

Creative Techniques to Encourage Expanded Thinking

1. The F.I.S.H.

This is a great activity to implement in a team that quickly dismisses ideas as they come up. Give participants multi coloured paper and a marker. Take turns giving common negative statements that put people or ideas down in a team discussion.

Have different people write down these statements as the team comes up with them, and put up these statements in the room where you normally conduct work.

In the same activity, introduce a plastic fish. Inform the group that this fish eats Fatally Inappropriate Slimy Hits (abbreviation: F.I.S.H.) that destroys all ideas in their infancy. When you want to fish for new ideas, explain that the fish will be passed to anyone who attacks new ideas before they get a hearing.

Here are a few common ego-bashing statements:

"It will cost an arm and a leg." "That's impossible."

"That's very boring." "We do not have a budget for it."

"You must be out of your mind!" "We can't do that."

"It sounds ridiculous." "We tried that before and it did not work."

2. Mind Mapping.

Mind mapping is a way to quickly record what you know so that you can make connections between two seemingly unrelated ideas and identify any gaps. Start with a question or problem that is challenging you. Put the problem or question in the middle of a blank page, using

a symbol to represent the issue. Radiating out in all directions, put down brief thoughts about the topic, with pictures. This works well for a team just as it does for individual problem-solving: If you want to use it as a team activity, have individuals undertake the process alone first. It is a way to get people to use their right brain, and provides a “method” for people to see in a creative way all of what they know about a problem or subject.

3. Spill the Beans.

This activity provides a relaxed way to get people to speak out their hidden agendas or difficulties on the table that might be holding them back from making progress on a team project. Give each person a small can of baked beans, or bring in a used and washed bean can that you have filled with dried beans. Ask the group for a volunteer to “spill the beans” about some part of the project that is not going well. Go around the room, and motivate each person to follow suit. Issues that are brought up can be discussed one-by-one. (This process works best if it is handled by an impartial facilitator.)

4. Idea Writing 8-4-4.

This activity works well in groups of eight or fewer. Write a topic or problem at the top of a piece of paper, in question format. The same question is given to each participant. Allow three minutes for each participant to write three ideas across the top, creating three columns. When the time is up, the papers are passed to the person on the right. Each individual silently reads the idea in each column contributed by the person(s) before and adds more ideas in the appropriate columns, making a new row. The ideas can be an expansion of a previous idea, a variation of a previous idea, or something entirely new. When the papers have made it around the whole group, it is time to review the ideas and get rid of any duplicates. Individuals are then asked to read out interesting ideas from the paper in front of them and place them before the group. The group can then come to consensus on which ideas they should or would like to pursue further.