



## PRE-IDEATION

# SLICING THE ELEPHANT AND SPLITTING THE IDEATION CHALLENGE

Choosing one of several methods to make one big challenge into a series of smaller challenges.

<b>Duration</b>	Varies, depending on the method chosen, from 20 minutes to 1 day
<b>Physical requirements</b>	Pens, paper, sticky notes, and a table or (better) a wall
<b>Energy level</b>	Medium
<b>Facilitators</b>	Minimum 1
<b>Participants</b>	Small groups (3–5 works well)
<b>Expected output</b>	More manageable challenges, more diverse approaches

Often, the theme of ideation is too large or abstract to get a grip on. You can use various techniques to limit or split the theme into more manageable chunks, see different aspects of the theme, and produce more diverse ideas.

Various approaches or techniques can be used to split an ideation challenge into smaller subunits. Here are some useful examples:<sup>01</sup>

- In the Six Thinking Hats exercise by Edward de Bono, participants are encouraged to sequentially adopt different viewpoints by changing hats (blue for managing the big picture, white for information and facts, red for emotions, black for discernment and logic, yellow for optimistic response, green for creativity) and ideate from these.

<sup>01</sup> See for example de Bono, E. (2017). *Six Thinking Hats*. Penguin UK. See also Crawford, R. P. (1968). *Direct Creativity with Attribute Listing*. Fraser. And see <http://www.toyota-global.com> (Company → Toyota Traditions → Quality).



- “Attribute listing”<sup>02</sup> takes different attributes (such as physical, social, procedural, or psychological) of a problem or idea and looks at them individually, ideating around each one.
- The “5 Ws + H” technique invites participants to ask themselves six questions (who, where, what, why, when, and how – questions that have been asked by philosophers since antiquity) and look at variations of the answers to each of those.
- In the “Five Whys” method made famous by Toyota,<sup>03</sup> we look at a problem or fact and ask ourselves “why” five times or more. Each answer can be the starting point for ideation.

<sup>02</sup> See Crawford, R. P. (1968). *Direct Creativity with Attribute Listing*. Fraser.

<sup>03</sup> See <http://www.toyota-global.com> (Company → Toyota Traditions → Quality).



- A** Subtext chains, a physicalization of the Five Whys method which lets us slice a question (here, “What does this angry customer really want?”) into simpler subquestions, and start to generate answers. See the discussion of the subtext method in #TiSDD 7.2, *Prototyping methods*, for more on subtext. The method works well on paper too.

## Step-by-step guide

The process will vary with the specific method used. In general terms:

- 1 Look at your starting point for ideation and consider if and how you will bring previous knowledge into the room (for example, as a research wall or as key insights).
- 2 Invite the right people to work beside your core team for the exercise (this might include people who know the background, people with no preconceptions, experts, representatives of the implementation team, people who will deliver the service, users, management, etc.).
- 3 Prepare the participants, perhaps with a warm-up, to develop a safe space.
- 4 Run the method.
- 5 Examine and perhaps cluster your ideas. What do they suggest? Do you need another run, or even another method?
- 6 Move into idea selection when you are ready.

## Method notes

- Encourage participants to look beyond the obvious by encouraging them to stay on each theme a little longer than they want to. Usually, the first ideas are the obvious ones – but when it starts to get difficult, we are forced to search more widely and there is a potential for real novelty.
- Use ideation methods sequentially, taking the output from one method as the input for the next. This will move you further away from your starting point. ◀