



THE RIVER

Imagine, you're running through the woods towards a well-defined goal. All of a sudden, a wide and wild river crosses your path. It comes as a surprise, and you're not prepared for it, but you're determined: you definitely want to reach your goal. What are you going to do?

The above is a familiar scenario for all of us who have ever worked on a specific project. Of course, the river symbolizes the unforeseen obstacle that crosses our path. It can be anything, but for sure it is a constraint that seems to obstruct our straight path towards our goal. And we have to find a solution. There's no giving up, no turning back.

This creativity technique, accompanied by a printed graph, is entirely focused on problem solving. Metaphorically speaking, there are six options: you can swim, bridge, block, bypass, sail or fish in the river. On the next page you will find an intentionally short and general explanation of what these verbs stand for.

Some of the options might initially sound a bit weird but try to take the metaphor as widely as possible. Also, the ideas coming from one option might also derive from another. Don't worry about that. In the end, it doesn't matter what 'impulse' made you come up with the idea as long as it's original and valuable.

1. SWIM the river

Are you strong and courageous enough to swim across the river, on your own or with others? Can you conquer or control the obstacle with power, energy, authority, drive and/or influence? Do you have everything you need for this or can you count on the help of others? Then put on your swimsuit, warm up, dive into the river and safely reach the other side.

2. BRIDGE the river

Do you have all the skills, materials, tools and insights to build a bridge across the river? Can you leave the obstacle untouched, but overpass it by constructing a smart connection that spans the gap between where you are now and where you want to be? Do you have everything you need for this or can you count on the help of others? Then start constructing a strong bridge that will bring you to the other side of the river!

3. BLOCK the river

Are you persuasive and persevering enough to block the river temporarily or for good? Can you prevent the obstacle to hinder your ambition by putting an end to it, deactivate or disarm it? Can this be done permanently or just for a short period of time? Do you have everything you need for this or can you count on the help of others? Then start building a dam right away, so that no more water runs through the river and you can easily wade through it!

4. BYPASS the river

Do you have the time, patience and lean mindset to walk around the river and bypass it? Is there any chance the obstacle will be less prominent under certain circumstances or at a specific point in time? Can you steer this in any way or do you just have to wait for the right moment? And how will you be able to take advantage of it to reach your goal? Then let go for a while and be patient but start planning your ultimate move strategically right away!

5. SAIL the river

Are you flexible and adventurous enough to sail the river and go with the flow? Can you initially accept the obstacle and go along with it to see where it will take you? Are you able to adapt your actions while never losing sight of your goal? Are you willing to take risks, be opportunistic, and change plans regularly? Then build a boat that you can easily navigate to ultimately reach your goal under the most volatile of conditions!

6. FISH the river

Do you have the smart and creative mindset to accept the river and go fishing in it? Have you ever considered that not the initial target you had in mind, but the obstacle itself might be your ultimate goal? Can you not only accept the obstacle but also embrace it as a true advantage, the USP you were looking for? And are you mad and creative enough to make it happen? Then take your fishing line, hang plenty of bait from it and get the biggest and tastiest of fish out of the water!

You can try this technique on your own, but as with any other technique in this book, it's much more fun and effective when you perform as a team (as described below). You can download The River graph at www.whentheboxisthelimit.com/river

How it works:

It is recommended working with a group of at least six participants in a session, but it can just as easily be more.

STEP 1

- *Print the graph on a large size sheet of paper, minimum A2, but bigger is better, certainly when working in groups.*
- *Put the sheet on the table or hang it on the wall. See what works best for you / your team.*
- *Provide post-its to everyone.*
- *Provide a regular die (with numbers from 1 to 6).*

STEP 2

- *Discuss the process and target you will work on, and make sure that everyone understands them clearly. Now discuss the obstacle that blocks you from reaching your goal. Bear in mind that this obstacle is your 'River'.*
- *Limit yourself to one obstacle at a time. If there are more, you can go through the process again at a later stage or use a second graph simultaneously, that may be handled by another team where relevant, appropriate or necessary.*

STEP 3

- *Make teams of two or more people (depending on the total number of participants in the session), with a maximum of four teams per session.*
- *Each team now rolls the die. The number they throw*

corresponds with the option they will work on that is mentioned in the printed graph. For instance, if a team throws a 3, they will start working on the option 'BLOCK the river'.

STEP 4

- *Try to separate the teams a bit so they won't disturb each other. You might foresee small tables and chairs along the outside wall of the room.*
- *Start the clock: during the next 6 minutes each team will generate ideas according to the received option (the number they rolled with the die). They will write their ideas on post-its they do not share with the group yet.*
- *When the clock stops, each team sticks and presents its ideas to the right of the respective option on the sheet.*

STEP 5

- *The group can decide to keep the same teams or to change them. Anyhow, we repeat STEP 3 and STEP 4. If a team or team member gets an option assigned they already worked on the team rolls the die again.*
- *According to your number of participants, you can repeat these steps several times. It is important that ALL of the options have been addressed by at least two teams.*

STEP 6

- *When you decide to stop the session, select the best ideas on the sheet and start developing them into concepts.*