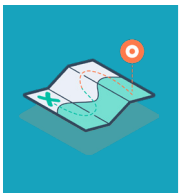




# Critical Thinking & Problem Solving

## Guide + Templates

Collaboration is easier when you have a little help. These brainstorming exercises and templates will help you and your team transform ideas into action. In the first part of this guide we'll cover some of the most popular brainstorming techniques. In the second part of the guide, we'll explain some tools designed to help you make the best decisions.



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# 1

## BRAINSTORMING

This guide contains a number of exercises and templates for both individual and group brainstorming. Regardless if you're doing this alone or with your team, the following rules should help you make the most of your brainstorming session:

- Focus on quantity over quality.
- Selectively apply constraints to keep the session focused.
- Don't prune ideas as you brainstorm.
- Never finalize or commit during a brainstorming session.
- Look at all sources generated for inspiration.
- Use a whiteboard (and take pictures of each whiteboarding session).
- Take breaks.

### Free Writing

Freewriting has long been a great way to get the creative juices flowing. According to a study from [Harvard Business School](#), regular workplace journaling is one of the best ways to improve professional performance. Not to mention, [research shows](#) that occasionally writing by hand improves both memory and creativity. It's no wonder that writers have long used freewriting to break through writer's block. Freewriting will bring perspective to your work and narrow down the focus of your day.

Freewriting can be a great starting point for bigger brainstorming activities, but it's best when conducted with a little bit of structure. As mentioned, freewriting tends to generate the best results when you write on paper, as creativity tends to spark better than when using digital tools. You can also conduct this activity with a group, giving participants the time to write, then afterward, come together to discuss the individual outcomes of the exercise.

### HOW

1. Start with a prompt. This could be a specific problem that needs to be solved, a challenge you might be having with another person, or perhaps a plan to innovate. Having a prompt will help guide your writing.
  - a. If you're finding it difficult to write, [Lumen Learning](#) suggests that you begin with a few questions:
    - i. What am I interested in? What do I care about?
    - ii. What do I know that I could teach others?
    - iii. What would I like to change about this issue?

2. Set a timer to write. Five to fifteen minutes should be enough time to get you started.
3. Don't worry about grammar or sentence structure. Jot down any idea that comes to mind, whether they're connected or not.
4. Don't censor yourself. The purpose of this session is to get the mind thinking. Let yourself write down feelings, ideas, or even rants you may have.
5. After you've run out of time or ideas, reread your passage and circle/highlight the ideas that seem most useful.
6. Consider developing an outline or a plan from the most important ideas that surface.

## Mind Mapping



One of the best ways to brainstorm, structure, and implement a vision, is by visually organizing its data and information. To flesh out almost any multi-faceted or complex concept, ranging from product launches, to organization charts, to the list of Oscar-nominated movies you haven't seen yet, mind maps are your best tool. There are a myriad of digital tools to brainstorm online, but using paper and pen is still one of the foremost ways to help organize your thoughts and ideas.

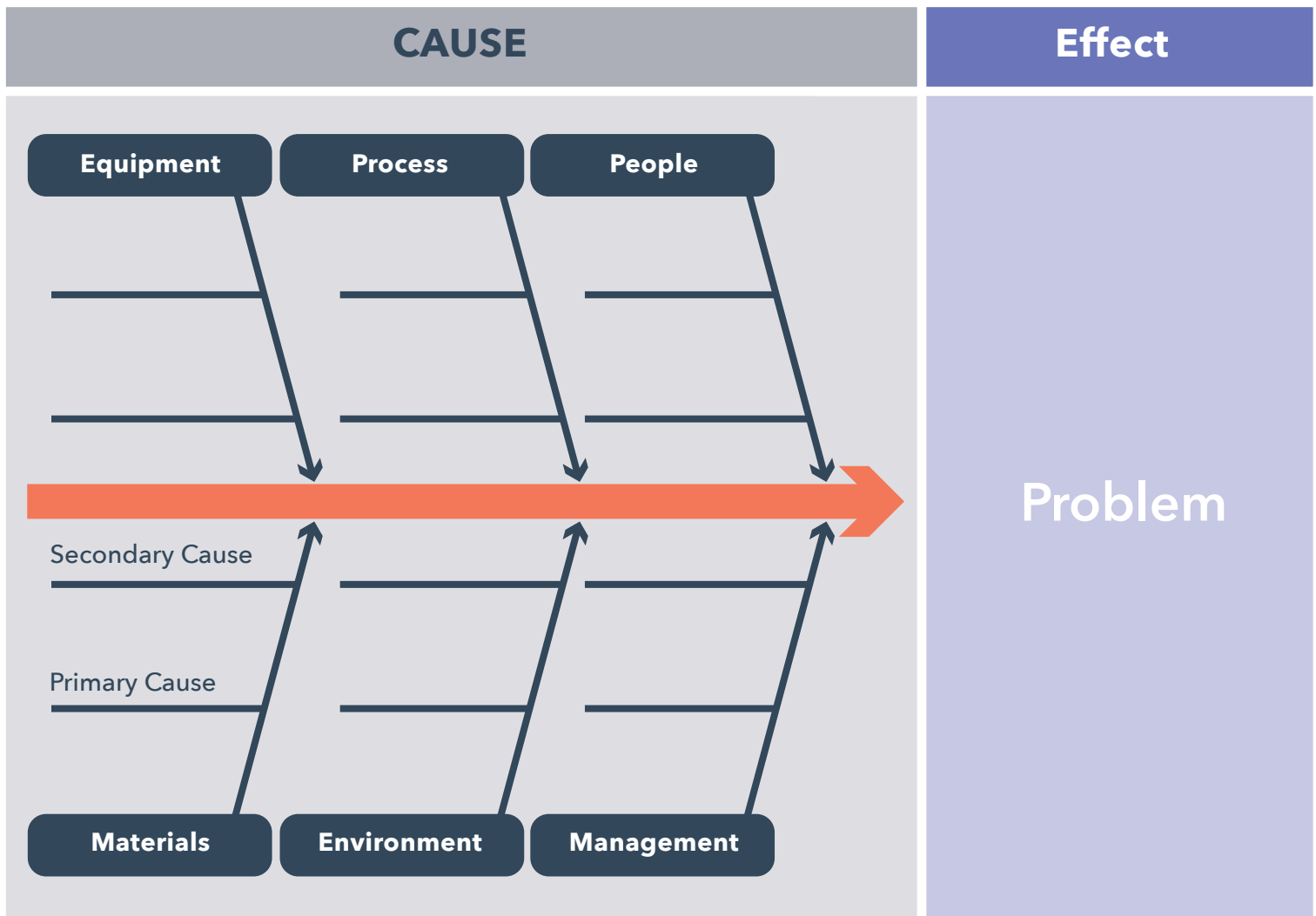
## HOW

1. Choose your topic, and place it in the middle of your piece of paper or digital space. Make it stand out from the rest of the images by drawing a shape around it, or by using a specific color.
2. Come up with at least four to five main ideas. Link them to the center topic in some way. You could do this with a circle and a line, or think of the connections as branches from one to another.
3. Continue brainstorming by drawing additional subtopics that extend from your main ideas. These could be new ideas, tasks, or questions.
4. Keep expanding the mind map outwards with additional sub-sub-topics/keywords and lines/branches.
5. Feel free to include visual signifiers: color coded branches, adding in images, gifs, photos, drawings, symbols, keywords, etc. These will help jog your mind for additional connections.

