IDEATING:

What is this phase about?
In ideation we open up our thinking again. It is about turning the problem statement into design opportunities and generating many ideas without constraints in a structured way. We filter and evaluate them at the end, we select ideas to pursue in the following prototyping phase. Ideation is very collaborative.

Why is this phase important?
Addressing a problem without ideas is not possible. It is important to explore different directions and come up with multiple ways to solve a problem.

What is required for this phase?
A crisp problem statement and a clear Point of View, so that the whole team is on the same page and knows what they are trying to solve. Make sure the team is relaxed and in a good mood, full of energy.

At the end of this phase, these questions should be considered in the team:

- Did we explore enough directions?
- Are we happy with the idea we are pursuing?
- Are the ideas concrete enough?
- Is the idea we chose really helping our user?

How Might We
This is the first step to open up the solution space. We turn the problem statement with your insights around the persona into a design opportunity. A little trick is to build sentences that start with "How might we" (HMW). In the next phase we are going to ideate on these questions. A well formulated HMW is not a solution, but enables the team to come up with multiple ways to solve it. A good HMW sparks ideas and inspires.

Be aware:
Make sure the HMW questions are not too general (HMW help the parent?) or too specific or even address two problems at the same time (HMW we get the kids to do games shortly before the flight and help the parents relax?).
You can use categories to spark the ideas for going in different routes to solve the problem. The Stanford guide for Design Thinking illustrates this: https://stanford.io/2X2Fgdm
HMW questions are a little psychological trick that takes the attention away from the persona and puts the action into the team. It is OUR job to create this solution FOR the user and the problem we defined.

How to:
- Revisit your Point of View
- Silently brainstorm HMW questions and share
- Cluster
- Do a second round of loud brainstorming to build on these HMWs
- Vote for 2-3 HMWs that you take into brainstorming

Brainstorming

Now it is time to ideate on your HMW questions. Brainstorming is a delicate process and how to do it is highly dependent on the team members. There is not one right way. Experiment with different techniques. To continue the process, it is important that you have all the generated ideas hanging somewhere where the team can see them. Collect and share them together with your HMW questions, so there will be no confusion, which idea is for what. When choosing a method, be aware of the following:

Loud vs Silent

In loud brainstorming you call out your idea right away when they come to you in order for other team members to be able to hear them and build on top of them. In silent brainstorming you collect your ideas on sticky notes and share it with your team after a certain time. Silent brainstorming is a great first step into almost every brainstorming activity since you make sure that the team members have some time to reflect and also everybody has the chance to have their idea heard. Loud brainstorming is great to build on each others' ideas fast but can also push teams into groupthink, meaning that the team only explores one direction.

Individual vs. Collaborative

Brainstorming doesn't have to happen in the whole team all the time! Splitting a team up in pairs or even do it individually can be of great value when you want to explore multiple directions at the same time and enrich the solutions space.

Timing

As with all creative work, ideation cannot be controlled and forced. Brainstorming activities should not take very long. Loud methods rarely take more than 10 minutes. It is exhausting work and as a facilitator you should be aware of that. Make these activities crisp and concentrated. We have a saying for that: "Stop when the popcorn stops popping." If a method doesn't work very well, try something else or take a break.

Brainstorming principles

Build on the Ideas of Others

We do this in teams because we want to have the experience and the creative energy of many people to solve a challenge. In ideation it is important not to work alone but collectively, jump on each other's thought process and infuse your thinking on top of it.

One Conversation at a Time

It is hard to build on each other's thoughts when several discussions are going on. Design Thinking and especially Ideation is a collaborative endeavour. Make sure the team is always on the same page and that only one person speaks at a time.

Stay Focused on the Topic

We want to use our time efficiently. It is easy to get side tracked and when doing team work we need to rely on everyone in the team to be focussed and involved in the team's thinking process. With good time boxing there is time for focussed work and also focussed breaks. Respect the breaks!

Be Visual

We rely heavily on written and spoken words in our work. But drawing and sketching gives another way of expression and further illustrates your ideas. Drawings also attract attention!

There is a saying: "If you want to have a good idea, first have a lot of ideas". You want to put out everything that is in your team's imagination. There is time for generating ideas and there is time for evaluating ideas. Now is the time for churning them out, in masses!

Defer Judgement

When you want to start a wild flow of ideas, the worst thing to do is to be critical of the ideas. Being critical is good, but not when you are about to start brainstorming. So, make sure everyone in the team knows, that right now everything is valuable and we will be critical of the ideas at a later stage.

Have Fun

Under pressure you cannot think freely. Make sure you and your team are relaxed but focussed on the task. Try to eliminate outside pressure like deadlines and outcome expectations. When we have fun, we are encouraged to express our opinion and also put ideas out that are uncommon. That is the goal.

Encourage Wild Ideas

Because we are looking for innovative ways to solve a problem, it is necessary to go beyond what is known, common and expected. Encourage ideas that may not be realistic now. Nothing is impossible.

Brainstorming Techniques

Hot Potato

Pick an object to throw around. Get the team in a circle. Throw the object to someone. This person has to say an idea out loud. Then this person throws the object to another person who has to say an idea and so on and so on. Remember to have somebody standing next to the circle to write down all the ideas!

