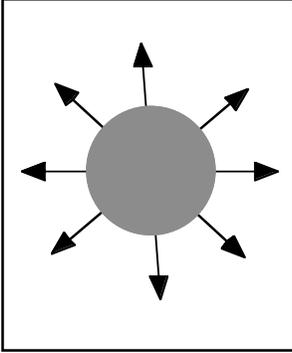


Force-Fitting



Overview, Description, and Purpose

Force-fitting is a tool for generating options. This tool is particularly useful for generating unique, unusual, or highly original options. Force-fitting involves using dissimilar, or apparently unrelated, objects, elements, or ideas to obtain fresh new possibilities for a stated task. The force-fitting process stimulates searching for new perspectives, viewpoints, or combinations— possibilities that arise from the unexpected. In force-fitting, you seek to find ways to see ordinary things in unusual ways, or unusual things in more everyday ways. (Some models or approaches refer to this as “making the familiar strange or the strange familiar.”)

The Force-Fitting tool can be particularly useful for the following purposes, or under these conditions:

- When the group will benefit from the “stretch” of some highly original possibilities, and is comfortable in “playing” with unusual ideas or perspectives;
- When the group seeks deliberately to move away from familiar ideas or the possible limitations of their assumptions, prior experiences, or expectations;
- To help the group “loosen up” its thinking and break out of feeling “stuck;”
- To produce new possibilities that may be quite different from other options, and may require considerable time and effort to refine and develop (“high-risk, high-gain” new options).

Tips and Suggestions

These suggestions may help you to use the Force-Fitting tool successfully.

1. Use *random* objects; don’t limit your thinking by trying to select objects that seem to “fit” or be specifically related to the task. The tool should provoke the group to move their thinking away from the “obvious.”
2. Be sure to use objects for Force-Fitting that will be attractive, attention-getting, and “playful” for the group. It can be very helpful to build a collection of small, inexpensive toys or gadgets for people to explore. Include some common, everyday objects, some unusual gadgets, and some items that will be light and humorous.

3. If a group member responds with a pun, a play on words, or a broad or non-specific admonition (or a platitude!)— write it down (deferring judgment), and then probe for a more specific follow-up; ask questions such as, “How? What about this object, or how it works, suggests how it might be possible to do that?”
4. Encourage the group to “stretch” beyond the first few ideas or connections they find for each object.
5. At first, the group may look for very literal ways to apply or use the object. Encourage them to think figuratively about the object and its possible implications for the task, or to use any of the object’s specific attributes or characteristics (e.g., size, shape, color, operation) as a springboard for new possibilities relating to the task.

Steps for Using this Tool

1. State your task or problem clearly. (If you are using the sample worksheet on page 3, write the task in the box after the + sign.)
2. Consider objects that are not related to your task in any specific way. (Use the pictures given, or any others!)
3. Choose one object at a time. How might anything about that object relate to your task? (Think about its size, shape, color, parts, operation, or purpose, for example.) List the participants’ responses, or if you are using the worksheet on page 3, write them in the box after the = sign.
4. Think of *many*, *varied*, or *unusual* ways the object (or any part of it) offers new ideas for dealing with your task or problem.
5. Focus your thinking by choosing one or more of the new possibilities to use or examine in greater detail.

Examples and Applications

Some ways to use Force-Fitting with students include:

- Improving existing products or activities, and especially making improvements that add highly novel or usual new possibilities or directions;
- Creating new products, and particularly possibilities that combine two or existing products that are not usually associated with each other;
- Using metaphor or simile in force-fitting, to help analyze or understand a character in a play or story;
- Creating new or unusual themes or plots for story writing, drama, or art;
- Combining media or materials in unusual ways in visual expression;
- Creating attention-getting illustrations or messages for publicity, promotion, or advertising of activities or events;
- Developing an unexpected “twist” or turn in a poem or story;
- Searching for new possibilities for dealing with any problem or challenge when you feel “stuck” and unable to come up with any new or different options.

Learning More About Force-Fitting

Isaksen, S. G., Dorval, K. B., & Treffinger, D. J. (1998). *Toolbox for creative problem solving: Basic tools and resources*. Williamsville, NY: Creative Problem Solving Group–Buffalo.

Treffinger, D. J. (2000). *Creative problem solver’s guidebook*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

Treffinger, D. J. & Nassab, C. A. (1998). *Thinking tools guides*. Sarasota FL: Center for Creative Learning.