



WAYS TO USE DiBL | WHITEPAPER 1 OF 6

# Brainstorms

How to ignite creative thinking, surface every voice, and turn group input into actionable outcomes.

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dibl.eu | Serious Games Interactive | 2026

## Executive Summary

Getting a room full of people to think creatively together is harder than it looks. Whether in a workshop, classroom, or virtual session, facilitators face the same recurring challenges: the same voices dominate, quieter participants disengage, and ideas get lost before they can be built upon. Traditional approaches – sticky notes, open mic rounds, whiteboard sessions – fail to capture the full breadth of thinking in the room.

DiBL Brainstorms solve this. By giving every participant a real-time channel to contribute from their own device, Brainstorms generate richer, more diverse input – and then give facilitators powerful tools to visualise, filter, and focus that input into meaningful conversation.

This whitepaper explores the learning science behind collaborative idea generation, shows how DiBL Brainstorms compare to tools like Mentimeter, Wooclap, AhaSlides, and Kahoot, and provides a practical guide for running high-impact brainstorm sessions – from initial prompt design to post-session action planning.

## The Challenge: Why Traditional Brainstorming Falls Short

Brainstorming has been a staple of facilitation since Alex Osborn popularised the concept in the 1950s. Yet decades of research show that traditional brainstorming – open verbal ideation in a group – consistently underperforms compared to structured alternatives. The reasons are well documented:

- Social inhibition – participants self-censor to avoid judgement or conflict
- Production blocking – only one person can speak at a time, so ideas are lost while waiting
- Anchoring bias – early ideas disproportionately shape the direction of the whole group
- HiPPO effect – the Highest Paid Person's Opinion dominates, suppressing diverse perspectives

Digital tools have partly addressed these problems – word clouds and quick polls make participation easier. But most tools stop there. They show you what people think, but give the facilitator little control over how to develop and deepen that thinking.

What's missing is the bridge between raw input and meaningful insight: the ability to visualise ideas collectively, surface outlier voices, prioritise collaboratively, and guide the conversation without losing momentum. That's exactly the gap DiBL Brainstorms are built to fill.

## The Learning Science

### Cooperative Learning

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A landmark meta-analysis by Gillies (2016) reviewing over a century of research found that cooperative learning – where students or participants work toward shared goals – produces substantially higher outcomes than competitive or individualistic approaches, with effect sizes ranging from 0.58 to 0.70. Crucially, this holds across age groups, subject areas, and cultural contexts.

Cooperative structures are not simply about putting people in groups. Johnson and Johnson (1994) identified five key elements that make cooperation work: positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, interpersonal skills, and group processing. DiBL Brainstorms are designed to activate all five – every participant contributes, results are shared publicly, and the facilitator guides reflection and dialogue.

### Collective Intelligence and Divergent Thinking

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Research on collective intelligence (Woolley et al., 2010) shows that groups outperform even their brightest individual members when three conditions are met: equal participation, social sensitivity, and diversity of perspective. Traditional verbal brainstorming violates the first condition almost immediately. Simultaneous digital input – the foundation of DiBL Brainstorms – restores it.

Divergent thinking research (Guilford, 1967; Runco, 2014) consistently shows that the quantity of ideas generated is a strong predictor of quality. When participants contribute simultaneously rather than sequentially, the total idea pool grows dramatically – and so does the probability of genuinely novel thinking emerging.

### Dialogic Teaching

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Brainstorming is most powerful not as an end in itself, but as the opening move in a dialogic sequence. Research on dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2017; Mercer & Littleton,

2007) emphasises that learning deepens when ideas are made public, questioned, and built upon collaboratively. DiBL Brainstorms create a shared, visible artefact – the word cloud or response list – that becomes the text for exactly this kind of facilitated dialogue.

## What DiBL Brainstorms Is

DiBL Brainstorms is a live, facilitated ideation tool that lets every participant contribute ideas simultaneously from their own device – phone, tablet, or laptop. Responses appear in real time as word clouds, sentence clouds, or ranked lists on a shared screen, giving the whole group an instant, collective view of the room's thinking.

Unlike simple polling tools, Brainstorms give facilitators active control over the experience: you can choose which responses to highlight, hide noise, prompt groups to prioritise, and shift seamlessly between plenary and individual views. The result is not just a data collection exercise – it's a structured thinking experience.

### Key Capabilities

- **Visualise ideas instantly** Responses appear as word clouds, sentence clouds, or lists – shared in real time or revealed at a moment of your choosing.
- **Break into groups** Assign groups different prompts or roles to explore ideas from multiple perspectives simultaneously.
- **Focus the conversation** Hide noise, emphasise key responses, and guide discussion toward what matters most.
- **Guide or empower** Choose whether to curate the conversation as facilitator, or let participants upvote and shape what's discussed next.
- **Capture and export** Download visual outputs and response data after the session for planning, reporting, or follow-up.