Star Fish

Sometimes you need a different perspective! Lay on the floor, put your heads in the middle to form a star and start ideating on a HMW question. Do it loudly, so the others can pick up your idea. Throw the sticky notes with the ideas in the middle behind your heads.

Idea Train

Movement is great to get creative muscles going. With the whole team, start walking around in a circle in front of a board. Every time you walk by the board put an idea there. Do this loudly, so others can build on your ideas.

Negative Brainstorming

This is about exploring the radical opposite direction. For that, turn your HMW question on its head and ideate. For example, if your HMW question is: "HMW turn an airport into a playground", the opposite would be "HMW turn an airport into a prison" or similar. These ideas can spark new thoughts and solutions for your actual challenge.

Superhero and other analogies

Using analogies comes in handy if you have the feeling the team is stuck. It sets the team on a different mind set and also frees them from concerns about implementability. Ask "How would Superman solve that question?". Depending on your challenge you can also use different contexts. "How would Apple solve that question?" or IKEA or any other brand or fictional character that everyone knows and that stands for certain values.

Brainwriting or Ideatower

This is a good method for getting deeper into ideas: Everyone in the team gets a blank A4 paper. Fold it 3 times, so you have 8 different fields. Everyone picks one idea they want to evolve and puts it in the first field. Build upon this idea in the next field. Add something or come up with a variation of it. After that: give that paper to somebody else in your team, and you get a paper from somebody else. Build on the idea from the last field. In the end you have 7 rounds and 40 ideas. Take 1-3 minutes per round.

Idea Shopping

Inspiration is crucial for ideation. So also feel free to look at what other teams have been brainstorming. Take a walk around the workshop space, look at sticky notes, read random notes. You can pick up on insights, observations and ideas of others. Bring them back into your team and share *them.*

Find more inspiration for brainstorming techniques here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ECWV8rPIdqs
Please note that due to the Covid19 situation some of these brainstorming techniques might not be appropriate.

Idea Filter and Evaluation

During the idea generating judgement is deferred. That means, everything is possible and valuable, so the team can go wild and explore freely. Now it is time to evaluate and filter the ideas and put them into context to make it easier to select the ones you want to continue on working with.

We use grids and funnels for this. Do one for every HMW questions and the respective ideas. If the HMW questions are closely related, you can do them in one.

You can use tape to form these grids or just draw them on boards. The categories can be adapted to what makes sense. It is best if the team decides for them on their own.

How to

The team picks up ideas from the ideation rounds and puts them into the grid or funnel. Not all ideas have to be put into, just take the ones that are liked by the team. After a short while there should be a clearer vision of which ideas are worthy to pursue.

Idea Grid
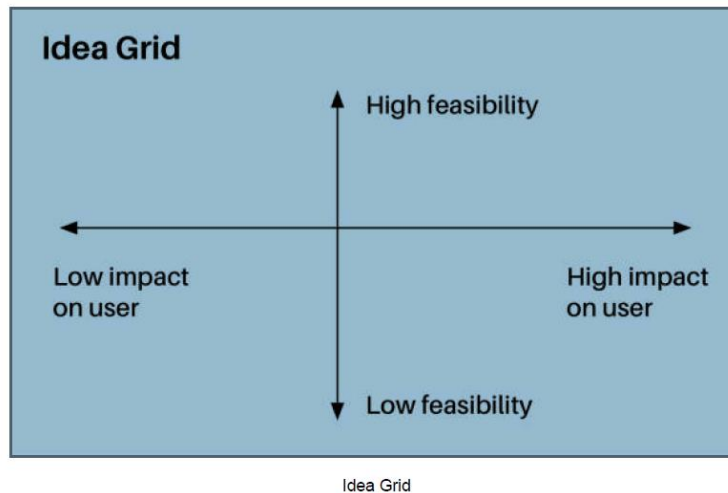
Possible Iteration Point

This evaluation process can be a good opportunity to go back to your persona or HMW questions if the ideas are too superficial or the team has the feeling the ideas don't address the actual challenge and need.

Idea Selection

After the team filtered and evaluated the ideas, it is time to select one idea to prototype. Use Dot-Voting to make this fast and efficient. Give dots to every team member – as many as they like. You can also use categories here to make the vote more geared towards the outcomes you want to achieve. For example, red dots for radical ideas, green dots for quick wins, yellow dots for visionary ideas.

Idea Documentation

After your team has chosen one idea to take further into prototyping and testing, it makes sense to document this idea. We do this to keep track of our progress, but also to make sense of the idea in the team, add things to it and align the team, so everybody is on the same page. Also, most ideas that come out of brainstorming are still very broad and on a meta-level. Documentation is a means to put some flesh on the bone and get more concrete.

Idea Dashboards

Quick and easy way for documenting ideas. Let the team fill it out. Sketching the idea on the dashboard is crucial because you have to get concrete with drawings. The goal of this dashboard is that everybody has a clear and common understanding what this idea is about, for whom it is, how it works and why it is beneficial for the user.

Reference:

[D thinking manual](#)