



The Hagrid Concept

The story of how one organisation used a creative problem-solving tool to become 'unstuck' in their idea generation.

"The group of students sat facing the Professor as she described the problem. With the imminent build of a new engineering faculty building, how might the designers facilitate interactions between staff and students that meet the needs of both?"

Lecturers need space for teaching and research. And their availability can be a bottleneck, for busy students needing urgent information and support. This might require a change in attitudes and mindsets. The Professor invited a range of potential solutions. She wanted radical solutions to be part of their shortlist.

The group of engineering students had generated some 25 ideas, and were stuck. Their energy had slowed. One said: 'I think our ideas are not radical enough'. I chose the random object tool, and asked them to try it. I reassured them about the relevance of the tool, though the object had nothing to do with their problem!



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I passed around an 8-inches tall cone-shaped spool, with a cardboard structure, and a hollow interior. Around the structure was deeply-wrapped white string, from base to top.

The group of four passed it between themselves. I told them to write down their thoughts individually, not sharing them for now, so that their immediate, different thoughts of the object would be captured in all their range.

For the next step, I told them to take a few minutes and connect some of their thoughts to the actual business challenge. In other words: generate potential solutions. There was some scepticism, and much laughter. Some sat back in their chairs, momentarily stumped. Then someone said, “Well, the rope provides a thick buffer...and someone else said: ‘Yes, a bit like Hagrid in Harry Potter — he’s a sort of gatekeeper for the students. Deals with their questions and problems. They don’t have to go to the teachers...’

From this simple, novel connection the group developed a series of feasible, potentially useful elaborations. The multi-faceted ‘Hagrid’ concept equates to volunteer staff in the new building, helping students get where and what they needed; and a central information point; and we might ‘buddy’ students with students in their year above; as well as administrative staff; and the building could be partitioned, using projected, differently-coloured light, for different functions on different times and days; and lecturers might make themselves accessible at agreed times but not others...

‘Hagrid’ morphed into a more abstract concept of enabling mechanisms to get students source help, without the necessity for finding busy lecturers, who may not be the right people to speak to anyway. The bottleneck of lecturer accessibility could be removed. When the group presented the concept to the client-professor, she loved it.

In the learning review at the end of this session, I explained that the rationale behind the random object tool is that it forces a ‘stuck’ group, to think of something stimulating but unrelated. And then, to force a connection back to the real challenge. “

This interview is an extract from Dr Rob Sheffield’s book *How Leaders Learn to Boost Creativity in Teams*, published by World Scientific © 2019 reproduced with kind permission.



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