## Fishbone Diagram

A cause and effect diagram, often called a “fishbone” diagram or the “Ishikawa diagram” after its creator, can help brainstorm possible causes of a problem by sorting ideas into overarching categories such as: people, equipment, process, materials, management, or environment. Team members are **directed to think of alternative problem causes that may fall into these categories. This type of diagram is useful for identifying causes that might otherwise be overlooked.** It’s helpful to include all team members who have personal knowledge of the processes and systems involved in the problem or event to be investigated. Even people on the periphery may have insight that can be helpful here.

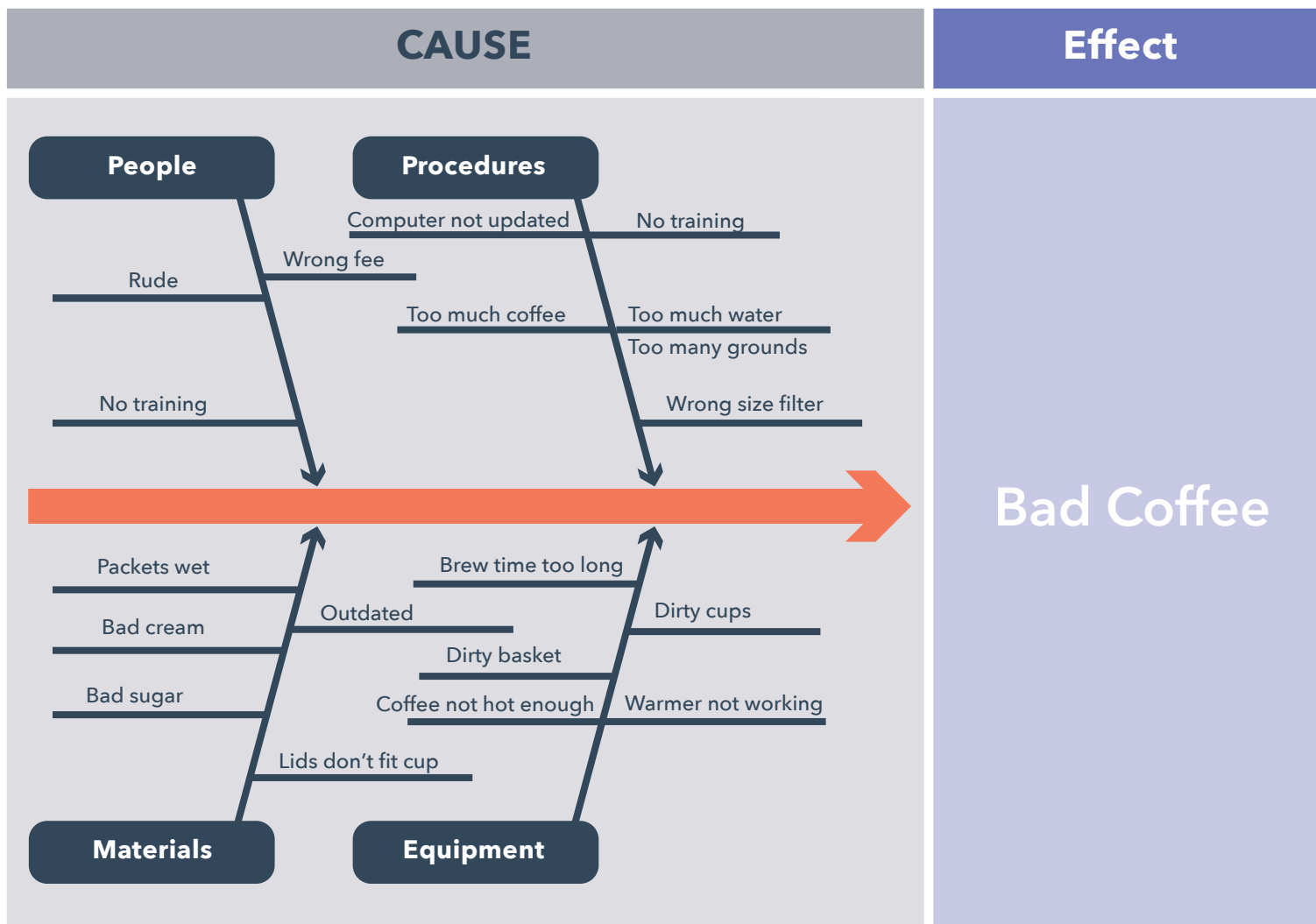
The original Ishikawa diagram:



## HOW

The problem or effect is displayed at the head or mouth of the fish. Possible contributing causes are listed on the smaller “bones” under various cause categories. This diagram explores the problem of bad coffee:

## Fishbone Diagram Example:



The fishbone diagram has long been used in manufacturing settings, and the six causes generally used in these cases are: equipment, process, people, materials, environment, management. Sometimes these are also listed as: measurements, materials, people, methods, machines, and environment. But you can modify these causes to fit your specific needs.

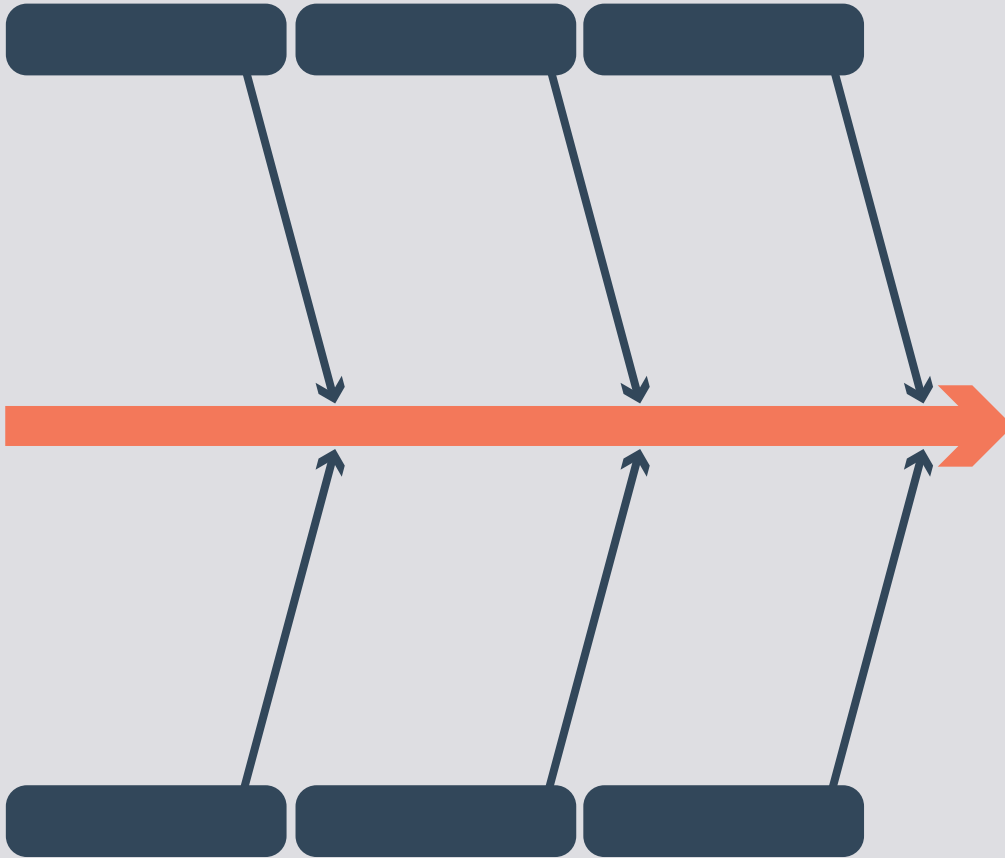
For example, if you're tackling a marketing problem with the fishbone diagram, you might want to consider switching up the causes to align with the [7Ps of Marketing](#).