## How DiBL Compares

A number of popular tools offer word clouds and open-text polling. Here's how DiBL Brainstorms compare to the most widely used alternatives – and where the difference matters most.

Tool	Strengths	Where DiBL goes further
<a href="#">Mentimeter</a>	Strong word clouds and Q&A; clean presenter interface; widely used in education and corporate.	DiBL adds facilitator curation, group assignment, and the ability to embed brainstorms inside a larger facilitated learning journey – not just a standalone slide.
<a href="#">Wooclap</a>	Good real-time audience interaction; integrates with PowerPoint; brainstorm/word cloud features available.	DiBL gives deeper facilitator control over response visibility and sequencing, and connects brainstorm outputs to branching activities and dilemmas in the same session.
<a href="#">AhaSlides</a>	Affordable interactive slides with word clouds; AI slide generation; solid free tier.	DiBL is purpose-built for facilitated learning experiences, not presentation accompaniment. Brainstorms in DiBL are designed to feed into structured reflection, not just visualise sentiment.
<a href="#">Kahoot</a>	Strong engagement through competition and gamification; widely recognised in education; recently added basic word cloud and brainstorm features.	Kahoot's brainstorm tools are designed for quick pulse-checks, not deep ideation. DiBL adds facilitator curation, group assignment, six structured brainstorm patterns, and the ability to connect outputs into dilemmas and simulations in the same session.

The core difference: most tools treat brainstorming as a moment – a slide you add to break up a presentation. DiBL treats it as a process – a structured, facilitated experience with a before, during, and after. It's the difference between collecting input and actually doing something with it.

## In Practice: How to Run a DiBL Brainstorm Session

### Before the Session

The quality of a brainstorm is largely determined before anyone opens their device. Start by defining a single, focused prompt – vague questions produce vague answers. "What do you think about our strategy?" generates noise. "What is the biggest barrier to implementing our new strategy?" generates insight.

- Use open-ended, concrete prompts that invite a specific type of thinking.

- Decide in advance whether you want free-text responses, rating/ranking, or both.
- If splitting into groups, assign roles or perspectives before the session starts to ensure diversity.
- Set up your DiBL session so the response visualisation is ready to share without lag.

## During the Session

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Launch the brainstorm and give participants 2-4 minutes of silent, simultaneous input time. Resist the urge to fill the silence – this is where the real thinking happens.

- Show the word cloud or response list once input time ends – this creates a shared moment of discovery.
- Invite brief reactions: "What surprises you? What's missing? What keeps coming up?"
- Use the highlight and hide tools to focus attention on the most interesting responses.
- If you used group prompts, compare outputs across groups – differences are often the richest conversation starters.
- Use an upvoting round to have the group prioritise: which 3 ideas deserve deeper exploration?

## After the Session

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The export function turns your brainstorm from a moment into a record. Use it to:

- Share a visual summary of the session with participants within 24 hours.
- Feed the top-voted ideas into your next planning cycle or decision-making process.
- Track how thinking evolves if you run brainstorms at multiple points in a programme.
- Use the raw data for reporting – showing stakeholders that decisions are grounded in participant input.

## From Ideas to Action

The most common failure mode in brainstorming is not a lack of ideas – it's the gap between generating ideas and acting on them. Research on implementation intentions (Gollwitzer, 1999) shows that groups are significantly more likely to follow through on ideas when they move immediately from generation to prioritisation to specific next steps.

DiBL Brainstorms support this transition in three ways:

- **Prioritisation built in** upvoting and ranking tools let the group identify what matters most before the session ends.
- **Exportable outputs** visual summaries and raw data can be used directly in planning documents, reports, and presentations.
- **Continuity across sessions** run a follow-up brainstorm at the start of the next meeting to assess how thinking has developed.

A DiBL Brainstorm should always end with a visible answer to the question: "What are the 2-3 ideas we're taking forward from this session - and who owns them?" Building this moment into your facilitation plan transforms a brainstorm from a participation exercise into a decision-making tool.

## The Six Brainstorm Templates

DiBL includes six ready-to-use brainstorm templates, each designed for a specific facilitation need. You can start any of them directly from the template library - no build time required - and adapt them as a starting point for your own session design.

### Template 01

#### Quick Brainstorm

One question, one text input, one reveal as a word cloud. The fastest entry point into collective thinking - use it as an opening icebreaker, a quick check-in, or a focused pulse of the room before discussion begins. Takes under five minutes from launch to debrief.

