

Ideathon

Contributed by:

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Introduction

Ideathon is a simple activity that helps participants look for ideas during a 30 minute walk in the neighbourhood. This exercise is to develop entrepreneurial thinking based on opportunities around us. This walk will orient participants to the role and demand of the external environment during the process of idea generation.

Learning Objectives

Some of the key issues to be demonstrated and discussed in class (optimum size 20-50 students):

- Opportunities lie in the external world, so before putting an idea on paper one needs to look at the external environment. There is a need to understand the dynamic external environment because fresh ideas and innovation are the output of whatever is happening around us.
- You start with your local surroundings as this is a familiar environment and subconsciously you have developed a good understanding of the environment. But now there is a need to look at it from an entrepreneurial perspective and develop ideas based on your new understanding of the environment.
- Any anomaly/change in the environment calls for a change thereby leading to business opportunities. One needs to act fast in identifying and executing the business idea to get first movers advantage in reaping the opportunity.
- Better understanding about your customers in the community/ their needs/ problems brings ideas into play.
- Consumer behavior could be specific to a locality – a liking for specific products / services / pricing / technology. One has to be very specific to achieve a deeper market penetration but generic for scalability of business.
- Even after launching the business, one needs to constantly keep a track of environmental dynamics to fine tune the operations/services/products. It is a continuous process in any venture.

The Exercise

Instructions to participant teams:

- 1) Make teams of 5-7 people, depending on the class size. The selection should be random so as to bring diversified people into a team.
- 2) Take a 30 minute walk around your college campus /home in a team, with a notepad in hand.
- 3) Make a note of business opportunities that you perceive or problems/needs that inspire you to look for a solution before you return to the campus.
- 4) Develop your ideas together as a team & present to the rest of the participant teams within the stipulated time

Running the Exercise:

This could be done in two different ways and there can be two set of winners:

- 1) Who brings maximum number of ideas:

Each team consolidates the ideas at one place and reads the list to rest of the class. The categorization of ideas may be done depending on availability of time. The classification may be based on types of environmental triggers, business sectors like FMCG, medicines, service, technology, supply chain management, etc.

- 2) Who brings smartest of ideas

Each team discusses various ideas among themselves. They read the list to rest of the class and explain which one is the best idea in their list and why. The idea may be pre-evaluated in terms of feasibility, need, demand, scalability, profit margin, etc.

Concluding the Exercise:

- A) Vote for the Best Idea:

This should take the exercise up to the brink of opportunity evaluation, as well as make it fun for everyone by introducing a competitive element.

After the presentations, have all the teams vote on which team's total list of ideas is the most attractive – which basically means that you are backing the team, and their idea-generating power, rather than one particular idea. Given that most businesses don't succeed on their initial ideas, this is a good way to introduce that the most important element in any business is the team.

- B) Debrief:

Lead the group through a discussion of why they chose certain ideas and not others.

Some thoughts for discussion triggers and points to draw out at the end of the presentations are as follows:

- a) You may choose a few favourite ideas from the different lists, and ask the teams to explain how they got the idea.
- b) You can draw out the similarities and differences in the ideas.
- c) You can ask what the differently grouped ideas have in common with each other.
- d) Highlight the
 - significance of change making ideas possible.
 - role of the external environment in inspiring new ideas
- e) Point out
 - where ideas were triggered by “problems” as well.
 - why and how a ‘walk’ was used to highlight the need to focus externally.
 - all ideas are not good ideas; that is why it is important to be able to generate as many as possible.

NOTE: The discussion should be lively and fun. No idea is silly. No idea is impossible. The same rules apply to brainstorming! It is great way to point out the difference between idea generation and opportunity evaluation.

Part 2 (optional):

1. Ask each team to choose a **new different route** to walk.
2. The teams have to generate a new set of ideas in the second round of walk.
3. At the end of the walk, the teams share the number of ideas and the list of ideas with the rest like above in part 1.
4. Focus on how a different environment or setting leads to the generation of a new set of ideas.

Time required:

- 5 -10 minutes to brief the participants and make teams
- 30- 60 minutes for team work – walk and idea generation
- 40- 60 minutes for presentations and discussion back on campus

Total time: 75–120 minutes*

* The activities may be reduced or expanded depending on availability of time.

Materials required:

1. Notepads - 1 for every team.
2. White board and markers.

(Note: This exercise was inspired by the ‘Ideas from a news paper ‘ exercise available on NEN online :

<http://www.nenonline.org/resources/brain-teasers>)