- Product
- Place
- Price
- People
- Promotion
- Processes
- Physical evidence

**YOUR Fishbone Diagram:**

**CAUSE**

**Effect**

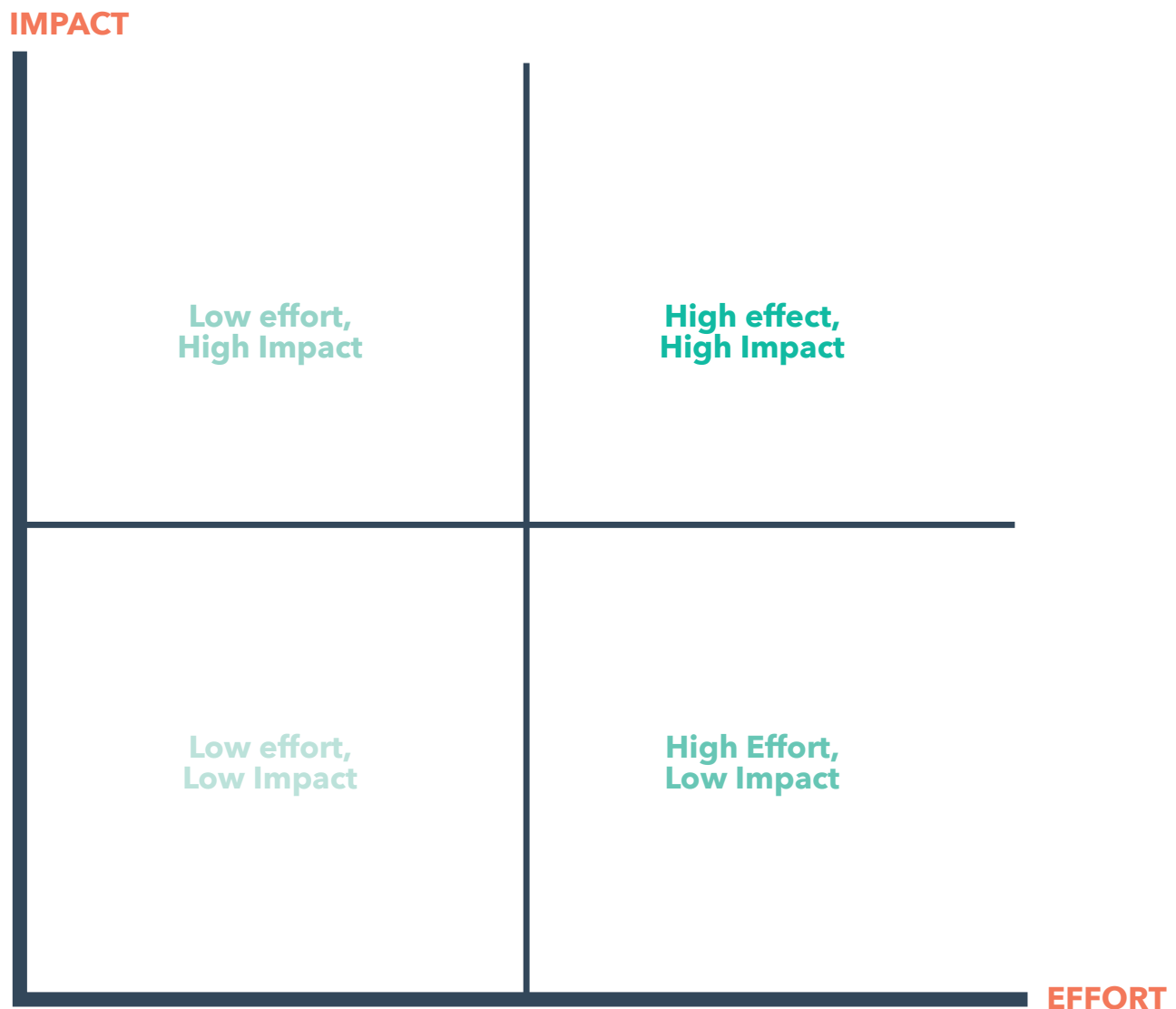




## Rapid Ideation

This method of brainstorming is simple and easy to do. The team is given a prompt, and each person writes down every idea that comes to mind as fast as they can, generating a list of ideas within a specific time period. Having a set time for this ideation is important, as it creates a sense of urgency which can actually help you be more creative.

A great way to do this is to hand everyone a pad of Post-it Notes. Set a timer for five or ten minutes, and have people use the Post-its to write down all of their ideas. Once time is out, have them add their Post-it Notes to a wall or a whiteboard for group discussion. Before doing this, it may be helpful to section off the whiteboard into an impact/effort matrix:

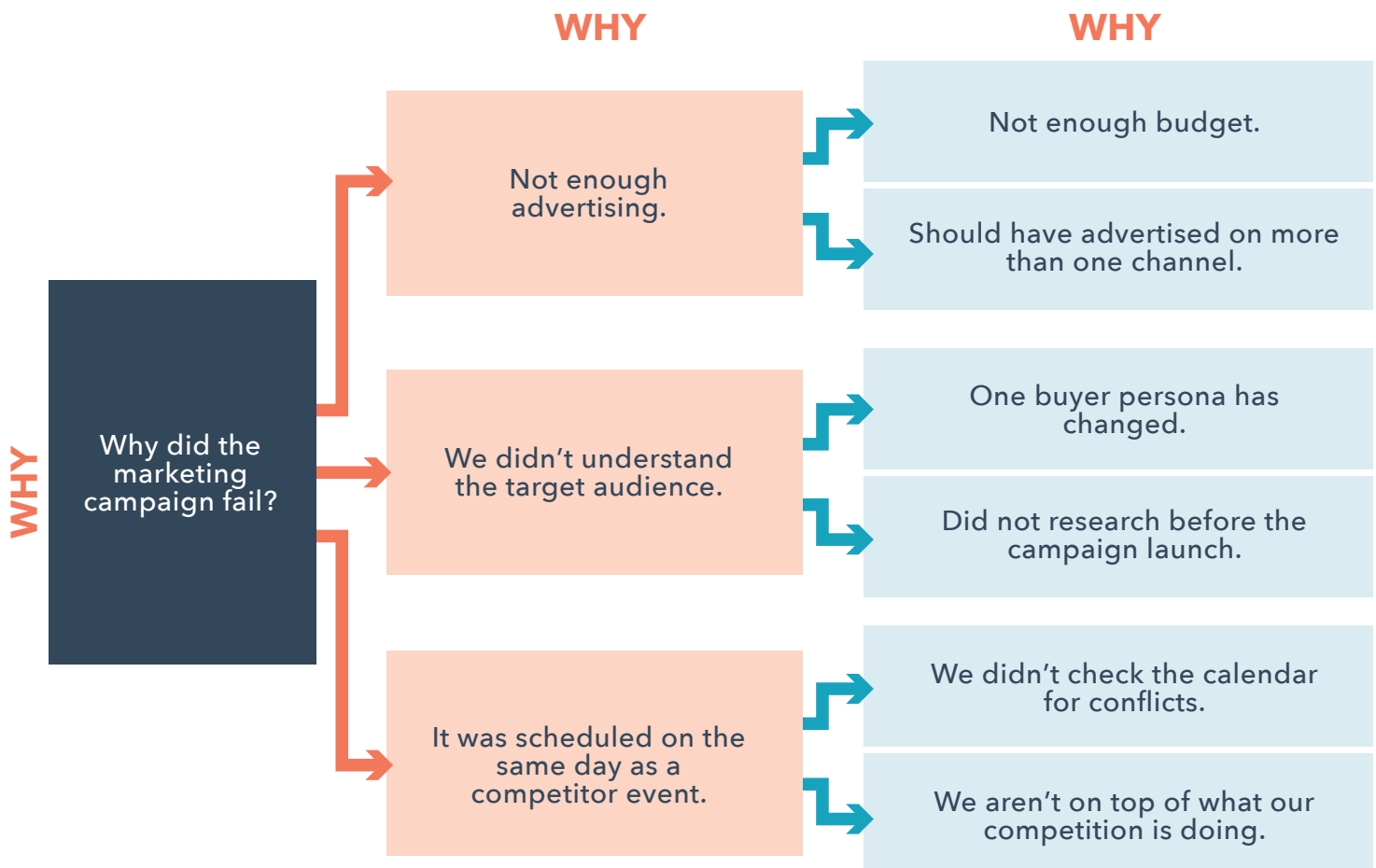


After everyone has placed their Post-it Notes, you can ask participants to vote on their favorites by placing a sticker or drawing a check mark on the notes.

## Why-Why & How-How

The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates is well known for his method of inquiry, which involves employing a series of truth-seeking questions to identify and challenge one's underlying assumptions. Over the last 2400 years, the idea of Socratic learning has prevailed; the belief that people have aptitudes and gifts that can be nurtured through questioning, self-exploration and metacognition—in other words, thinking about one's own thinking. Socrates was a proponent of "anamnesis," the idea of recollection or drawing upon the deeper resources and hidden ideas within an individual. His method of inquiry was geared toward helping a person explore deep-seeded thoughts and beliefs, and bringing them to new understandings. Socrates accomplished this through a series of questions, asking over and over, "Why" and "How," until the final truth was revealed.

Using these diagrams is easy. In the first box put your question, which should begin with "Why," or with "How." Answer the question two or three times. For each answer, ask "why" or "how" again. You can do this multiple times until you feel like you have generated enough ideas. For example, in each of these stages, the team asked "why?"

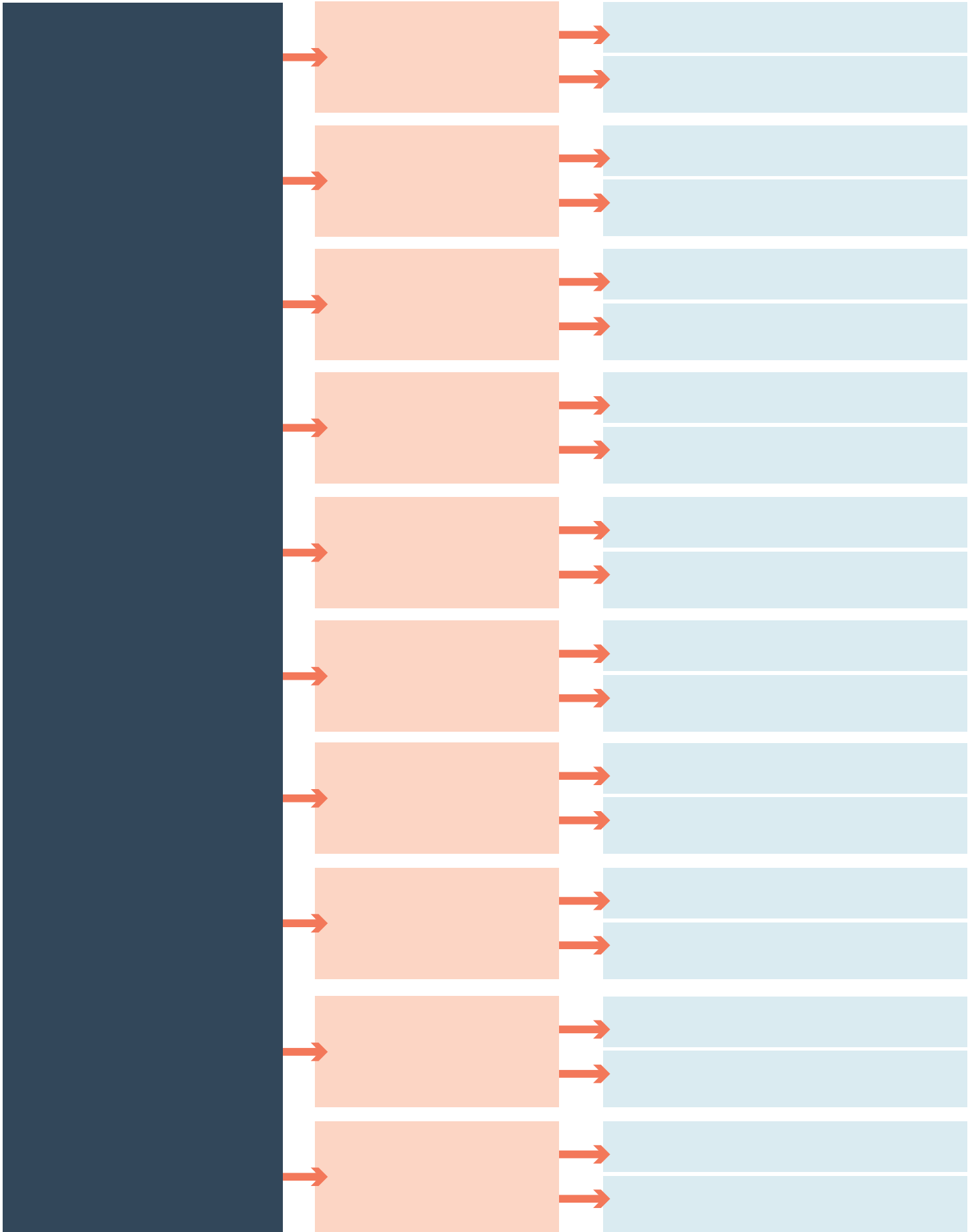


As you can see, one of the greatest strengths of these exercises is the way that they can be used to determine the cause and effect of actions. You can do this exercise on paper, a whiteboard, or by using one of the below templates.

