

YES! AND... CREATIVE GORILLA # 108

How might we use Creative Solution Finding in a virtual meeting ...

Facilitate Virtual Meeting Creativity...

*"I think they should consider giving Oscars for **meetings**: Best Meeting of the Year, Best Supporting Meeting, Best Meeting Based on Material from Another Meeting."* William Goldman, Novelist



"Is anyone there?"

How can we run a virtual "creative solution finding" session?

One of the toughest meetings in which I was involved was a teleconference. I was in Lagos on a mobile telephone at 4.00 a.m. People were calling in from Asia, Europe and the US. It was difficult to understand who was speaking or what they were saying and I swear after ten minutes I heard a gentle snoring. It might have been me.

I was reminded of this when I received a note from a fellow Gorilla this week, with background and a question as follows:

"I have a new team of 5, situated in 3 locations (2 locations in Sweden, 1 in the UK). We get on really well. We regularly use audio with netmeeting / webex conferences and we can do 3 way video conferences. **What ideas do you have for creative problem solving in a less than ideal physical set-up?**

I like a challenge and this Gorilla is my response. It is longer than the norm, please forgive me, I trust you will find it worthwhile.

My first thought was that there are companies that specialise in web meetings and they have some great new technology. However, I set the scope of the challenge as a team working with little budget; they cannot use an external resource and must use the available technology as described.

Before the Meeting

- Create a positive mind set and call it Creative Solution Finding (CSF) rather than Creative Problem Solving
- Identify the structured CSF methodology you will use (see an example overleaf). This:
 1. Ensures that the challenge or opportunity is thoroughly investigated
 2. Ensures everyone is using the same terminology and knows where they are in the process
 3. Lets you assign different people to lead each stage if you wish, to encourage involvement.
- Ideally, you will train everyone in advance on the skills and approach needed for Creative Solution Finding. If not possible,

YES! AND... CREATIVE GORILLA # 108

send advanced reading notes explaining the method and these skills:

- Explore at each stage to create many options (Diverging)
- Converge at each stage to narrow down the options
- Defer judgement when exploring ~ Yes! And... not Yes! But...
- Follow the steps in order
- Ensure that people receive a pre meeting brief with a clearly defined purpose and outcomes, an outline of the meeting and an opportunity to feedback any concerns prior to the meeting. A list of contact numbers will help too, both office and mobile in case they are using their office phone for the conference (so you can contact them if there is a problem)
- Provide any background material for reading before the meeting
- Lay down guidelines in advance; no e-mailing, surfing, texting or calls during the meeting; in fact no distractions unless meeting related. You need people with 100% focus on the issue
- Agree a lead person (a facilitator) to ensure the process is maintained and everyone participates
- Prepare a set of fun / interesting exercises to use between each stage e.g. a topic based crossword; a puzzle etc. This lightens the atmosphere and provides a break between each stage

The Meeting

Focus

- People come in to meetings with mental baggage; you must focus them away from this and on to the meeting. The method will depend on group size:
 1. In a small group, you might ask each person to talk about the most positive thing that has happened to them this week, month etc.
 2. If large, you can split in to pairs. A person alone, could make a mobile call with another person
- Talk through the purpose, outcomes, etc
- Explain that at each stage you will record one piece of information from each person at a time so that all are frequently involved
- Explain also that each person will have a time limit for any explanation and no interruptions are allowed during an explanation
- As this is a remote process, you might decide to split it in to a number of separate calls to allow time for thinking between each stage

EXPLORE SITUATION & RECORD KEY INFORMATION

- We assume you will start with a rough description of the situation. Have each person spend time to identify as many facts as they can about the situation. Prepared questions will be useful for this. [For an example, download our Discovery Matrix at <http://www.yesand.eu> in Learn With Us]

YES! AND... CREATIVE GORILLA # 108

- The facilitator lists or maps (a mind management software would be ideal) all of these facts, one at a time from each person and numbers them. In an audio call, everyone will need to note and number the facts or you can e-mail them
- Each person chooses the key facts and explains why chosen

GENERATE & DEFINE KEY CHALLENGES

Based on the facts, each person defines a number of challenge definitions and the facilitator records, numbers and shares these. Next, each chooses their preferred challenge and explain why. The group then agrees the challenge definition to take forward.

This is a good place to break and have people begin the process of idea generation alone over a couple of days.

GENERATE & SIFT IDEAS

Before you start idea generation, use some kind of creative exercise to warm people up, e.g. find as many ways as possible to customise the MD's car (or other humorous topics). There is a large number of idea generation techniques and the techniques you use will depend on the topic so have them prepared beforehand.

We suggest you use techniques known as Nominal Group Techniques, i.e. people are "together" but act independently.

As with our normal workshops, we recommend you start with a Vent, i.e. everybody generates ideas individually without speaking

and notes these down. Once these are exhausted, share and record them as before.

Some creative techniques that will work well remotely include Random Connections, SCAMPER, and Metaphors. [Again, see our web site www.yesand.eu and look in Learn With Us.

Look out for people not contributing. You might like to challenge everyone to come up with at least one idea and have people work together to generate ideas.

You will end up with a lot of ideas and will need to reduce these down. (Again, it might be a good place to take a break as idea generation can be tiring). To reduce down (sift), you will need to use a very few criteria. We use a Benefits / Resource matrix (again see Learn With Us at www.yesand.eu)

EVALUATE AND SELECT SOLUTIONS

Two techniques that will work well remotely are De Bono's Six Hats and the Disney Technique (critic, realist and dreamer). Both of these use the principle of different perspectives to provide a thorough evaluation of an idea.

You can run these in a couple of ways. One is for everybody to "wear" the same colour hat or adopt the same character and work through the different hats / characters. The other is for people to each adopt a different hat / character.

ACTION

How might you add to my suggestions? What practical experience do you have that you might contribute to this discussion? If possible, use the

YES! AND... CREATIVE GORILLA # 108

approach suggested and let me know how it went.

TO CLOSE

I wrote this article in November and sent it to the enquirer for them to use and provide feedback. Here is a summary of the response:

“The ideas in the article are excellent. However, we held a face to face meeting before starting the virtual meetings, for people to get to know each other. The virtual meetings since have gone really smoothly and what we have learned is that it is important for the facilitator to follow rigorously the ideas in the article on preparing and running the meeting.”

John Brooker | Facilitate, Innovate, Transform.



We facilitate leaders and teams in medium to large organisations internationally to:

- *Make Meetings Outstanding*
- *Make Transformation Simpler*
- *Make Innov8ion Flow*

Imagine what we can do for you...

Contact John or Kate Brooker:

Speak: +44 (0) 20 8869 9990

Write: hi@yesand.eu

Read: www.yesand.eu