

ADDING DEPTH AND DIVERSITY

BODYSTORMING

A physical ideation method, sometimes called “brainstorming for the body.”⁰¹

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| Duration | Preparation: up to 5 minutes Activity: 15–60 minutes |
| Physical requirements | Optional props or prototyping material, access to the real service location or enough space to represent key functions of the environment |
| Energy level | High |
| Facilitators | 1 or more |
| Participants | Teams of 3–7 people |
| Expected output | Lists of ideas, insights, or new questions; photos or videos of potential futures |

Bodystorming is a physical exploration and discovery method which will generate ideas and understanding as well as quickly revealing assumptions and problems. It is very useful when the ideation challenge has physical or interpersonal aspects; when the group are tired of talking; or when a session needs empathy, energy, or a memorable highlight.

After a short immersion phase in the context of the challenge, the participants play through some ideas, taking on the roles of various stakeholders, groups, or platforms. For example, they might act out some variations of a sales pitch or advisory session, try different ways to serve a cup of coffee to someone with a lot of luggage, or take the part of a “landing page” interacting with customers and directing them to the right part of the website. As they go, they pause to record and reflect on their discoveries. Bodystorming is less structured and much faster than investigative rehearsal,⁰² but has less depth of discovery and insight.

⁰¹ See Gray, D., Brown, S., & Macanufo, J. (2010). *Gamestorming: A Playbook for Innovators, Rulebreakers, and Changemakers*. O'Reilly.

⁰² See #TISDD 7.2, *Prototyping methods*.



Step-by-step guide

- 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 Immerse the group in the context of the challenge. If the group are not very familiar with the context, make a short visit to the location in operating hours and observe, without a specific brief. They might do some quick, informal interviews or use the service as customers. Sketch or photograph the physical environment for later reference, and take brief notes. If the group know the context well (e.g., after a research phase, or because they work or visit there often) this phase can be replaced by storytelling.
- 4 Most bodystorming practitioners prefer to bodystorm in the original service context. This can be inspirational, but can also be restrictive or impractical in many ways. If you prefer, use a workshop space, preparing any props or environmental context you need – for example, a table and a laptop might represent a counter and a cash register.
- 5 Use notes from the group's immersion visit or previous experience to make a list of interesting situations or ideas.
- 6 Take one situation at a time and play around with it by acting it out. You might like to fix roles in advance, or let the group switch between them. There will be lots of laughter at the beginning, which is fine, but remember that this is work. As ideas for alternatives come up, try them out or park them.
- 7 Take notes on a flipchart to help the group remember what they discovered. Video is an alternative for very confident groups – but it is slow when you need to find something.
- 8 Repeat for other situations or ideas.
- 9 Reflect on your discoveries and choose which ideas to take forward, perhaps using an idea selection method.



Method notes

- This method is very different from everyday work for many participants, and the group might feel embarrassed. Prepare them with framing and warm-ups.⁰¹ Warm-up games from improvisational theater like “Yes, and ...” are great.
- Some groups do just fine in an empty room without props and sets, but others find that having physical items helps them be more realistic.
- Many groups will quickly slip into discussion. Remind them that discussion comes later, and encourage them to stay physical. Acting it out often makes discussions superfluous.
- Some groups make their lives too easy and every idea will work straight away, with perfect customers and technology. The facilitator should challenge this, or make the situation more difficult – for example, by adding technical challenges (“delivery will be three months”), or by making a customer angry, skeptical, misinformed, or easily confused. You could invite less active participants to write potential problems on cards, and “play” them when the scene gets too easy.
- Some groups may find it hard to take this seriously. They can be helped by framing this as a prototyping method, or by giving them especially challenging situations to work on.
- For a deeper look at your ideation subject and the emotional experience of stakeholders, see also the methods *Investigative rehearsal* and *Subtext* in #TiSDD 7.2., *Prototyping methods*. ◀



- A Bodystorming ideas for a machine interface by playing through some quick scenarios. Ideas fall thick and fast, so the team member with the notepad is busy recording them.

⁰¹ See #TiSDD 10.3.4, *Creating a safe space*.