



Engage Everyone Simultaneously in Generating Questions, Ideas, and Suggestions (12 min.)

What is made possible? You can immediately include everyone regardless of how large the group is. You can generate better ideas and more of them faster than ever before. You can tap the know-how and imagination that is distributed widely in places not known in advance. Open, generative conversation unfolds. Ideas and solutions are sifted in rapid fashion. Most importantly, participants own the ideas, so follow-up and implementation is simplified. No buy-in strategies needed! Simple and elegant!

Five Structural Elements – Min Specs

1. Structuring Invitation

- Ask a question in response to the presentation of an issue, or about a problem to resolve or a proposal put forward (e.g., What opportunities do YOU see for making progress on this challenge? How would you handle this situation? What ideas or actions do you recommend?)

2. How Space Is Arranged and Materials Needed

- Unlimited number of groups
- Space for participants to work face-to-face in pairs and foursomes
- Chairs and tables optional
- Paper for participants to record observations and insights

3. How Participation Is Distributed

- Everyone in the group is included (often not the facilitator)
- Everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute

4. How Groups Are Configured

- Start alone, then in pairs, then foursomes, and finally as a whole group

5. Sequence of Steps and Time Allocation

- Silent self-reflection by individuals on a shared challenge, framed as a question (e.g., What opportunities do YOU see for making progress on this challenge? How would you handle this situation? What ideas or actions do you recommend?) 1 min.
- Generate ideas in pairs, building on ideas from self-reflection. 2 min.
- Share and develop ideas from your pair in foursomes (notice similarities and differences). 4 min.
- Ask, “What is one idea that stood out in your conversation?” Each group shares one important idea with all (repeat cycle as needed). 5 min.



WHY? Purposes

- Engage every individual in searching for answers
- Avoid overhelping and the overcontrol-dependency vicious cycle
- Create safe spaces for expression, diminish power differentials
- Express “silent” conversations and expand diversity of inputs
- Enrich quality of observations and insights before expression
- Build naturally toward consensus or shared understanding

Tips and Traps

- Firmly facilitate quiet self-reflection before paired conversations
- Ask everyone to jot down their ideas during the silent reflection
- Use bells for announcing transitions
- Stick to precise timing, do another round if needed
- In a large group during “All,” limit the number of shared ideas to three or four
- In a large group, use a facilitator or harvester to record output not shared
- Invite each group to share one insight but not to repeat insights already shared
- Separate and protect generation of ideas from the whole group discussion
- Defer judgment; make ideas visual; go wild!
- When you hit a plateau, jump to another form of expression (e.g., Improv, sketching, stories)
- Maintain the rule of one conversation at a time in the whole group
- Do a second round if you did not go deep enough!

Riffs and Variations

- Graphically record insights as they emerge from groups
- Use Post-it notes in Rounds 2 and 3

- Link ideas that emerge to **Design Storyboards, Improv Prototyping, Ecocycle Planning**
- Go from groups of 4 to groups of 8 with consensus in mind. Colleague Liz Rykert calls this Octopus!

Examples

- Use after a speech or presentation, when it is important to get rich feedback (questions, comments, and ideas), instead of asking the audience, “Any questions?”
- A group of managers used two rounds of **1-2-4-All** to redesign their less-than-stimulating weekly meeting.
- For a spontaneous conversation that starts after the topic of a meeting has been announced
- For a group that has been convened to address a problem or an innovation opportunity
- For unlocking a discussion that has become dysfunctional or stuck
- In place of a leader “telling” people what to think and do (often unintentionally)
- For a group that tends to be excessively influenced by its leader
- Read Craig Yeatman’s story in Part Three: Stories from the Field about using **1-2-4-All** to help manage a merger decision, “Inclusive High-Stakes Decision Making Made Easy.”

Attribution: Liberating Structure developed by Henri Lipmanowicz and Keith McCandless