Creative Thinking Module

Introduction to Idea Evaluation Tools

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Why should ideas be evaluated?

Idea evaluation and selection is: “one of the most difficult, sensitive, and critical problems”


**Why Evaluate?**
- Weed out the losers
- Pick the winners
- Prioritise projects
- Quality control

**Two main purposes are:**
- Select the best and strongest ideas
- Avoid potential weaknesses
How to evaluate & select

- **External Decision:** Ideas are selected by customers/clients
- **Champion:** Decision is made by team leader.
- **Intuition:** The idea is chosen by its feel.
- **Multi-voting:** Each member votes for several ideas (see picture). The one with most votes is selected.

How to evaluate & select

- **Pros & Cons**: The team lists the strengths and weaknesses of each idea and makes a choice.

- **Prototype & Test**: The team builds and tests prototypes of each idea and makes a decision based upon test results.

- **Decision Matrix**: The team rates each idea against pre-specified selection criteria.

How to evaluate & select

- **Solution Diagramming**: Use a diagram (or a flow chart) to visualise & evaluate how the solution might work

- **Solution Storyboard**: Use storyboard (see picture) to explain and test how the solution might work

- **Solution Enactment**: Use role playing to simulate the proposed solution and check how people will interact with it

Tool: Decision Matrix

STEP 1: PREPARE THE CRITERIA

- **Choose** criteria which ideas will be evaluated, e.g. user needs & company’s requirements
- **Establish** the criteria before developing ideas
- Make sure that the criteria are **unambiguous** and fully understood by all team members
- As all criteria are given “equal weight”, unimportant criteria should not be listed on the matrix.
- Criteria may come from a review of previous projects

Criteria for Evaluation

MUST-MEET CRITERIA
(For example)
- Strategic fit
- Technical feasibility
- Company resource fit

SHOULD-MEET CRITERIA
(For example)
- Market attractiveness
- Product advantage (Unique Selling Points)

Tool: Decision Matrix

STEP 2: DEVELOP THE IDEAS

- Short list the ideas – if there are more than 12 ideas, the multi-voting can be used for an initial screen.
- Ensure each idea is presented at the same level of detail.
- Choose a reference/benchmark which all ideas will be compared with.

STEP 3: RATE THE IDEAS

- **Compare** each idea against the reference
  - + means “better than” the reference
  - - means “worse than” the reference
  - S means “same as” the reference
- **Rate** every idea on one criterion before moving to the next criterion. If there are a large number of ideas, use the opposite approach.
- **Establish a score pattern** based on the comparison

### Example of Decision Matrix

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**REFERENCE**

STEP 4: RANK THE IDEA

- **Sum** the number of “better than”, “same as” and “worse than” scores and enter them into the matrix.

- **Calculate** a net score: “better than” sum – “worse than” sum

- **Rank-order** the ideas according to the net score

Key Considerations

- Is there a generally good idea which is degraded by one bad feature?
- Can a minor modification improve the overall idea while still preserving its distinction from other ideas?
- Are there two ideas which can be combined to preserve the “better than” qualities while reducing the “worse than” qualities?

**Tool: Decision Matrix**

**STEP 5: SELECT & REFLECT**

- Ideas are selected for further **refinement**
- All members should be **comfortable** with the outcome
- If not, perhaps:
  - One or more **important criteria** are missing
  - **Rating** is erroneous or not **clear**
  - **Ideas** are not clearly **understood**
- Ensures that the results **make sense** to everyone – reduces the chance of making mistakes & increases the commitment of the whole team

To make a good decision

Participants must have:

- A great insight into the requirements/specifications
- A great understanding of the problems
- A great understanding of the potential solutions
- An understanding of the interaction between proposed solutions
- A knowledge of reasons why one idea is stronger or weaker than another

Further Reading

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