Skills 360 - Organizing your Ideas (Part 1)

Discussion Questions

1. Do you have any special ways of brainstorming ideas?
2. Think of someone who you think speaks well. How does he/she organize ideas?
3. Do you ever write out lists of advantages and disadvantages or pros and cons?

Vocabulary

To run on at length: to continue talking, especially in a disorganized way, for a long time; "Darren often runs on at length about his new product ideas, even after people have stopped listening."

Vague: not clear or certain; "In a strategic plan, avoid creating vague goals that cannot be measured or broken down into action steps."

To tune out: to stop paying attention; "Studies have shown that most students begin to tune out about 70 minutes into a class."

Chaotically: in a very disorganized way; "On Black Friday, shoppers ran chaotically through the store, searching for the best deals."

Clearly articulated: explained in a way that everyone can understand; "In her first media appearance, the new CEO clearly articulated her plan to save the ailing tech giant."

To tame: to make something less wild or easier to control; "During the crisis, finance ministers of several countries met to figure out a way to tame inflation."

Framework: a structure for organizing ideas; "When writing a business plan, start with the basic framework and then fill in content section by section."

To get the ideas flowing: if you "get ideas flowing," you help yourself or others think freely, openly, and creatively about something; "When I have to create new ad designs, sometimes I flip through magazines just to get the ideas flowing."

To deep-six: to throw away or get rid of; "The employees were so happy to deep-six the old office furniture when the company relocated."

(To) Lay it all on the table: to be completely open or honest, or to say everything possible about something; "I asked Dave what he thought about the business and told him to just lay it all on the table."

Fair game: if everything is "fair game," it means that everything can be discussed and that there are no right or wrong ideas; "fair game" can also mean that it is fair to criticize something; "During the negotiations, the union said that every part of the collective bargaining agreement was fair game."

To come to mind: be remembered; if something "comes to mind," it means you think of it; "Someone asked me about Graham's leadership ability, and a couple of examples immediately came to mind."

Easier said than done: if something is "easier said than done," it is more difficult than it seems or sounds; "Keeping calm in a crisis is a great idea, but for many people it's easier said than done."

Mind mapping: a technique for outlining or thinking of ideas that shows words branching out from a central idea; "The facilitator led a mind mapping session at the beginning of our business planning meeting."

Radial: having a design or arrangement like rays coming out of a center point; "The radial organization chart had the president at the center and the other executives branching out from around him."

Say: we use the word "say" to present an imagined or hypothetical situation; "Say you were the branch manager… who would you keep on staff and who would you release?"

Branching: having a pattern like a tree branch, with smaller lines coming out of larger lines; "The map showed the branching system of roads that covered the state."

To illustrate: to show how something is true or to give examples of an idea; "To illustrate the importance of white space in design, Tamara showed us several good and bad advertisements."

To jot down: to write down, especially quickly or briefly; "I always carry a small notebook with me so I can jot down new business ideas when they come to me."

To put together: to organize, prepare, or create; "Joan put together bags of promotional items to hand out at the trade show booth."

Handy: useful or easy to use; "The new mini-projectors with internal data storage are much more handy than carrying around an LCD and a laptop."

To crank out: to create or make, especially quickly and without great care; "The new factory can crank out toys at twice the rate of our old facility."

Transcript

Welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host Tim Simmons, and today I want to help you organize your ideas.

Before we get into that, I'd like to let you know that our Business English App for the iPhone and iPad is now available in the App Store. The app comes packed with over 100 great lessons from Business English Pod – including *all* our Skills 360 lessons. And the best news of all? It's free to download. Just head over to Business English Pod [dot] com for the App Store link.

So, back to ideas. Sure, you've got lots of them. And sure, they're important to you. But are they important to others? Well, they *could* be, but only if they're clear and organized. You've probably been frustrated when people run on at length about what they think using vague language. And you've probably tuned out when someone jumps around chaotically from idea to idea without tying it all together with a purpose. That just doesn't work. And sometimes it's not the *best* ideas that win, but the ones that are most *clearly* articulated.

But exactly how can we do this? Ideas can be very wild animals. They don't always come into our heads in an organized manner. Sometimes they don't seem to come into our heads at all. And they don't just get together in their own groups and organize themselves. So we need to generate them, tame them and get them into usable form.

Today we'll look at a few different frameworks for generating ideas. In this case, we're using a form of organization to actually *get* the ideas flowing.

