CREATIVE IDEATION TO SPARK FRESH THINKING

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HELLO!

We’re excited that you joined us for the “Creative Ideation to Spark Fresh Thinking” breakout session at the 2018 Adobe 99U Conference!

At The Design Gym, our clients often ask us how to create a more creative and customer-centric culture. But, we also hear a lot of reasons why changing the culture at work is so hard: you don’t have the authority, you don’t have enough time, the people around you aren’t receptive to change—the list goes on.

While changing an organization’s culture can be complicated, it’s possible to start modelling more creative and empathetic behaviors in small ways, like during brainstorming sessions.

To that end, we have created this ideation toolkit to help you cultivate empathy and creativity and, ultimately, generate better ideas the next time you are leading or participating in a brainstorm session.

This toolkit complements the activities you used in our breakout session and includes a few extras for you to try on your own. We’ve curated these tools especially for you because we’ve found them to be simple, easy-to-use, and relevant in a wide range of situations.

Good luck to you and your team and reach out if there’s anything we can do support you on your creative journey!

Stay Awesome,
The Design Gym

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The best ideas start with excellent questions. All too often, we jump to solutions without even considering whether or not we’re asking a question that gets to the heart of the problem. However, framing a challenge can be tricky, especially if we’re looking at it from the same perspective for some time.

The following framing tools are designed to help you dive deeper, explore your challenge from different perspectives, and ask better questions so that you can frame your challenge in ways that lead to more innovative, customer-centric solutions.

**FRAME TOOLS:**

- “How Might We” Questions
- Ladder of Abstraction
- Personas
“How Might We” Questions

WHAT

“How Might We” (HMW) is a classic design thinking question-starter that frames a challenge in a way that invites collaboration and possibility:

• How indicates that there is an actionable solution to the question.
• Might indicates that there are lots of possible ways to solve the problem.
• We indicates that the process of generating the solution is collaborative.

Exploring a range of different HMW questions can help ensure that you and your team aren’t jumping straight into solutions or limiting possibilities too early in the process. It’s also a great tool for reframing obstacles as an opportunities.

SET-UP

TIME
10 minutes prep
30 minutes

TEAM
1 Facilitator
Collaborators

MATERIALS
Writing surface and tools of your choice: sticky notes, markers, whiteboard, etc.
**HOW-TO**

1. **TURN YOUR PROBLEM INTO A QUESTION**
   The simplest way to write a “How Might We” Question is by adding those three words in front of your challenge. If you’ve done some research on your problem, you can position your HMW question to reflect a user need or insight that you uncovered.

   For example, take the problem: “Girls are looking to connect with each other after the Global Girl Summit, but they struggle to find the time.”

   By reframing this as, “How might we create opportunities for girls to connect in a way that fits their busy lifestyles?” we invite many possible solutions to this question.

2. **PRO-TIP: BRING IT BACK TO YOUR USER**
   The best HMW questions frame the problem from the user’s perspective, not yours or the company’s.

   For example, “How might we empower young female coders to express their creativity and build lifelong friendships with fellow changemakers?” is a more compelling and generative question than “How might we acquire more users?”

**OUTCOME**
An generative question, grounded in user needs, that sparks fresh and creative solutions.
WHAT
The Ladder of Abstraction is a structured technique used to reframe a challenge statement by generating broader and narrower versions of the problem. It works particularly well when you have an existing challenge statement but aren’t sure whether it captures the right nuances of the problem. By producing a range of possible How Might We Questions, your team can then decide where to focus their efforts in subsequent brainstorming phases.

SET-UP
TIME
10 minutes prep
30 minutes

TEAM
1 Facilitator
Collaborators

MATERIALS
Writing surface
and tools of your choice: sticky notes, markers, whiteboard, etc.
HOW-TO

1. START WITH YOUR CURRENT PROBLEM STATEMENT
   Write it down in the center of the page where the whole team can see it.

   For example, “How might we use the Global Girl Summit to inspire girls to enroll in local Girls Who Code programs following the Summit?”

2. GO BROAD
   Ask “Why?” to create broader challenge statements. By abstracting the problem upward, we start to get to the root cause of a problem and find room for more innovative solutions; however, they are often not as directly actionable.

   For example, why do we want to increase enrollment in Girls Who Code programs? One reason might be because we want to increase the number of women in leadership positions in the workforce. So a broader challenge could be, “How might we help girls be more successful in their future careers?”

