

TREE OF TRADE

Limitations often are incredibly powerful in stimulating creativity, because they force us to think laterally, in alternatives. And, as it turns out, that is the very difference between a linear and a creative thinker: where the first group is satisfied with only one solution - even though it is the obvious way to go and consequently not really innovative - the second group will only be satisfied when there is more than one idea on the table. That means that numerous alternative ideas are evaluated, selected, combined, and enhanced to come to a totally new solution in the end.

Tree of Trade is a technique that is built on thinking in alternatives. We start with listing the essential elements that are inherent to the question, look at the needs they fulfill, and, afterwards, try to find alternative elements that cater to the same needs. In the last step, we will - if necessary - translate those elements realistically so that they result in genuinely useful solutions.

You can apply this technique all by yourself, but like many other techniques, it's way more fun and much more rewarding to do this in a group. You can download the PDF-file of the graph free of charge at www.whentheboxisthelimit.com/treeoftrade

How it works:

STEP 1

- Print the graph more than once in a big size, minimum A2, but bigger is better, certainly when you work in a group.
- Put the first graph on the table or hang it on the wall. See what works best for you.
- Provide post-its and markers for all participants.

STEP 2

- Discuss the central question or problem, and ensure that everyone understands it clearly. Write the problems down if necessary and keep them visible during the entire process.
- From this question or problem, try to distill a list of as many elements as possible that are associated with the respective issue or problem.
- Keep this list of elements at hand or stick it on the wall.

STEP 3

Take one element from the list, write it on a post-it, and stick it in the circle **'MISSING ESSENTIAL'** of the first graph.

STEP 4

- With the group, discuss which need this element fulfills with regard to the issue or problem.
- Write that need on a post-it and stick it in the circle **'RELATED NEED'**.
- If the corresponding element fulfills more than one need, use multiple graphs and stick one need in the circle **'RELATED NEED'** per graph (while in the meantime also filling the circle **'MISSING ESSENTIAL'** on every graph you work on).

STEP 5

- Now together look for which other or alternative elements can fulfill this need with an eye to your question or problem. You can take this as far as you want. Definitely, don't stop at self-evident solutions.
- Select the four most original ideas and stick those in the respective circles **'ALTERNATIVE A, B, C, D'**.
- Do the same for the other graphs if there are any.
- Sometimes these elements offer the right alternative solution immediately, but not always. In the latter case proceed to step 6.

STEP 6

- Focus on the issue or problem and see how you can translate the post-its stuck in the respective circles **'ALTERNATIVE A, B, C, D'** to an actionable idea.
- Try to find at least three "translations" per alternative, write them down on the post-its and stick those in the circles **TRANSLATION 1, 2, AND 3'**.

STEP 7

- Go back to step 3 and repeat until you have covered the entire list of elements.