But first, think about your purpose. What is it you are trying to do? Do you need to persuade someone? Are you trying to inform people? Are you trying to warn, recommend, guide, criticize, defend, describe, or inspire? Understanding your purpose will help you decide which ideas to highlight and which to deep-six.

Once you understand your purpose, try getting out as many ideas as possible. Lay it all on the table. Everything is fair game at this stage. Don't be afraid of things that are off-the-wall. Just feel free to brainstorm, and write down whatever comes to mind. You can evaluate the ideas later. For now, you just want to generate them.

But sometimes this is easier said than done. And that's why we use different tools or techniques for idea generation.

One useful technique is mind mapping. To make a mind map, start with one word in the center of a piece of paper. From that word, you're going to create a radial branching system of ideas. What word do you start with? Any general idea or topic you want to explore. Say you're planning your goals for next year. Maybe you start with that word "goals." Now write a few words around the middle, and connect them to that central word with lines. These are major themes that relate to the central idea. So around goals, you might have "work," "health," "financial," and "social." Then do the same for each of these major themes. Keep writing new ideas around each new subword, until you have a big branching structure around the central word.

We also have something called concept maps. Concept maps have a branching structure like mind maps, but they branch *down* rather than *out*. And they illustrate how ideas are connected. Start with an idea at the top in a circle. Then jot down related concepts in circles below. Draw lines to these related concepts, and on those lines write how the first idea is related to the second. You can use phrases like "leads to" or "results in" or "creates" or just "is." For example, imagine you're putting together a presentation about social media, so you write that phrase at the top. Below it, you draw several lines leading to circles. On one line, you write "leads to" and in its circle you put "increased communication." From that circle, you draw a line that says "contributes to" and a circle with "better understanding between coworkers." You see? You're looking at exactly how ideas are related.

Besides these mapping techniques, there are some handy charts we can use. A very basic one is a pros and cons list. You may be very familiar with that. Draw a line down the middle of the page, and write "pros" on one side and "cons" on the other. Pros are *positive* aspects, while cons are *negative* aspects.

Then there's a SWOT analysis, which is commonly used for evaluating a business idea. SWOT means Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. You can write these words in the four boxes of a large divided square. Within each box, just crank out as many ideas as possible.

All of these techniques have value, and you might want to consider using several of them. One thing to notice is that they all involve writing things down on paper. This is important. You need to get those ideas out of your head and into writing in front of you. It will help you see their relationships, remember them, and organize them later.

And it's the organizing side of things we'll talk about next time.

That's all for today. If you'd like to test yourself on what we've just covered, have a look at the **myBEonline.com** website. There you'll find a quiz about today's show as well as a complete transcript.

So long. And see you again soon.

Review

1. Tim says that your ideas can only be important to others if they are…

   A Clever and innovative
   B Wild and usable
   C Clear and organized
   D Wise and profitable

2. According to Tim, what should you think about before brainstorming ideas?
   A The people they might affect
   B The most useful techniques for organizing your ideas
   C The criteria by which you'll evaluate the ideas
   D The purpose that your ideas will serve

3. Which does Tim suggest about the brainstorming stage?
   A You should focus on the quantity rather than the quality of ideas
   B You should avoid things that are unlikely to be feasible
   C You should build an evaluative framework into your chosen method
   D You should clearly relate each idea to a general topic

4. Why does Tim talk about "goals," and types of goals like "work," "health," and "financial"?
   A To demonstrate the importance of future planning
   B To give an example of a good brainstorming topic
   C To illustrate the technique of mind mapping
   D To show how to organize ideas within a SWOT analysis

5. How do concept maps differ from mind maps?
   A They typically use different shapes for different types of ideas
   B They show the relationship between different ideas
   C They branch toward the center rather than outward from the center
   D They are more useful for exploring technology

6. According to Tim, SWOT analysis is often used to…
   A Set goals or create plans
   B Generate new solutions for old problems
   C Connect seemingly unrelated topics
   D Evaluate business ideas

Review Answers

1. Tim says that your ideas can only be important to others if they are…

    C clear and organized

2. According to Tim, what should you think about before brainstorming ideas?

    D the purpose that your ideas will serve

3. Which does Tim suggest about the brainstorming stage?

    A you should focus on the quantity rather than the quality of ideas

4. Why does Tim talk about "goals," and types of goals like "work," "health," and "financial"?

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    B they show the relationship between different ideas

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    D evaluate business ideas

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