

Roadmap for Effective and Creative Meetings



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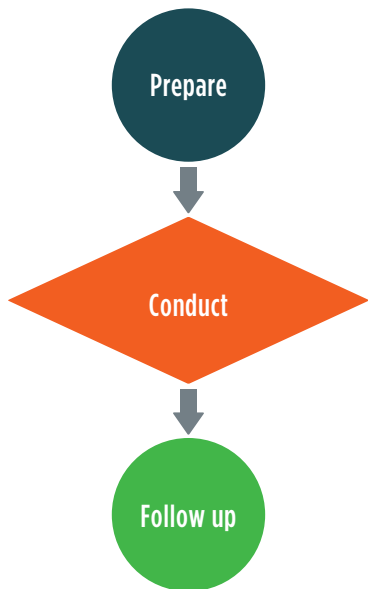
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Creative meetings

Three phases

The full creative process, as we have described, comprises *insights*, *incubation*, *idea work* and *implementation*.

Creative meetings are one way to follow through this process. If you're to plan, lead and follow up on an idea meeting, it's helpful to think in terms of these three distinct phases: prepare, conduct, follow up.



Prepare

A creative meeting starts with the need to think imaginatively about an **important issue or problem**, such as *How can we improve customer satisfaction?*

In what area, for what challenges or for which goals do you need to find new solutions? The analysis of what you want a creative discussion about is essential, as it will set the direction and parameters for your group's ideas. It will also engage the participants, and inspire them to come up with ideas.

Why is it important? This is a basic question that determines the resources, participation and commitment at your disposal, and is a prerequisite to the ultimate implementation of the outcome.

Why do you need to find new solutions to it? The originator of the issue needs to clarify this and, naturally, run the answer by the group as well. They might have different opinions!

What needs does the question cater for? Who has the need? What do we do with the output? Even at this stage you, as facilitator, have to ensure that the output of the meeting is put into effect. This is by far the most important means of ensuring long-term commitment – showing that selected ideas will actually be implemented.

Then, with the focus issue in mind, put together a group of the right people (see Group Creativity on page 11).

Conduct

The meeting itself can take many forms. Its purpose and the goals of the business determine the agenda, content, environment and participants.

What distinguishes the implementation of a creative meeting from other types of meeting is that we need to build a creative atmosphere and inspire and elicit new ideas and thoughts from the participants in accordance with the questions to be dealt with and the composition of the group.

Documentation

It can be difficult to document brainstorming meetings. How do you want to use the material? One good idea is to schedule documentation time straight after the workshop. This will not only help you remember what was said and make the documentation process quicker, but will also give the participants swift feedback, which is especially important if they are going to carry the process further, as they will still be mentally active and no doubt able to come up with even more ideas and solutions.

Digital tools are available to help with documentation and the further development of ideas, particularly for people participating remotely. The field of digital tools in idea and innovation development is a fast-growing one and new solutions and functions are constantly appearing.

In our experience, with careful planning you will find yourself able to be flexible and to trust the creative process, as you might find yourself having to depart from your plans when unexpected ideas emerge that you haven't prepared for but decide on the spur of the moment to snap up and run with. Good planning makes it easier to follow any side-tracks that appear and then return to the main path of the meeting.

In the next sections, we'll give you some practical guidance through all the phases of idea development, what they entail and what methods and tools you can employ to ensure that your creative meetings are both smart and fun.

Follow up

It's a good idea to think in advance of the meeting about how its output will be put to use. How will you make sure that everyone understands what the next step will be and who is in charge of it? Addressing these matters early on with the group also injects extra motivation during the meeting itself. Also decide how you want to show the outcome, both internally and externally.

Since innovative ideas can easily become drowned in the flow of daily work, the follow-up is especially important. We've encountered many people who are sceptical towards workshops and brainstorming meetings – for the very reason that results and ideas are not taken advantage of in time. You don't get that many new chances to engage people if you omit to ensure that selected ideas are supported all the

way to implementation and become valuable to the organisation. One way of keeping the process going is for the process leader to book regular follow-up meetings until the work process is properly established or the idea has been realised.

The Idea Diamond – an effective method for creative meetings

A creative way of working involves – contrary to what many believe – a structured idea-generation process. The simple unleashing of creative forces is not enough. You have to set the right conditions, make sure that the group is comfortable and understands the task in hand, and lead the participants through a number of well-defined steps to finally deal with the raw material that emerges from the methods.

The following pages describe the Idea Diamond™ and its six steps, illustrating them with simple examples. The Idea Diamond is a method based on research by Göran Ekvall

To think about

Do you have any pressing issues or challenges at work that you think would be suitable for a creative meeting?

What would you want to try out if you were to plan a creative meeting?

What difficulties might it entail, do you think?

and follows an established and effective structure for idea development.

Each individual step has an equally important part to play in the optimal hatching, shaping and implementing of ideas. The Idea Diamond provides an effective structure and general roadmap for creative work. It starts with the collective definition of the problem that has emerged from the preceding analysis and that is the decided focus of the meeting, and ends with a proposed plan of action.

The Idea Diamond is the primary process of the creative meeting and works for all kinds of problem and issue as well as different kinds of group. A good creative meeting is in place when the rules of play have been set, the group has been clarified and step 1 *Issue* has been properly completed. A well-executed step 2 *Focus* gives the participants insight into the basic premise and creates conditions favourable to the process itself and to harmony within the group, according to Wheeland's theories on effective group processes.

Tips

Some meetings are virtual. Even though the remote nature of such meetings impedes spontaneity and participation, the same processes apply. Combining virtual meetings with physical ones is usually very effective. A physical start-up is especially important - it fosters a creative climate and makes it easier to identify the area to be developed.

Other sectors

Thinking creatively is very much about focusing and approaching a topic from different angles. Looking at how other business sectors handle different situations can be one way of finding inspiration for your own company.

Instructions

Choose an organisation known for being really good at whatever it is you want ideas and inspiration about, such as a supermarket if you're working with marketing or a really good school if you're wanting to create a learning environment. As process leader, you can either present your own sectors or ask the group to come up with their own ideas for organisations that are good at whatever it is you're to discuss.

Think about and discuss how the organisation you have chosen works. Let the participants come up with their own suggestions in an open brainstorm. Make a list on a board or flipchart.

Which of these aspects could you transfer to your organisation – and further improve or tweak? Work in pairs or in threes with the aspects that the participants themselves find most interesting. What ideas do you get that suit your business? Can anything be used and adapted?

Examples of other useful businesses

- Preschool – for ideas relating to a learning organisation
- Hospital – for ideas relating to security and prioritising
- Ikea – for ideas relating to logistics or smart solutions

Creativity is a route towards making work smarter and more fun. This book will help you become better at holding creative meetings and stimulating thoughts and ideas. We hope it will inspire you and teach you methods and structures – the essential conditions for creativity. Unlock the energy, get better results and find new solutions – and have more fun doing so!

Ewa Svensson and Kristina Swenningson have been running Crearum since 2005, helping their customers find new solutions and develop creative processes. Customers include Saab, 3M, Swisslog and Verisure.



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