WHY

WHY

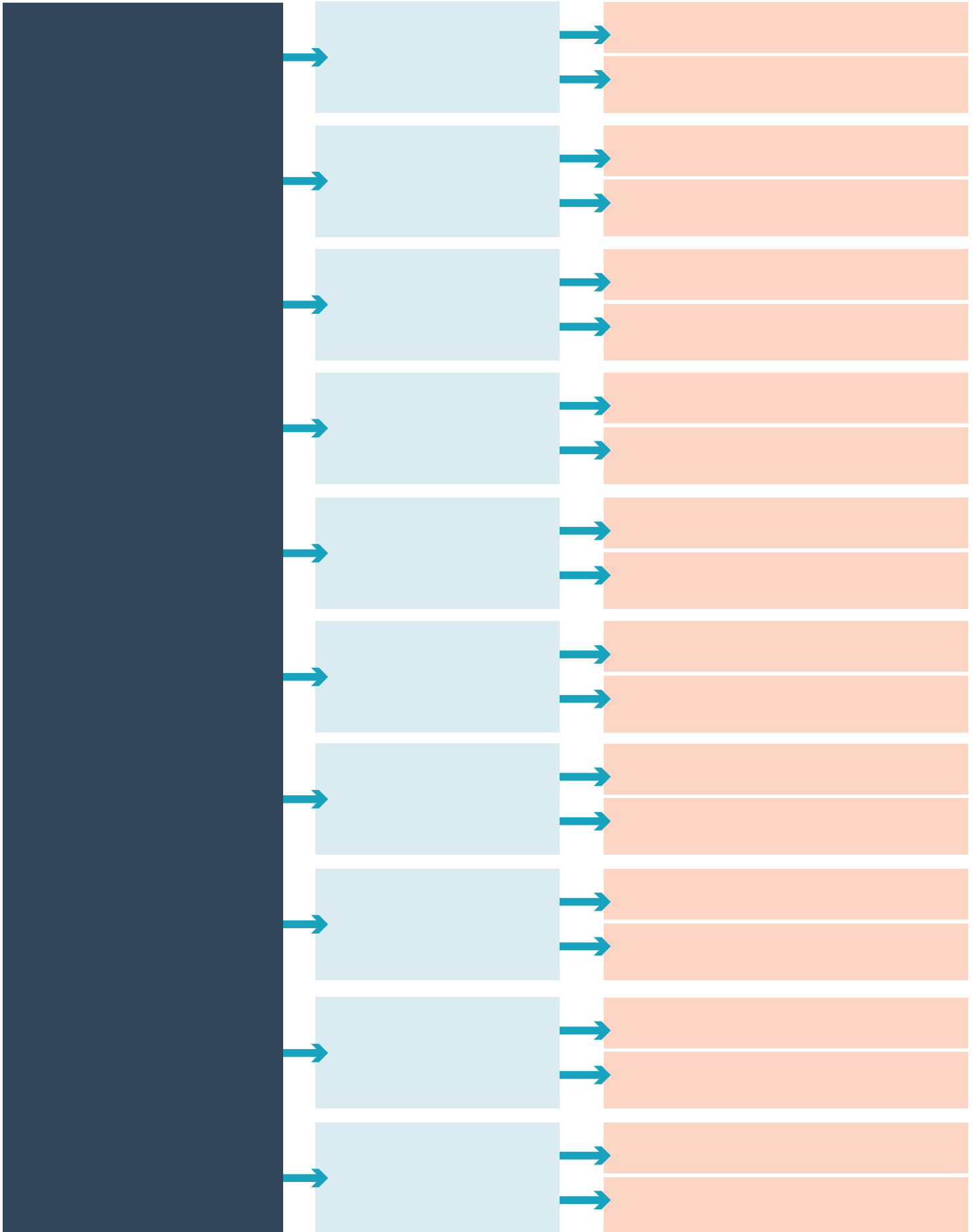
WHY



HOW

HOW

HOW



## Reverse Brainstorming

In certain corporations and government entities, data security is the highest priority. So high, in fact, that these organizations have been known to [hire hackers](#) – many of whom have committed internet crimes – to hack their systems and find out where their weaknesses are.

This "reverse" approach to security, wherein you hack your own company, is considered one of the best ways to secure a server from intrusion. And for us, it's the inspiration behind this fourth brainstorming technique.

When you reverse brainstorm, you essentially work to create problems rather than solutions. "Why on Earth would you want to do that?" you might ask. Creating problems teaches you what not to do, so you're more intuitive to the needs of your project. Think of it like hacking your company to find out where the weaknesses are. There are a few benefits to this process:

- Reverse brainstorming tells you what to avoid from the get-go.
- It's easier to start with what to not to do rather than what to do – the latter of which can make us feel stuck.
- It helps you avoid decision fatigue early on in the ideation process.

Say, for example, you want to drive awareness to a new product. As a marketer, you have many promotional channels at your disposal; but you may not know how to use them or where to start. In a reverse brainstorming session, you might come up with the following:

- Avoid hyperlinks to the product's purchase page
- Don't tweet about the product
- Criticize the features of your product

Obviously, these are all horrible ideas if your goal is to promote the product. But, take the reverse of these ideas, and you've effectively created three excellent starting points for a supportive campaign: Link to the product in a series of blog posts, develop a Twitter campaign around the product, and identify specific features of the product that prospects would be most interested in reading or hearing about.

You can also use reverse brainstorming to come up with actions for promoting a new product. Or you could come up with the top worst clients you could attract to your company, which would tell you the best types of leads you should pursue. Or, you could outline what failure looks like for your team, which you could then use to come up with new goals and objectives. **Reverse brainstorming can give you a completely new angle to use when tackling sticky problems.**

## Round Robin Brainstorming

You know that one loud guy in the group who talks over people so that half the room doesn't even bother speaking up? The Round Robin technique stops that problem by giving everyone the opportunity to give their opinion, without one person influencing the others. With Round Robin, everyone's ideas have equal weight.

To conduct a Round Robin session:

1. Provide index cards or Post-It notes for each team member. You can also use an online collaboration tool like [Miro](#) or [Lucidchart](#).
2. The facilitator of the session should give an overview of the problem and objectives of the brainstorming session, whether that's to solve the problem or to understand certain aspects of it to determine various solutions.
3. Each team member should think of one idea and write it down on a card. It's best to discourage discussion during the idea gathering process.
4. Once each person has written down an idea, the card should be passed to the person next to them.
5. The new card from the person's neighbor is now the jumping off-point for new ideas. Each person should use that idea as inspiration to create another idea. This is where Post-It notes come in handy, to add ideas to the note or card.
6. Continue the round robin swapping of ideas for a designated amount of time.
7. Collect the ideas. You can now organize, discuss, and rank the ideas with an impact/effort matrix (see the rapid ideation section above), or even vote on the best solution.

