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# CREATIVE IDEATION TO SPARK FRESH THINKING



FRAME



OPEN



CLOSE

# HELLO!

As a creative consultant I'm often asked how to build a more creative, customer-centric culture. I also hear plenty of reasons why changing workplace culture feels impossible: you don't have the authority, you don't have the time, people around you resist change—the list goes on and on.

Changing an organization's culture can be complex, but I believe you can start modelling more creative, empathetic behaviours in small, practical ways — for example, during brainstorming sessions.

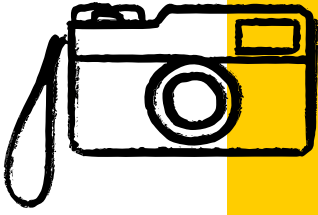
That's why I created this ideation toolkit: to help you cultivate empathy and creativity and, ultimately, generate better ideas the next time you lead or join a brainstorm.

I chose these tools because they're simple, easy to use, and effective across many situations.

Good luck and don't hesitate to hit me up if there's anything I can do support you on your creative journey!

Stay awesome,  
Marius Westphal

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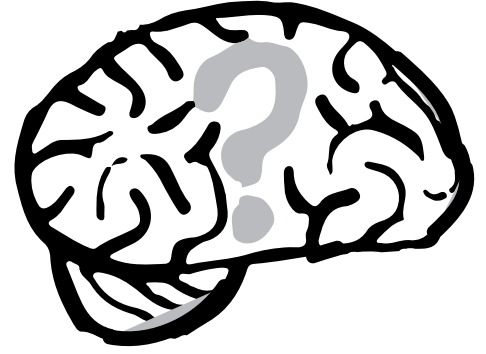
# FRAME

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've been 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



FRAME

# “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, 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.



FRAME

# LADDER OF ABSTRACTION



## 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 further inspire girls and women to come together to take on local causes and issues?”

## 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're often not as directly actionable.

For example, why do we want girls and women to come together to take on local issues? One reason might be because we want to more girls and women to take on leadership roles in their communities. So a broader challenge could be, “How might we help girls be more successful leaders?”

