Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a technique for stimulating the speedy generation of a large number of ideas on a topic. The features of an effective brainstorming session are:

- The topic should be unambiguous, concise, and clearly stated.

- The ground rules for the session (see points below) should be agreed.

- The topic should be on display throughout the session.

- Group members have a few minutes to think individually about the topic.

- A facilitator to stimulate discussion and keep the energy at a high level.

- A means to capture the ideas generated so they can be seen by the group (Usually a flip chart, but networked computers can also be used effectively).

- Setting a time limit for the session increases the pressure, and can always be extended if ideas are still forthcoming.

- No initial evaluation of discussion of the ideas raised. Judgement must be suspended. This ensures that the pace is kept up, and that the more 'off the wall ideas' are not held back for fear of ridicule

- The facilitator in particular must not pass comment on ideas, even by body language, ie hesitating to write an idea down. They can briefly clarify however *to* ensure ideas are recorded correctly and understood.

- Call a halt when the session slows down rather than prolong it into low energy.

  Having produced the ideas, the next stage is to evaluate them and carry out a **List Reduction** for eventual implementation. In doing this be careful not to dismiss ideas as ' impractical'.

Some techniques for moving from brainstorm to action are:

- Elimination of ideas (but see point above)

- Prioritizing and ranking ideas

- Forced ranking into categories, ie urgent/non-urgent etc.

- Expansion - asking for more details on ideas

- Grouping and/or combining of similar ideas

- Looking at barriers and drivers to implementation

- Setting up working parties or action groups to explore ideas

- Considering resources and key supporters

Other suggestions to encourage innovative thinking are:

- 'There must be other ways'

- Replace 'yes but" with 'yes and'.

- Go with intuitions and feelings

- Everything does not have to be 'useful'.

- Replace ' We've always done it this way' with ' let's find another way'.

- Be receptive to people with different problem solving styles.

- See problems as opportunities.

Substitue (or simplify)

Combine

Adapt

Modify

Put to other uses

Eliminate or expand

Reverse