## Rolestorming

This technique enables brainstormers to look at things as though they're in someone else's shoes. Participants are encouraged to role play and answer questions from the perspective of someone else--real or fictional--for example, Oprah Winfrey, Napoleon, or Harry Potter. Looking at problems as someone else can help open all sorts of doors to new possibilities.

Rolestorming isn't a technique that is used on its own. Instead it is often used in conjunction with other brainstorming techniques to help individuals overcome inhibitions that may be preventing great ideas from surfacing.

As mentioned, the roles that a team member might play can be real or fictional. You could, for example, ask individuals to take on a role such as:

- The CEO of the company, or another member of senior leadership.
- A fictional character that is well-known, such as a superhero (or villain) or someone easily recognizable from books, television, or movies.
- A famous historical figure.
- A demanding partner, client, or ex-client.

Then, to conduct the brainstorming, consider the following:

1. Ask each person to explain who they are rolestorming as, and what qualities the person they're embodying may have.
2. Each team member should really role-play, pretending to be that character.
3. Conduct the brainstorm as you would normally.
4. You might consider switching up the roles partway through, either by asking team members to trade identities, or choose new ones.
5. While this method may be fun, and even funny, remember that the cardinal rule of brainstorming is that all ideas should matter, even if they're strange, or impractical.

## S.C.A.M.P.E.R

S.C.A.M.P.E.R. is essentially a process for expanding and improving upon ideas by testing and questioning them from different angles. For each letter of the mnemonic, ask yourself a related question about your project or the problem at hand:

- **Substitute:** What would happen to the project if we swapped X for Y?
- **Combine:** What would happen to the project if we combined X and Y?
- **Adapt:** What changes would need to be made to adapt this project to a different context?
- **Modify:** What could we modify to create more value on this project?
- **Put to another use:** What other uses or applications might this project have?
- **Eliminate:** What could we remove from the project to simplify it?
- **Reverse:** How could we reorganize this project to make it more effective?

This method forces you to approach your project or problem in unexpected ways. Each question asks you to dig a little deeper into the issue and consider new possibilities.

**S.C.A.M.P.E.R.** will get you to think beyond predefined assumptions about your product or project. The series of “would” and “could” questions lets your mind run free with minimal commitment to any actual change or alteration. It allows you to improve a process even if you believe the process has reached its optimal form.

While **S.C.A.M.P.E.R.** might seem like a brainstorming activity for product development teams, it can serve marketing teams just as well. Use it to:

- Improve a current process – such as keyword research or market research – by substituting, combining, and adapting tasks.
- Optimize the copy of a blog post or campaign by crafting hypothetical changes that could improve the piece. These changes could make it easier to “template” the piece.
- Build a drip campaign that effectively gets leads to convert by modifying and substituting certain email messages.



# 2

## DECISION MAKING

Sometimes making a decision isn't as straightforward as you might like. There might be many pros and cons of a decision that need to be weighed. While various outcomes could be positive, one may prove to be most beneficial. The following decision-making tools will help you organize your thinking so you can assess risk, determine possible outcomes, and better predict your chances for success.

### Pros & Cons List

The pros and cons list is a simple tool that you may already be familiar with. Pros are listed as arguments in favor of making a particular decision or action. Cons are arguments against it. To make a list, on a piece of paper (or a whiteboard), draw a line down the middle and add headers for pros and cons on each side. Then, simply fill it out.

A few things to note:

- The two sides need not correlate to each other.
- One side may have more points than the other, which may make your decision-making easier. For example, if you want to ask for a promotion and you have more pros than cons, you may decide the time is right to ask.
- You might also want to list out how this decision may affect the people around you as well, as they may consider different pros and cons from you.

Let's say you need to decide if you should purchase a specific piece of software for your team.

Your list might look like this:

Should we purchase the new messaging system for our team?	
PROS	CONS
May facilitate better real-time problem solving among teams	Notifications may be distracting for workers who can't multitask well
Channels can be public or private	Not easily customizable
Application plug-ins available	Expensive
More manageable than email for some types of communication	Will need to request extra budget
Mobile and desktop apps	Limited message storage
Great security and encryption	Will need to consider headcount for implementation & ongoing management

This may be enough information to make a decision, but if not, you can also consider weighting the list. As you can see, the pros outweigh the cons in this example.

Should we purchase the new messaging system for our team?			
PROS	SCORE (1-10)	SCORE (1-10)	CONS
May facilitate better real-time problem solving among teams	8	5	Notifications may be distracting for workers who can't multitask well
Channels can be public or private	8	7	Not easily customizable
Application plug-ins available	8	8	Expensive
More manageable than email for some types of communication	9	6	Will need to request extra budget
Mobile and desktop apps	7	9	Limited message storage
Great security and encryption	7	8	Will need to consider headcount for implementation & ongoing management
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>

## Decision Tree

A decision tree is a flowchart-style diagram that helps you analyze various courses of action you might take for any given obstacle, and the consequences for each. There are three parts to a decision tree: the root node, leaf nodes, and branches. This method can help you weigh risk versus reward, and map out a course of action to follow.

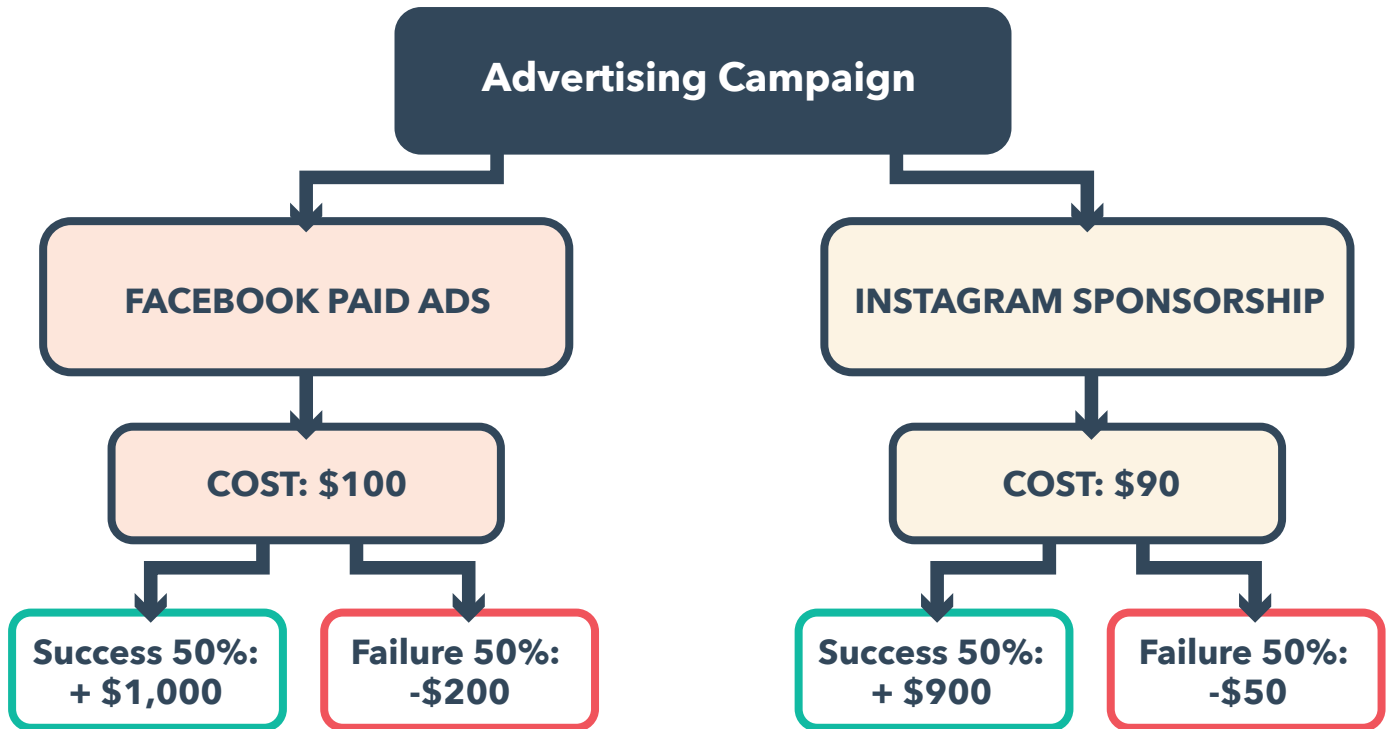
The visual element of a decision tree helps you include more potential actions and outcomes than you might if you just talked about it, enabling you to mitigate risks of unforeseen consequences. Plus, the diagram allows you to include smaller details and create a step-by-step plan, so once you choose your path, it's already laid out for you to follow.