## 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.

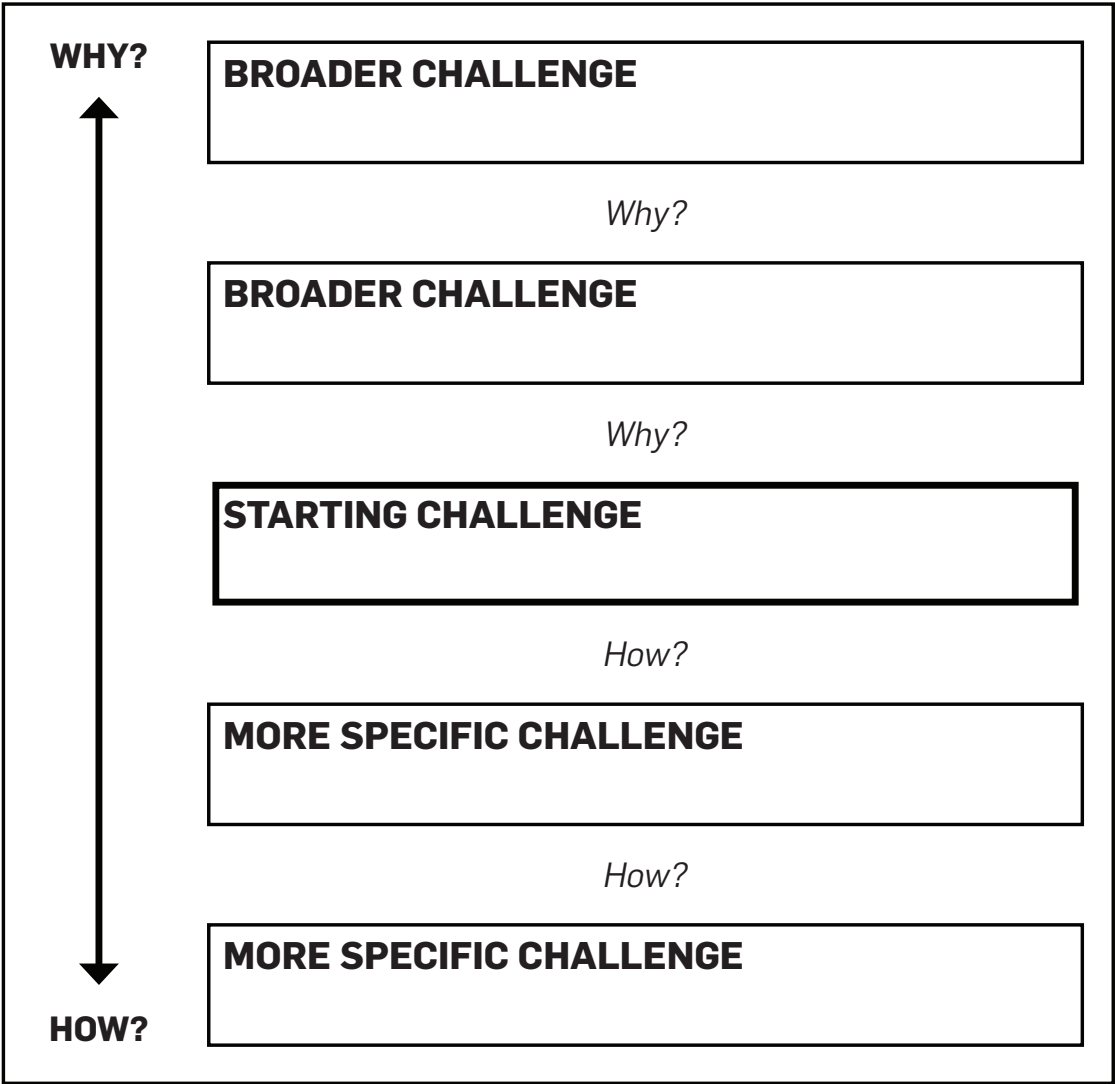
For example, how can we address the Girls Who Code challenge? One specific way might be to hold regular, local events. So a narrower challenge could be, “How might we partner with local community groups to host these events?”

## 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

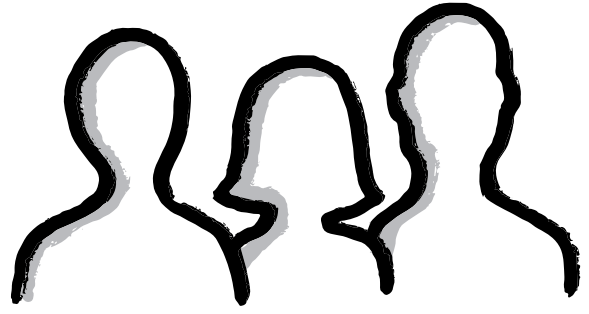
A range of challenge statements that you and your team can choose from to decide on the most relevant challenge to solve, given your goals.



**EXAMPLE:** *Ladder of Abstraction Template*



FRAME



# PERSONAS

## WHAT

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.

## SET-UP

### TIME

30-60 minutes

### TEAM

1 Facilitator  
Collaborators

### MATERIALS

Blank paper, flip charts, markers or a digital template

## HOW-TO

### 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 (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.

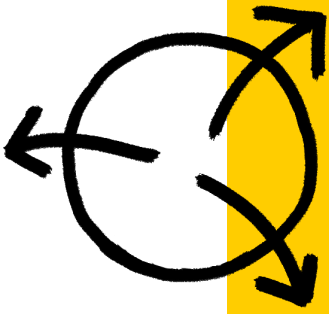
## 3. FINAL PERSONA PRODUCTION

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.

# OUTCOME

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

<div>PHOTO / SKETCH</div> <div>Visualize these people!</div>	<div>DEMOGRAPHIC INFO</div> <div>What quantitative info is important to know?</div>	
<div>NEEDS + DESIRES</div> <div>What is important for these people?</div>	<div>MINDSET</div> <div>What do they believe?</div>	<div>PREFERENCES</div> <div>What's important in making a purchase?</div>



# OPEN

Open is a mindset 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, it's important to suspend judgement and adopt a "Yes And" attitude to build on each other's ideas. Don't prematurely jump into Close; there's tremendous value in having your team spend dedicated time, even if it's limited, in Open before making decisions.

