



Divergent and Convergent Thinking: Tying up Loose Ends

Overview

What do post-it notes, matches, crazy glue, and safety glasses have in common? They are all successful products that began life as mistakes: the person who invented them was actually trying to do make something else. The key is that the inventor was willing to look at the results from a new perspective: what could we do with this? What problem could this solve?

Directions

Step 1: Divergence

You work for “Loose Ends,” a company that buys up surplus goods, repurposes them, and sells them as something else. You have the opportunity to buy a large shipment of bubble wrap. You need to decide very quickly whether or not to make the purchase. But first, you need to do some brainstorming about how you could use the bubble wrap.

Set a timer for five minutes and write down as many possible uses for bubble wrap as you can – even if the ideas seem far-fetched or even silly. Banish judgment: at this stage, you are going for sheer quantity, not quality.

Step 2: Convergence

Your brainstorming session has convinced you: there are lots of possible ways to reuse bubble wrap. You decide to buy the surplus wrap. Now you need to go through the list of ideas you generated and figure out what Loose Ends should do with its new purchase.

Take the list and strike out any duplicative ideas. From the ones that remain, select the most interesting five. Use the matrix below to evaluate and develop them. For each one, answer:

EVALUATION QUESTIONS	IDEA 1	IDEA 2	IDEA 3	IDEA 4	IDEA 5
Give each idea a name.					
What is the reimagined purpose?					
How could bubble wrap be used for this purpose?					
What would we need to change or add?					
How much time, effort, or expense would this take?					
Who would be likely to buy the repurposed product?					
Why would this appeal to buyers?					
RANKING					
Review your matrix and rank the five ideas from 1-5 (1 is the highest) for each criterion:					
Usefulness (solves a real problem)					
Feasibility (easiness, speed, or low cost required to repurpose)					
Novelty (new product would be interesting or innovative)					
Appeal (likeliness to appeal to consumers)					
REFLECTION					
Which idea ranked the highest overall? Do the results make sense to you? Reflect on the process and whether it worked to help you identify the best idea.					

1. How could we use this for another purpose?
2. What would we need to change or add?
3. How much effort or expense would this take?
4. Who would be likely to buy the repurposed product?
5. Why would this appeal to buyers?

Review your matrix and rank the five finalists from 1-5 (1 is the highest) according to four criteria:

- usefulness (solves a real problem)
- feasibility (is easy or low cost to repurpose)
- novelty (new product would be interesting or innovative)
- appeal (likeliness to appeal to consumers)

Step 3: Reflect

Which idea ranked the highest? Do the results make sense to you? Reflect on the process and whether it helped you identify the best idea.

Rubric

Criterion	Description	Yes	Not Yet
Generates at least 10 distinct ideas	<i>You brainstormed a lot of ideas</i>		
Rigorously applies evaluative process	<i>You picked the five most interesting ideas and evaluated them according to the matrix</i>		
Ranks ideas according to criteria of usefulness, feasibility, novelty, and consumer appeal	<i>You applied the four criteria to the five ideas</i>		
Selects highest ranking idea and reflects on results and process	<i>You considered whether the process worked to identify the best idea</i>		