## Decision Tree Analysis

Let's say you're deciding whether to advertise your new campaign on Facebook using paid ads, or on Instagram, using influencer sponsorships.

For the sake of simplicity, we'll assume both options appeal to your ideal demographic and make sense for your brand.

Here's a preliminary decision tree you'd draw for your advertising campaign:



As you can see, you want to put your ultimate objective at the top -- in this case, Advertising Campaign is the decision you need to make.

Next, you'll need to draw arrows (your branches) to each potential action you could take (your leaves).

For our example, you only have two initial actions to take: Facebook Paid Ads, or Instagram Sponsorships. Your tree might include multiple alternative options depending on the objective, however.

Now, you'll want to draw branches and leaves to compare costs. In the example, these are the boxes for Facebook Paid Ads and Instagram sponsorship. Then branches are added with additional information. If this were the final step, the decision would be obvious: Instagram costs \$10 less, so you'd likely choose that.

However, you're not there yet. You need to figure out the odds for success versus failure. Depending on the complexity of your objective, you might examine existing data in the industry or from prior projects at your company, your team's capabilities, budget, time-requirements, or predicted outcomes. You might also consider external circumstances that could affect success.

In the Advertising Campaign example, you may have determined that there's a 50% chance of success or failure for both Facebook and Instagram. If you succeed with Facebook, your ROI is around \$1,000. If you fail, you risk losing \$200.

Instagram, on the other hand, has an ROI of \$900. If you fail, you risk losing \$50.

## Decision Tree Formula

**To evaluate risk versus reward, you need to find out Expected Value for both avenues.**

**Here is the base formula:**

$$[[\text{Percentage of predicted success}] \times [\text{potential amount of money earned}]] +$$
$$[[\text{Percentage of predicted chance of failure}] \times [\text{amount of money lost}]] = \text{Expected Value.}$$

**Here's how you'd figure out your Expected Value:**

1. Take your predicted **success** (50%)
2. Multiply it by the potential amount of money earned (\$1000 for Facebook).
3. That = 500.

**THEN**

4. Take your predicted **failure** (50%)
5. Multiply it by the potential amount of money lost (-\$200 for Facebook).
6. That = -100.

**THEN**

7. Add those two numbers together.

**EVALUATE & FIND ANSWER**

Using this formula, you'll see **Facebook's Expected Value is 400**, while **Instagram's Expected Value is 425**.

**With this predictive information, you should be able to make a better, more confident decision --** in this case, selecting Instagram as the better option. Even though Facebook has a higher ROI, Instagram has a higher Expected Value, and you risk losing less money.

## How to create a decision tree in Excel

- Put your base decision under column A, and format the cell with a bold border
- Put potential actions in column B in two different cells, diagonal to your base decision
- In column C, include potential costs or consequences of the actions you put in column B
- Go to the shape tool, and draw an arrow from initial decision, through action and consequence

While the Advertising Campaign example had qualitative numbers to use as indicators of risk versus reward, your decision tree might be more subjective. For instance, perhaps you're deciding whether your small startup should merge with a bigger company.

In this case, there could be math involved, but your decision tree might also include more qualitative questions, like:

- Does this company represent our brand values? Yes/No.
- Do our customers benefit from the merge? Yes/No.

Remember, one of the best perks of a decision tree is its flexibility. By visualizing different paths you might take, you may find a course of action you hadn't considered before, or decide to merge paths to optimize your results.

## Decision Matrix

When you're overwhelmed with options and variables, or see no obvious choice between several perfectly good ones, the decision matrix (also known as the decision-making grid or Pugh Method) works wonders.

Let's say your company needs a CRM. You've shortlisted a few industry-leading solutions. Using the decision matrix, you can draw a complete, objective comparison of vendors based on the criteria most important to you- all in one neat little table.

Here's how to make one:

1. List your decision options, in this case, your vendors. Arrange them in rows.
2. List the factors affecting your decision. What are some key considerations when choosing software? Make these your columns.
3. Add an extra row for weight, and an extra column for total.

Your table might look something like this:

	WEIGHT					
Cost						
Ease of Use						
Compatibility						
Tech Support						
Customization						
Scalability						
Reporting						
Total						

4. Score each option for each factor. How well does Vendor B satisfy ease of use, for example? Work your way down each column, scoring the vendors from 0 (poor) to 5 (rockstar). Be as objective as you can.
5. Give each factor some weight. How important is the factor to your decision? Underneath, add a number from 0 (unimportant) to 5 (indispensable).

Come back and use this example table above as a template.

For example:

	WEIGHT	VENDOR A	VENDOR B	VENDOR C	VENDOR D	VENDOR E
Cost	3	4	3	0	0	2
Ease of Use	5	1	0	2	4	5
Compatibility	1	0	1	2	3	3
Tech Support	2	0	2	5	5	4
Customization	3	2	5	4	1	2
Scalability	5	4	5	3	1	4
Reporting	4	5	4	0	1	2
Total						

6. Calculate your weighted scores. Multiply the scores from step four by the values in step five where they intersect. These are your weighted scores for each option/factor combination. Make them your new cell entries.
7. Add up the weighted scores for each option. Pick the highest.

Using our example, Vendor E triumphs:

	WEIGHT	VENDOR A	VENDOR B	VENDOR C	VENDOR D	VENDOR E
Cost	3	12	9	0	0	6
Ease of Use	5	5	0	10	20	25
Compatibility	1	0	1	2	3	3
Tech Support	2	0	4	10	10	8
Customization	3	6	15	12	3	6
Scalability	5	20	25	15	5	20
Reporting	4	20	16	0	4	8
Total		63	70	49	45	76

## SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis is a strategic planning technique that puts your business in perspective using the following perspectives: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Using a SWOT analysis helps you identify areas your business can improve and maximize opportunities, while simultaneously determining negative factors that might hinder your chances of success.

