

# Brainstorming Process and Its Use in Libraries

Sanda Oo

## Abstract

This paper studies a systematic approach to problem-solving process in a work place. In this process, there are two techniques. They are brainstorming and cause and effect diagramming. This paper emphasizes on brainstorming process as a management tool. Brainstorming is a practical techniques fostering creative problem-solving. It is a method of free expression and is employed when the solutions to problem cannot be deduced logically and/ or when creative new ideas are required. It describes brainstorming process and the factors to be considered for organizing brainstorming sessions. Finally, it discusses the usefulness of brainstorming session in Yadanabon University Library.

**Keywords:** brainstorming process, management tool, problem-solving, decision-making, new ideas, group activity

## Introduction

In any organizations, there may have some problems or barriers that prevent them from accomplishing their goals and objectives. Organizational members will often encounter problems or obstacles and need the guidance, experience, or assistance of their supervisor or some other respected persons. Therefore, both supervisors and employees should be skilled in using some kinds of logical system in dealing with problems. By taking a logical and systematic approach, the problem solving process develops. There are two techniques that may be used at many points in this process. They are brainstorming and cause-and-effect diagramming. They play an important role in management by objectives.

This paper aims to improve working conditions of the libraries by organizing brainstorming process, that is, problem-solving process. Brainstorming can help the librarian in decision-making when he encounters problems in the library. This process is one of the effective management systems for any libraries.

## Brainstorming

An approach to solving creative problems commonly used by group is brainstorming. Brainstorming is a method of free expression and is employed when the solutions to problems cannot be deduced logically and / or when creative new ideas are required. This technique was devised by Alex Osborn, an advertising executive, in 1930s for coming up with creative new ideas. Brainstorming is a favourite theory thought up by Osborn. It has been used successfully in business, industry, government and education. It involves separating idea production from idea evaluation. It encourages individuals and groups to use their collective thinking power to create new ideas and bring out existing ideas that might never be heard.

Brainstorming works best in groups. It is a practical technique fostering creative problem-solving in the qorkspace.<sup>1</sup> It is useful and can be applied in the situations presenting the problems that can have multiple solutions. It can be employed in a structured manner in which the group follows a set of rules or in an unstructured format which allows anyone in the group to present ideas randomly as they occur. If practiced in libraries, it gives new, exciting approaches to solving the problems creatively.

## Organizing Brainstorming Sessions

The members of brainstorming groups are encouraged to present their ideas in an uncritical way and to discuss freely and openly all ideas on the floor.

The following are some factors to be considered in organizing a brainstorming session:

- i. Prepare a clear and focused statement of the problem.
- ii. Form group and appoint a leader/ facilitator.
- iii. Elect someone to record the ideas as precisely and explicating as possible, ideally on a flipchart to maintain a visible and permanent record or on a white board.
- iv. Review the rules of brainstorming (i.e. code of conduct), for example:
  - (a) Each member in rotation is asked for ideas.
  - (b) A member can only offer one idea in turn.
  - (c) Think of as many ideas as he/ she can.  
(The more ideas to choose from, the greater the chance of a good one.)
  - (d) These ideas are stated in as few words as possible.
  - (e) Where a member has no ideas he or she says "pass".
  - (f) Strive for an explosion of ideas and build on the ideas of other group members.
  - (g) No criticism, discussion, interruptions, comments or judgment ideas are evaluated during the brainstorming session.
  - (h) No fault-finding is allowed, it stifles ideas, halts associations.
  - (i) Accept all ideas as given and record them. Questions are only asked to clarify issues.
  - (j) Good-natured laughter and informality enhance the environment for innovation activity.
  - (k) Exaggeration adds humour and often provides a creative stimulus.
- v. Review the problems encountered in brainstorming in order to prevent or minimize their occurrence. The typical problems include:
  - (a) Attempting to evaluate ideas during brainstorming.
  - (b) Criticism of individuals.
  - (c) A person trying to play the role of an "expert".
  - (d) A tendency to state "solutions" rather than possible "causes".
  - (e) Arguments
  - (f) Side discussion and members trying to talk all together.
  - (g) Members shouting out ideas when it is not their turn.
  - (h) Leader domination
  - (i) Approaching each idea with a negative attitude.
- vi. As ideas are suggested, these are written down so that they can be seen by all members of the group.
- vii. Allow the ideas to incubate for a period of time before they are evaluated.
- viii. Determine the best ideas by consensus. This can be done in a number of ways majority voting or polling, paired comparisons, ranking on a scale of say 1-10, or each team member ranks the item in order of priority.