3. GET SPECIFIC
   Ask “How?” to create more specific versions of the original challenge statement. Narrow questions illuminate constraints and get to solutions that are more specific and targeted.

   For example, how can we address the Girls Who Code enrollment challenge? One more specific way might be to create more local alumni groups. So a narrower challenge could be, “How might we activate local alumni groups?”

4. MAKE A CHOICE
   Based on your team’s goals and constraints, choose the problem statement that best fits your team’s needs. We like the Goldilocks test when considering the scope of your challenge: not too big, not too small...just right.
OUTCOME

A range of challenge statements that you and your team can choose from to decide on the most relevant challenge to solve, given your goals.
A Persona is a curated set of information about a specific target or user group, which helps you and your team be empathetic to motivations, desires, and emotions of the people you’re designing for. It can include a photo, a handful of demographics, and qualitative details such as the user’s goals, needs, preferences, lifestyle, motivations, behaviors, etc. It should also include direct quotes!

1. **DEFINE YOUR CATEGORIES**
Personas can—and should—have different categories of information, depending on the type of organization, project, etc. Some teams might be more interested in emotions and feelings, while others care more about environment and relationships. As a team, define 3-5 categories of qualitative information that you want to include to serve as your baseline framework.
2. **PICS—OR IT DIDN’T HAPPEN**

Be sure to include at least one photo of the customer, and more if you can. Seeing faces and people in action helps build empathy better than just words can. Bonus! We’ve seen some teams create short video personas that feel like mini-documentaries. These can be circulated widely and allow for the customer’s voice, emotions and actions to be seen directly.

3. **FINAL PERSONA PRODUCTION**

Hand-drawn personas are great in workshop settings, but don’t have the longest life span. Take the final workshop output and create a digital or more polished version that can be put into decks, printed and hung up on the walls.

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**OUTCOME**

An artifact that helps your team take on the customer mindset.

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**CUSTOMER PERSONA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHOTO / SKETCH</th>
<th>DEMOGRAPHIC INFO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visualize these people!</td>
<td>What quantitative info is important to know?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEEDS + DESIRES</th>
<th>MINDSET</th>
<th>PREFERENCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is important for these people?</td>
<td>What do they believe?</td>
<td>What’s important in making a purchase?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EXAMPLE:** *Persona Template*
Open is a mode of divergent thinking that's all about generating lots of creative options. It's not about good or bad ideas; it's about getting started and opening up to diverse possibilities. When your team is in Open mode, it's important to suspend judgement and adopt a “Yes And” attitude to build on each other’s ideas. Don’t prematurely jump into a Close mode; there’s tremendous value in having your team spend even a little time in Open mode before making decisions.

The following Open tools are designed to help you and your team go wide and generate lots of possibilities.

**OPEN TOOLS:**

- Creative Analogies
- Inspirational Interviews
OPEN
CREATIVE ANALOGIES

WHAT
When generating new ideas, looking outside of the conventions of your own company or industry can help inspire interesting and creative ideas. Creative Analogies help you step away from the constraints of your own experience and tap into fresh perspectives. By exploring how others have created meaningful solutions to similar problems, you can use those principles and apply them back to your challenge.

SET-UP
TIME
5 minutes prep
30 minutes

TEAM
1 Facilitator
Collaborators

MATERIALS
Writing surface and tools of your choice: whiteboard, flip chart, markers, etc.
HOW-TO

1. **LOOK OUTSIDE FOR INSPIRATION:**
   Who (or what) else is really good at solving challenges similar to our own, but in a different situation, context, or industry? Generate a list and be brave with your choices—some of the best ideas come from the most unexpected sources of inspiration!

2. **UNCOVER THE ESSENCE:**
   For each who that you’ve identified, ask yourselves how this other person/organization solves their challenge. What are some tactics, principles, approaches and/or tools that they use?

3. **BRING IT HOME:**
   How might you apply these same tactics or principles to your challenge at hand? Use the inspiration you listed to generate new ideas.

**OUTCOME**
A collection of ideas inspired by attributes of successfully solved challenges that are similar to yours.
INSPIRATIONAL INTERVIEW

WHAT
Inspirational Interviews are conversations with the people who are impacted by what you’re designing: the end-users, the surrounding stakeholders, and even the teammates who will help you produce the final solution. By allowing your team to move beyond simply observing behaviors and making inferences to deeply understanding a user’s hopes, fears, and motivations, Inspirational Interviews are a great way to infuse your brainstorming with diverse perspectives.

