

## 'That was my idea' -- Group brainstorming settings and fixation

March 29 2010

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When people, groups, or organizations are looking for a fresh perspective on a project, they often turn to a brainstorming exercise to get those juices flowing. An upcoming study from *Applied Cognitive Psychology* suggests that this may not be the best route to take to generate unique and varied ideas.

The researchers from Texas A&M University show that group brainstorming exercises can lead to fixation on only one idea or possibility, blocking out other ideas and possibilities, and leading eventually to a conformity of ideas. Lead researcher Nicholas Kohn explains, "Fixation to other people's ideas can occur unconsciously and lead to you suggesting ideas that mimic your brainstorming partners. Thus, you potentially become less creative."

The researchers used AOL Instant Messenger as their electronic discussion format when conducting the experiments, which included groups of two, three, and four subjects. This study and other studies have also shown that taking a break (allowing for a mental incubation period in participants) can stem the natural decline in quantity (production deficit) and the variety of ideas, and encourage problem solving.

Therefore, group creativity may be an overestimated method to generate ideas and individual brainstorming exercises (such as written creativity drills) may be more effective. If ideas are to be shared in a group setting, members of the group need to be aware of this fixation phenomenon, and take steps to prevent conformity. This will lead to a more vibrant,

fresh discussion and a wider range of possible solutions.

**More information:** "Collaborative fixation: Effects of others' ideas on brainstorming." Nicholas W. Kohn; Steven M. Smith. Applied Cognitive Psychology ; Published Online: March 29, 2010, [DOI:10.1002/acp.1699](https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.1699)

Provided by Wiley

Citation: 'That was my idea' -- Group brainstorming settings and fixation (2010, March 29)  
retrieved 22 September 2024 from  
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-03-idea-group-brainstorming-fixation.html>

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