

Idea Generation Tool

Forced Connections



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WHAT IS A FORCED CONNECTION?

Hitting a wall when it comes to different thinking? Need to come up with novel ideas or inject value into an existing product? With Forced Connections, you'll be surprised how easy it is to invigorate or create new ideas for a product, service, or process.

Forced Connections helps people shift gears by providing offbeat inspiration. By using an object that is unrelated to the issue at hand, people are able to generate creative solutions and truly novel ideas. The next time you find yourself in a stalled brainstorming session, use this tactic to help participants stretch their thinking.



For a video introduction to Forced Connections, click on the image above or go to: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1PX_1nygUNg

Note: The Forced Connection technique was first introduced by Alex Osborn in his book Applied Imagination (1953).



FACILITATION GUIDE

NUMBER OF PEOPLE: Small teams of four to five people.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCE: Relevant for all levels of staff.

RECOMMENDED TIMING:

1. Define Your Challenge:	5 min.
2.-4. Stimulus Brainstorm:	15 min.
5. Draw Final Idea:	5 min.
6. Group Discussion:	20 min.
	<u>45 min.</u>

SUGGESTED MATERIALS:



Blank copies of the worksheets for participants
(see the end of this tool)



Whiteboard or flipcharts if completing the exercise as a group
(use them to write down all group ideas; no idea is a bad idea)



Colored markers, pens, and pencils
(separating ideas by color will help organize your thoughts)

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HOW IT WORKS

Imagine your team seated around a table, trying to come up with ideas for improving a product or service. Thirty minutes into the session, the flow of ideas stalls. This is a good time to introduce Forced Connections.

- 1. Define Your Challenge.**
- 2. Pick a Stimulus.** Select an object in the room.
- 3. List Five Attributes of the Object.** This could include its color, scent, or texture.
- 4. Force the Connection.** Apply 3–5 of the attributes to the challenge you are facing to generate new ideas.
- 5. Draw the Concept.** Ask teams to draw their selected concept. Try to include as many connections as possible and be open to ideas that arise in the drawing process.
- 6. Discussion.** Wrap the session with a discussion about the exercise.

EXAMPLE: THE SHOWER

Let's say your team is brainstorming ways to improve the shower and they run out of ideas.

1. Have them select any stimulus in the room (for example, a pen).
2. Ask them to list four or five attributes of that object (e.g., refillable, blue, portable, scent, has a cap).
3. Have the team choose one of the attributes and tie it back to the shower.
 - For this scenario, let's choose "portable."
4. Ask them to explore the characteristics of "portable" in relation to the concept they are working on.
 - e.g., How could we make a shower that is portable? Maybe we can make a shower for camping?
 - Follow this thread for a while, exploring it from multiple angles.

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Real-World Example

Step 1. DEFINE YOUR CHALLENGE. Use Worksheet #1 (at the end of this tool) to write the product, process, or problem you want to improve. Phrase it as an open-ended question, such as “how might we improve the shower?” or “in what ways could we improve the packaging for Product X?”

In what ways might we improve the shower?

Steps 2–4. STIMULUS BRAINSTORM.

Step 2. Pick a Stimulus.	Step 3. List its Key Attributes.	Step 4. Force the Connection. Generate New Ideas.
<p>Pen</p> 	writes	Write on walls to leave reminders or capture ideas
	communicates	Add computer/email to the shower
	colored	Colored water to match my mood
	has a cap	Put a top or roof on the shower to retain steam, make it more like a sauna
	refillable	Auto-refill soap and shampoo

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Step 5. DRAW THE FINAL IDEA.

Ask your team to draw their final idea using Forced Connections (see Worksheet #2). Drawing is an excellent technique to build a narrative around an idea for which there might not be an existing context. It improves collaboration and helps individuals better share a vision that might only exist in their own mind. Finally, it frees people from the business jargon and bullet points of PowerPoint presentations and encourages both big-picture vision and details.

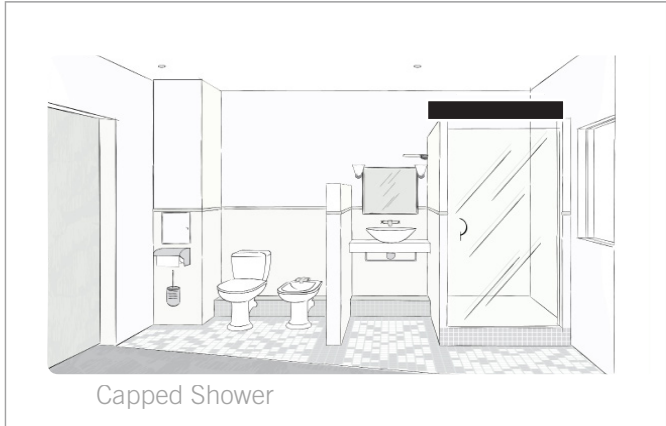
Step 6. GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.

- Did the stimulus generate new ideas that are pursuable?
- How was it to draw your idea rather than presenting your idea in words?

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WORKSHEET #2

Step 5. DRAW THE FINAL IDEA. Using the new ideas generated, draw your new concept.



Capped Shower

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7

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WORKSHEET #1

Step 1. DEFINE. Write the product, process, or problem you want to improve. Phrase it as an open-ended question, such as “how might we improve the shower?” or “in what ways could we improve the packaging for Product X?”

Let's improve: _____

Steps 2–4. STIMULUS BRAINSTORM.

Step 2. Pick a Stimulus.	Step 3. List its Key Attributes.	Step 4. Force the Connection. Generate New Ideas.

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WORKSHEET #2

Step 5. DRAW THE FINAL IDEA. Using the new ideas generated, draw your new concept.

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TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Define Your Challenge as a Question

Use open-ended phrasing such as “In what ways can we improve...?” to specify your challenge and open up new thinking.

Be Creative With Stimulus Attributes

Describe the stimulus in terms of size, color, texture, features, how it works, adjectives, etc. The more creative the better.

Draw Your Concept

Replacing words with pictures encourages big-picture vision while capturing detail.

Discuss Most-Promising Solutions

As a group, distill the most-promising ideas into improving the product.

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