SET-UP
TIME
1-2 hours prep
30-60 minutes per interview

TEAM
Interviewees
1 Interviewer
1 Note-taker

MATERIALS
Note-taking and brainstorming supplies, interview guide, video/audio recorder
HOW-TO

1. **RECRUIT INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS:**
   You want to talk to actual users or people who fit the profile of would-be users.

2. **WRITE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:**
   An interview guide is your game plan for the questions you want to ask before you begin talking to people. Use open-ended questions and probe for stories by asking, “Tell me about a time when...” or “Describe your process for...”

3. **DURING THE INTERVIEW:**
   - Listen for opportunities for improvement, pain points, and any other moments of inspiration to build a better experience for your user.
   - Your interview guide should be just that: A guide. It’s okay to deviate, and it’s okay to come back to specific questions you need to ask.
   - Active listening, eye contact, and welcoming body language are essential to good interviewing.
   - Be sure to ask, “Anything I might have missed?” at the end! This is often when you’ll get the most honest responses.

4. **AFTER THE INTERVIEW:**
   Review the notes, looking for the “greatest hits” in terms of interesting stories and quotes that can inspire new ideas.

OUTCOME

A combination of notes and recordings from each interview, including quotes that represent the most interesting or relevant findings to help you identify needs.
After diverging and generating lots of possibilities without judgement in Open, Close is a mode of convergent thinking that helps us make decisions. During Close, we critique and assess our options, eventually choosing which ideas to pursue. Close is all about moving towards action by narrowing in on the best ideas given our constraints.

The following Close tools are designed to help you and your team converge on the best options to move forward with.

**CLOSE TOOLS:**

- Idea Dashboard
- Decision Matrix
IDEA DASHBOARD

WHAT
An Idea Dashboard helps you move from a nascent idea to one that is more robust. It’s an especially useful tool when shifting from a wide solution set to focus on a few key concepts to test. When complete, you can share the dashboard with others, receive feedback on your idea and generate questions that may help you move it forward.

HOW-TO

1. NAME YOUR IDEA
Take the idea you and the team were most excited about and give it a name. Naming ideas helps other people remember them, and brings a little bit of marketing savvy to even the least developed idea (always good when you’re trying to get buy-in!).

2. GIVE IT A HEADLINE:
Think of this as the napkin test: if you only had the space of a napkin to write a description of your idea, what would it say?

SET-UP

TIME
30-60 minutes

TEAM
Collaborators

MATERIALS
Idea Dashboard template, writing tools
3. **FLESH OUT THE DETAILS**
   What are some of the key features of this idea? This is your opportunity to think thoroughly about the idea’s details more comprehensively so you can get better, more specific feedback when you share it with stakeholders or users.

4. **PRO-TIP: BRING IT TO LIFE WITH A SKETCH!**
   Don’t worry about the quality. The goal is about communicating the idea, so stick figures and basic shapes will do just fine.

**OUTCOME**
A more fully realized idea, ready to share with people who can give you meaningful feedback about it.

**EXAMPLE:** Idea Dashboard Template
**WHAT**

A Decision Matrix is a 2x2 grid that helps teams quickly compare and assess a range of ideas by visualizing their solution set against multiple success criteria. Think of it as a quick gut check to help you begin to sort ideas and see patterns.

**EXAMPLE:** Decision Matrix

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**SET-UP**

**TIME**
15-30 minutes

**TEAM**
Collaborators

**MATERIALS**
Ideas (sticky notes or dashboards), blank matrix on whiteboard or flip chart, markers
HOW-TO

1. SELECT YOUR CRITERIA
   Choose two success criteria that align with your objectives. Some options are: impact, effort, cost, time, scaleability, innovativeness, interest/passion around the idea, etc. Label the two high-low axes with these criteria.

2. PLOT YOUR IDEAS
   Add your ideas to the matrix based on the criteria.

3. PICK A QUADRANT
   Based on your strategic objectives, identify which quadrant to prioritize (for example, high impact and low effort). Here’s where you’ll find the most promising of your ideas.
   You can complete this exercise multiple times with different criteria to see how it affects the prioritization of your ideas. The most promising ideas may consistently meet your valued criteria.

OUTCOME

A refined collection of promising ideas that you can further analyze, research, and test.