

Method 13

Wrong Thinking



Creative approach to business challenges

Complexity	Target group	Pax number	Activity duration
Easy	Young people entrepreneurs	Minimum one team of 4 people. Exercise works better if more teams rotate in producing inputs.	Apx. 60 min



Description

The method is implemented in 5 stages

1. **State the challenge that you anticipate in your project idea.** You can also list your fears and doubts regarding the new product or service. For entrepreneurs who have already put their idea into practice, this could be an actual description of the tough problem they want to overcome. Write your challenge as a question. For example: “How can we ensure that customers will refer our product to their family and friends?”
2. **Create a catastrophic version of the challenge.** Here, you don't brainstorm possible solutions to the challenge. The process is exactly the opposite. You intentionally make your challenge worse by describing the catastrophic version of the challenge. We describe the nightmare scenario, the situation we never want to see, the situation that frightens us. Write a simple sentence that is more than just an opposite of the question under the previous paragraph. For example: “How can we convince customers to talk exclusively negative things about our product?” or “How can we ensure that customers never mention our product to their network?”
3. **Brainstorm on the catastrophic version. Invite the group to focus on the ideas of the catastrophic version.** How can we bring this scenario to life? How can we make this problem worse? Which activities lead us to this state? It might seem counterintuitive to the participants, so you might need to refocus the group's effort on the main goal: list as many ideas as possible that will lead to the catastrophic state you previously described. Focus on the things you avoid and those you do. This is the most creative part of the process. Take your time. Avoid criticism, foster divergent thinking, make solutions as wild as possible. In stage 3, focus exclusively on the catastrophic scenario. Take at least 15 – 20 minutes for this stage.
4. **New solutions based on the “catastrophic” ideas.** At stage 4, we reverse thinking again: we look for new insights for the initial problem by observing ideas from stage 3. If there is a large quantity of ideas, we focus on:
 - The most innovative ideas.
 - Ideas that are very close to the initial challenge.

We choose just a few negative statements with the highest potential (ideally 3 – 5). We carefully read the first sentence. The group starts brainstorming on how they can respond to that specific negative idea. They start looking for the

opposites of the negative idea. Let's say our chosen negative idea to the question "How can we ensure that customers never mention our product to their network?" is this: "By being totally dull in product name and packaging". In stage 4, this leads us to think about the crazy name for the product, new colours for the packaging and the shape of the package that is totally different from the competitors.

If all previous phases are done properly, we can expect many innovative solutions that can greatly enrich our product. Take at least 20 minutes for stage 4.

5. Evaluate and elaborate solutions. After divergent thinking comes the convergent phase and critical analysis of the solutions. Which solution is feasible? Which complements other important components of the product? Which can be implemented in a cost-efficient way?



Objectives

Fostering original thinking. Finding new solutions to common problems. Transforming criticism to constructive thinking.



Needed materials

- Post-it papers.
- Posters
- Markers / pencils / pens
- Items to provide to participants for idea generation



Competences

- Teamwork
- Creative thinking
- Out-of-the-box solutions
- Communication
- Managing fears and insecurity



You can use this method as a supplementary tool alongside other methods. For instance, if a group is working on the Business Model Canvas and they have hit a roadblock, this

Varieties for the method

approach can offer a fresh perspective and help generate novel solutions.

By integrating the outputs of the "wrong thinking" method into the Business Model Canvas, the group can develop a more comprehensive and innovative business model.

Entering the entrepreneurial space can be daunting for individuals who crave certainty, predictability, and clear directions. Some may become preoccupied with the potential problems and obstacles. The "wrong thinking" method can have a strong cathartic effect by encouraging participants to think creatively about their biggest fears and doubts. As a result, their fears lose their power, and they gain a new perspective on the challenges they face. This approach can



Tips for facilitator

Take time to consider each negative idea. The output will be far more creative if you select a few problematic challenges (3 to 5 per group). If you rush the brainstorming process with too many ideas, participants are likely to come up with stereotypical answers.

You must carefully facilitate two opposing ideas. Groups will develop novel solutions if the opposites are more than just a simple change of words (such as from "good" to "bad", from "many" to "none" or from "strong" to "weak"). For example, the question "How to make a product easy to use?" could be reversed to "How can we make a product that even engineers are unable to handle?"

Fresh perspectives can be achieved by introducing the "**world café**" approach. When groups complete stage 3, allow an additional 10 minutes to rotate the groups. Group A moves to challenge B and begins brainstorming the catastrophic version of that situation. This will add new perspectives to the previously gathered outputs. The same can be done in stage 4. Groups can switch places and provide new insights into the initial problem.



Extra info

The method works similarly in both online and live modes. In the online mode, we replace the post-its with apps that facilitate creative thinking in groups. Google Jamboard or Miro are two such tools that we can use. The facilitator must prepare a template for each group in advance, with each of the 5 stages entered on a separate template.



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