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

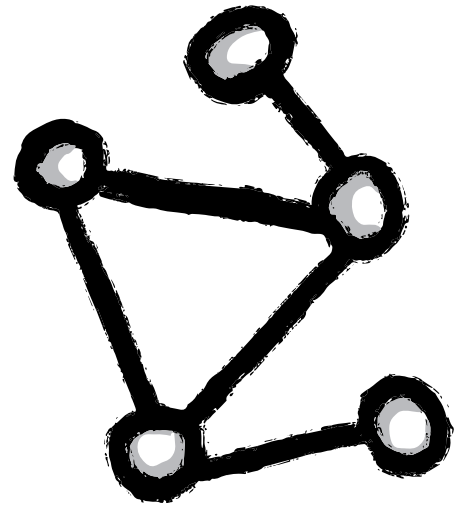
## OPEN TOOLS:

- 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. WHO ELSE?

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. HOW?

For each example that you've identified in step one, ask yourselves how this other person/organization solves their challenge. What are some tactics, principles, approaches and/or tools they use?

## 3. GENERATE NEW IDEAS

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.



OPEN



# 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 Notetaker

### 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 improvements, 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 at the end, "Anything I might have missed?" 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.



# CLOSE

After diverging and generating lots of possibilities without judgement in Open, Close is a mindset 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.

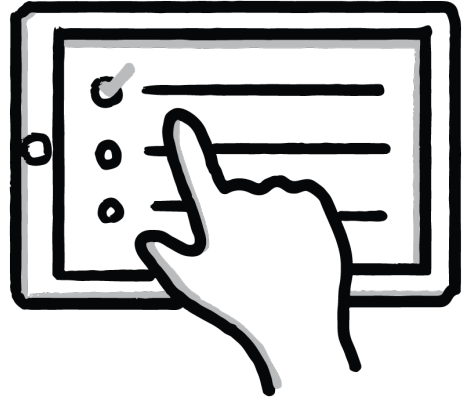
The following Close tools are designed to help you and your team converge on the best options to move forward with.

## CLOSE TOOLS:

- Idea Dashboard
- Decision Matrix



CLOSE



# 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 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 thorough 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.

### NAME

*Every memorable idea needs a name!*

### HEADLINE

*Describe the idea in a sentence. Include the benefit to the stakeholder.*

### DETAILS + SKETCH

*What are the components of the idea and what do they look like?*

**EXAMPLE:** *Idea Dashboard Template*



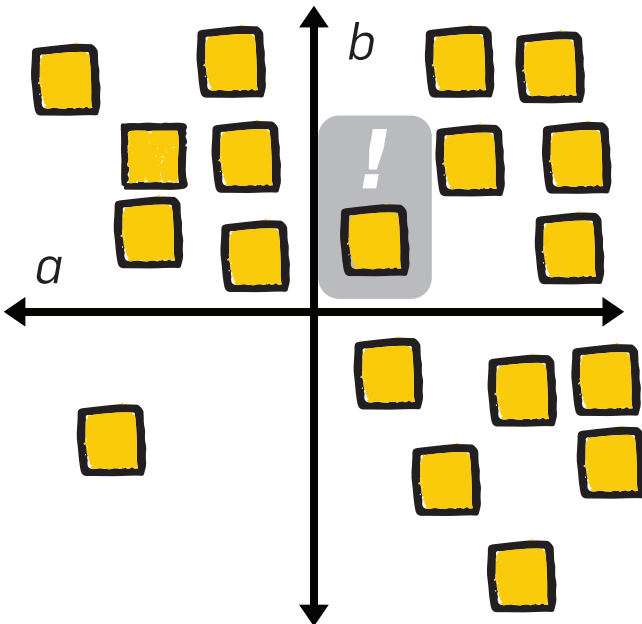
CLOSE



# DECISION MATRIX

## 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*

## 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, scalability, 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.



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