While it may seem simple on the surface, a SWOT analysis allows you to make unbiased evaluations on:

- Your business or brand
- Market positioning
- A new project or initiative
- A specific campaign or channel

Practically anything that requires strategic planning (internal or external) can have the SWOT framework applied to it, helping you to avoid unnecessary errors down the road from lack of insight.

To create a SWOT analysis:

### **1. Arrange each section into a table with four quadrants.**

Whether you use the template above as a model or create your own to suit your needs, it can be helpful to start in table format to visualize your SWOT analysis. This can be done by arranging each of the four sections into separate quadrants.

### **2. Identify your objective.**

Before you start writing things down, you'll need to figure out what you're trying to evaluate with your SWOT analysis. Be specific with what you want to analyze. Otherwise, your SWOT analysis may end up being too broad, and you may get analysis paralysis as you go to make your evaluations. If you're creating a social media program, you'll want to conduct an analysis to inform your content creation strategy. If you're launching a new product, you'll want to understand its potential positioning within your industry. If you're considering a brand redesign, you'll want to consider existing and future brand conceptions.

All of these are examples of good reasons to conduct a SWOT analysis. By identifying your objective, you'll be able to tailor your evaluation to get more actionable insights.



### 3. Identify your strengths.

"Strengths" refers to what you're currently doing well. Think about the factors that are going in your favor as well as the things you offer that your competitors just can't beat.

For example, let's say you want to use a SWOT analysis to evaluate your new social media strategy.

If you're looking at a new social media program, perhaps you want to evaluate how your brand is perceived by the public -- is it easily recognizable and well-known? Even if it's not popular with a widespread group, is it well-received by a specific audience in particular?

Next, think about your process: Is it effective or innovative? Is there good communication between your marketing and sales to ensure both departments use similar vocabulary when discussing your product?

Finally, evaluate your social media message, and in particular, how it differs from the rest of the industry. I'm willing to bet you can make a lengthy list of some major strengths of your social media strategy over your competitors, so try to dive into your strengths from there.

### 4. Identify your weaknesses.

Similarly to your strengths, what are the roadblocks hindering you from reaching your goals?

What do your competitors offer that continue to be a thorn in your side? This section isn't about being a Negative Nancy. Rather, it's critical to foresee any potential obstacles that could mitigate your success.

When identifying weaknesses, consider what areas of your business are the least profitable, where you lack certain resources, or what costs you the most time and money. Take input from employees in different departments, as they'll likely see weaknesses you hadn't considered.

If you're examining a new social media strategy, you might start by asking yourself these questions: First, if I were a consumer, what would prevent me from buying this product, or engaging with this business? What would make me click away from the screen?

Second, what do I foresee as the biggest hindrance to my employees' productivity, or their ability to get the job done efficiently? What derails their social media efforts?

## 5. Consider your opportunities.

This is your chance to dream big. What are some opportunities for your social media strategy you hope, but don't necessarily expect, to reach?

For instance, maybe you're hoping your Facebook ads will attract a new, larger demographic. Maybe you're hoping your YouTube video gets 10,000 views, and increases sales by 10%. Whatever the case, it's important to include potential opportunities in your SWOT analysis. Ask yourself these questions: Which technologies do I want my business to use to make it more effective? What new target audience do I want to reach? How can the business stand out more in the current industry? Is there something our customers complain about that we could fix with our social media strategy?

The opportunities category goes hand-in-hand with the weaknesses category. Once you've made a list of weaknesses, it should be easy to create a list of potential opportunities that could arise once they've been eliminated.

## 6. Contemplate your threats.

It's likely, especially if you're prone to worrying, you already have a good list of threats in your head.

If not, gather your employees and brainstorm: What obstacles might prevent us from reaching our social media goals? What's going on in the industry, or with our competitors, that might mitigate our success? Is there new technology out there that could conflict with our product?

Writing down your threats helps you evaluate them objectively. For instance, maybe you list your threats in terms of "least" and "most likely" to occur, and divide and conquer each. If one of your biggest threats is your competitor's popular Instagram account, you could work with your marketing department to create content that showcases your product's unique features.

Let's look at a couple of examples. Here's how we'd fill out a SWOT template, if we were Starbucks:

STRENGTHS	OPPORTUNITIES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Great brand recognition</li><li>2. Recognizable chain, worldwide</li><li>3. High quality, unique products (not just coffee...)</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Diversify Products for cultures</li><li>2. Expand in Asia and Africa</li><li>3. Use technological advances as ways to distribute product (i.e. mobile orders)</li></ol>
WEAKNESSES	THREATS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. High prices</li><li>2. Easy to imitate products</li><li>3. Products often don't account for cultural diversity in certain regions</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Competition from low-cost coffee sellers</li><li>2. Competition from independent coffeehouses (there's movement to support independent over chain)</li><li>3. Other businesses imitate their products</li></ol>

Some small-business marketers may have difficulty relating to the SWOT's of a big brand like Starbucks, so here's an example of how a restaurant might visualize each element:

STRENGTHS	OPPORTUNITIES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. World-class chefs</li> <li>2. Positive reviews</li> <li>3. Years of service</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Solid current business location</li> <li>2. Ability to open more locations</li> <li>3. International cuisine is trendy on social media</li> </ol>
WEAKNESSES	THREATS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We don't offer delivery</li> <li>2. We've been told we're pricier than competitors in our area</li> <li>3. We haven't added to the menu in years</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. New competitors are moving in next door</li> <li>2. People will prefer delivery to dining in</li> <li>3. Meal prep services are teaching people how to cook many of our menu items from home</li> </ol>

While a Thai or any other restaurant might not be as worried about high-level lawsuits like Starbucks, small businesses might be more worried about competitors or disruptors entering the playing field.

In another small-business example, a local boutique might be well known in its neighborhood, but it also might take time to build an online presence or get its products in an online store. Because of this, some of its strengths and opportunities might relate to physical factors, while weaknesses and threats might relate to online situations.

STRENGTHS	OPPORTUNITIES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Minimal local competition</li> <li>2. Trust from customers and the neighborhood</li> <li>3. Affordable prices</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Marketing on social media</li> <li>2. An online store could boost our revenue</li> <li>3. Our location could pull in new foot traffic</li> </ol>
WEAKNESSES	THREATS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Poor social media presence</li> <li>2. No online ordering</li> <li>3. Dated styles and accessories</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bad online reviews</li> <li>2. Online Competitors</li> <li>3. Could lose foot traffic due to dated fashion</li> </ol>

Ultimately, a SWOT analysis can measure and tackle both big/small challenges and opportunities, and both big/little strengths and weaknesses.

While the examples above focus on businesses in general, you can also use a SWOT analysis to evaluate and predict how a singular product will play out in the market. Use the template on the following page to create your own SWOT analysis.

## SWOT Analysis Template

STRENGTHS	OPPORTUNITIES
WEAKNESSES	THREATS



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