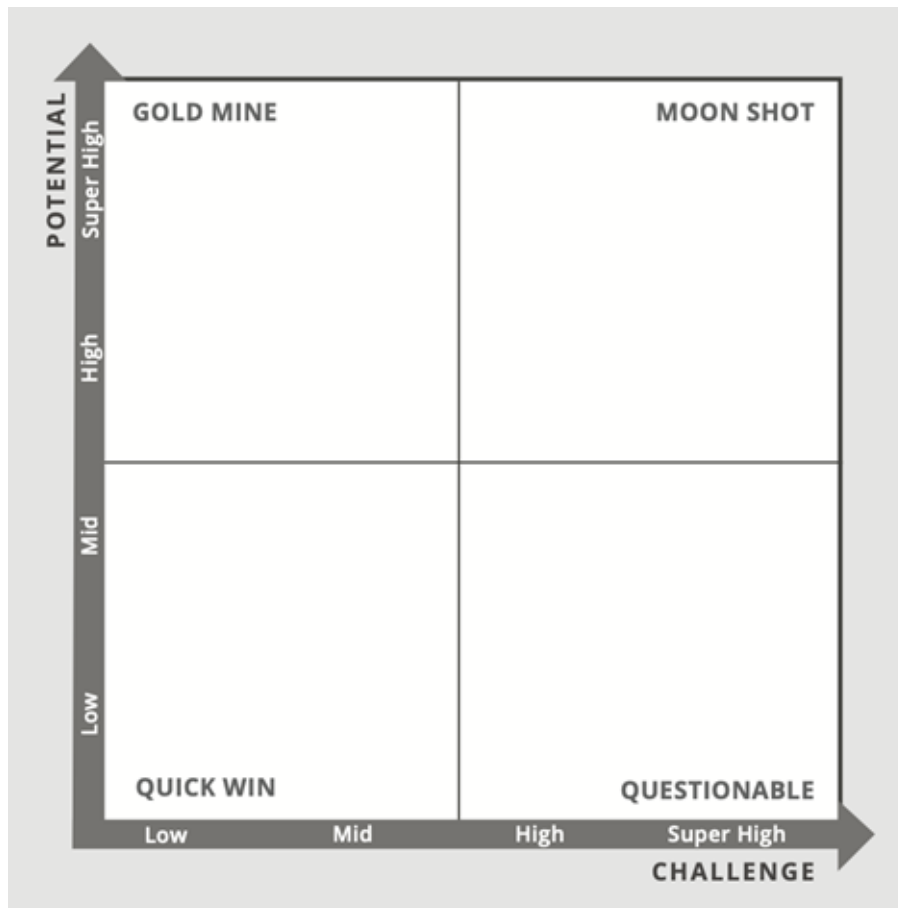
1. Define 3-5 criteria to evaluate your ideas, such as desirability, feasibility, time to market, viability, and revenue potential.
2. Evaluate each idea based on these criteria on a 0-5 scale, where 5 is a highest and 0 is the lowest score.
3. As a team, discuss the scores for each idea.
4. To determine which idea is the best, add up the scores for each idea. 

Example:

Criteria	Desirability	Alignment	Effort	Total Score
Idea 1	5	2	2	9
Idea 2	3	5	4	12 

3 Matrix

1. Create a 2x2 matrix by selecting two axes. For example, you can choose idea potential and idea complexity, or you can pick your own criteria.
2. Discuss with your team where to place each idea on the matrix.
3. Decide which quadrant to focus on and select an idea from that quadrant.



Example of 2x2 matrix from the Where to Play framework.

Download more innovation tools like this one at www.forward-partners.com