## Qualities of Leadership in Brainstorming

The leader who conducts a brainstorming session should have the following qualities.

1. Should be confident, patient and enthusiastic.

2. Should have a sense of humour to be able to generate laughter and enjoyment at the session.
  3. Should understand the suggestive power of wild ideas.
  4. Should he/ she contribute some ideas leading to the other ideas by the participants.
- Hence, to conduct brainstorming session, the role of leader is very crucial.

## **Brainstorming in Libraries**

As a management tool, brainstorming can be effective in libraries in various situations. For example, when we want to improve our library services, or when we want the library staff to increase their interest in the routine work, brainstorming practice can bring the solution to the problem.

In any libraries, the librarian may encounter some problems on managing the library. They may be staff problem, user service problem, budget problem, acquisitions of library resources problem, technical service problem, etc. To generate solutions to these problems, brainstorming session can be organized in the library.

Depending on the situations, some of the problem statements that can lead to creative thinking can be stated.

- How to organize better information services in a library?
- How to organize user education programmes on libraries?
- How to get more membership for the library?
- How to the overdue books less?
- How to make the routine work interesting in the library?
- How to market our services?
- How to study the information seeking behavior of users?
- How to improve the qualities of library staff?
- How to organize better the exhibitions in the library?
- How to train the library staff to know the latest development in computers?
- How to acquire the library resources to meet the users' requirements?
- How to organize the library to be favourable environs?

By conducting Brainstorming sessions, some of the new ideas of the participants may come put. Some ideas will express the expectations from the library staff. By evaluating these ideas, the librarian will know the expectations and he/ she can apply the ideas in his / her library management to improve working conditions of the library.

## **Conducting Brainstorming Process in Yadanabon University Library**

Brainstorming process was conducted in Yadanabon University Library . It was a very small session. The problem statement was “How to make the routine work interesting in the library?” The librarian led the session and only seven junior library assistants participated in it. It lasted for about one hour. The participants gave some of the ideas below:

We can make our work interesting by

- Making refresher course for all routine works
- Giving training the library staff to know the latest development in ICT
- Learning from the past experience
- being flexible at work
- giving awards for the best work

Some ideas expressed their expectations from the librarian. They are:

- Appreciation
- Job rotation
- Soft music at work
- Surprise checks by seniors
- Recreation in office time
- No bias
- No punishment for mistakes
- Personal involvement with the readers

These ideas gave an insight and direction to the librarian in library management. The expectations were conveyed to the librarian. The ideas can be used to improve working condition of the junior staff in the libraries.

Thus, in library situations, brainstorming can work as a positive tool. It takes cognizance of the suggestive power of ideas from junior staff. It can increase the self-confidence and resourcefulness of the staff and leader. Moreover, it can reinforce a sense of participation.

## **Conclusion**

When the librarian is faced with unusual or difficult situation that cannot be readily solved through experience, formulas, other known methods, brainstorming can be effective. It is useful for generating ideas, listing problems, identifying causes, and formulates possible solutions. In addition to the bringing out the individual and creative capacities of the people, brainstorming causes participants to adopt an experimental frame of mind essential to effective problem-solving. It can be used to identify problems suggest possible causes, predict obstacles to goal attainment, generate possible solutions and anticipate problems of implementation.

## **References**

- Dale, B. G, H.S Bunney and P. Shaw. 1994. "Quality management tool and techniques: an overview". *In Managing Quality*. Edited by Barrie G. Dale. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Prentice Hill.
- Greenberg, Jerald. 1999. *Managing behavior in organization: science in service to practice*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hill.
- Turabian, Kate L. 1996. *A manual for writers of term papers, thesis, and dissertation* . 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Chicago and London: the University of Chicago Press.
- Osborn, A. F. 1957. *Applied imagination*. New York: Scribner's.
- Ostrye, Anne T. "Creativity in workplace". *College Research library News*. 50.4, 279-281.
- Paietta, Ann Catherine. 1991. *Access services: a handbook*. Jefferson, North Carolina: Mc Farkand.