Table of Contents

Random Word Ideation

This creativity technique takes advantage of the human brain's ability to *free associate* words, concepts, and ideas to promote innovative design ideation.

Overview

By the time you understand the current and preferred situations well enough to start designing interventions, you will also likely already have preconceptions of what will constitute a good design. This is an unavoidable property of the human mind. However, it's unlikely that any of the preconceived designs will be very good; some may even be spectacularly bad. And those preconceptions will literally blind you to other, potentially better solutions. This is a kind of design fixation.

One way to break those preconceptions is to force your mind to look for alternative solutions by forming associations between the design situation and random other words, ideas, and concepts.

This method is best done in a team setting, to promote synergistic ideation between the ideas of the team members.

How to do it

Prepare

Make sure everyone is aware of, and has access to, the PSS and PRS for your project. Spend a few minutes making sure everyone agrees to the contents of those two stages.

Schedule 45-60 minutes for the entire exercise as outlined in this section. Make sure you leave 15 minutes at the end to review all the generated ideas and pick out the most likely to be interesting or worth further study and detailing.

Make sure you have the means to record *all* the ideas generated. An easy way to do this is to create a shared Google Doc to which all team members can contribute simultaneously.

Generate random words

To help prevent design fixation, you need to ensure the words you use a completely random. Fortunately, the Internet can help here as there are many random word generators available online. Some of these include:

- http://creativitygames.net/random-word-generator
- http://ideagenerator.creativitygames.net/
- https://randomwordgenerator.com/

Use as many random words as you can fit into the time your team has allotted for the exercise.

Brainstorm on each word

To take advantage of the potential for synergistic ideation between team members, you are advised to work on one word at a time.

Write the word down, then have everyone think of associations between the word and your design situation. Say them out loud as your write them down. Discuss each association for a few minutes. Do not fear building from what a teammate says to something entirely different, because the point is to free associate between the word and the design situation.

Not all random words will lead to useful associations. If no one can think of anything useful within a minute or two, mark that word as discarded and move on to the next word. If you run out of random words, generate more.

Review and select

In the last 15 minutes or so of your session, go through the list of all the ideas you generated collaboratively and look for the ones that seem the most interesting, most different, or most feasible.

Make sure you note why only certain ideas were selected - that is, justify why you think those were the best ideas.

Expand and refine

Collaboratively distribute those ideas amongst your team for further study, expansion, and refinement.

Examples

This example is taken from a real life case in which Salustri participated in the 2010s.

The challenge to be addressed was *to minimize/manage food waste at grocery stores*. The background was simple: much food is simply not bought because it is nearing its “expiry” date, blemished, or misshapen. This food is usually just composted or even thrown away; yet, it is perfectly edible, nutritious, and safe.

One of the most memorable and productive random words from the exercise was “octopus.” Here are some of the ideas that resulted from thinking of “octopus” with respect to the challenge.

From the morphology of octopi. Create a hub-based food reclamation system, in which the octopus's body is a central reclamation and processing centre, each arm represents a major route for bringing food from various grocery stores to the centre, and each sucker represents a grocery store. Design

overlapping routes (overlapping octopi) to provide load-sharing functionality (rather like Uber's surge-pricing, but to ensure timely collection of food).

From the ability of octopi to camouflage. Genetically alter food so that blemishes do not appear even if the food is bruised.

From the malleability of octopi. Octopi are known for being able to squeeze through very small holes. Based on this notion of massive shape changes, one could build and distribute container-sized processing stations that can process “waste” food *on-site* into paste-like "astronaut food" or even dry powder to be rehydrated by the end user.

Deliverables

The real outcome of this method are good ideas for design embodiments and concepts. Those ideas will naturally appear in a morphological chart or at some other point during concept design.

To justify the ideation and selection of “best” ideas, you must include the notes you took (see above) in an appendix of your design report. Make sure that the appendix includes the (1) date, time, and duration of the session, (2) all the random words you considered and the ideas they generated, and (3) the justifications for having selected only some of the ideas.

However

TODO Describe consequences and counter-indications.

creativity, method