[Preview template](#)

### Template 02

#### Brainstorm + Prioritize

The most useful everyday brainstorm. Participants submit ideas via free text, then vote to surface what matters most. The session ends with a ranked top-5 list the group has collectively chosen. Use when you need to move from "what do we think?" to "what do we focus on?"

[Preview template](#)

#### Template 03

### Pro/Con Side-by-Side

Split participants into two groups - one brainstorming arguments for a decision, one against. Both word clouds are revealed simultaneously, creating a balanced visual comparison. Use before any significant decision where premature consensus is a risk, or when you want structured debate without open conflict.

[Preview template](#)

#### Template 04

### Team Brainstorm Challenge

Teams brainstorm independently on the same question, then present their ideas one by one. Cross-team comparison reveals where the room converges - and where it diverges. Use when you want to harness competitive energy, or when teams have genuinely different contexts to bring to the same question.

[Preview template](#)

#### Template 05

### Perspectives Brainstorm

Assign participants different roles before the session starts - a customer, a manager, a front-line worker, a regulator. Each role brainstorms from their perspective, and results are revealed side by side. Use when you want to surface hidden assumptions, build empathy across functions, or prepare a group to handle real stakeholder complexity.

[Preview template](#)

#### Template 06

### Funnelled Brainstorm

The most structured variation. Teams brainstorm in parallel, then a refinement round brings all participants in to build on the strongest ideas, and finally the group scores them for future focus. Use for longer sessions where the goal is not just ideation but a prioritised shortlist that's ready to act on.

[Preview template](#)

All six templates are available in the DiBL template library. Sign up free at [dibl.eu/sign-up](https://dibl.eu/sign-up), open the case builder, choose a template, write your prompt - and you're ready to run your first brainstorm in minutes.

## Real-World Examples

### Case study

#### **GirlTalk – Amplifying Youth Voices at National Scale**

GirlTalk works with young people on topics that are often difficult to surface in traditional group settings – wellbeing, identity, social pressure. Using DiBL Brainstorms across their facilitated workshops, they gave participants a safe, anonymous channel to share ideas and experiences that might otherwise have stayed unspoken. To date, DiBL has supported over 35,000 interactions with young people through GirlTalk's programmes – a scale that would be impossible to achieve through open verbal discussion alone. The word cloud format proved particularly powerful: seeing their own thoughts reflected back as part of a collective picture helped participants feel heard, and gave facilitators a real-time map of where the conversation needed to go. The impact reached national media, with GirlTalk's approach featured on TV2 in April 2026.

### Case study

#### **Waterwise – Policy Solutions Through Brainstorming**

Waterwise's "Save the City" activity demonstrates how brainstorming mechanics drive policy-level thinking. Participants engage in freeform ideation: they submit policy solutions to address urban water scarcity as free-text responses. After input closes, the facilitator displays all submissions on the shared screen, and the group votes on which solutions are most viable and impactful. The brainstorm creates transparency – participants see the full breadth of ideas emerging from the room. The voting step then creates commitment: by collectively ranking ideas, participants shift from spectators to decision-makers. Facilitators use the prioritised list to guide deeper discussion on implementation, ensuring that the session conclusion is not just creative thinking, but actionable policy direction.

### Case study

#### **Green Rooftops – Brainstorming Policy Incentives**

The Green Rooftops game uses DiBL Brainstorms to co-create policy incentives for green roof adoption. Over five 3-hour sessions, a diverse cohort of citizens, architects, and urban planning students submitted proposals for how to encourage rooftop greening – each participant contributing up to 3 free-text suggestions per round.

After submission, the facilitator displayed all proposals on the shared screen, reviewed them in real time for appropriateness, and removed any submissions that were off-topic. The group then voted on which incentives were most viable and feasible within realistic policy and budgeting constraints. The brainstorm outputs fed directly into policy recommendations published in the GREAT Green Roofs Cyprus Insights Report 2025, used by government and municipal planners as the foundation for a new green roof incentive programme.

## Getting Started with DiBL Brainstorms

Creating your first DiBL Brainstorm takes less than five minutes. Sign up for a free account at [dibl.eu](https://dibl.eu), open the case builder, and choose from six ready-to-use brainstorm templates – each pre-configured for a specific facilitation need. Adapt the prompt and you're ready to go.

DiBL works on any device with a browser – no app downloads required for participants. They join via a session link or QR code, contribute their ideas, and see results appear in real time on the shared screen.

### Getting Started

- **1. Create** Sign up free at [dibl.eu/sign-up](https://dibl.eu/sign-up) and open the case builder.
- **2. Design** Choose one of the six brainstorm templates, write your prompt, and select your visualisation format.
- **3. Facilitate** Share the session link, let ideas flow, and guide the conversation with your live controls.

Learn more: [dibl.eu/brainstorms](https://dibl.eu/brainstorms)

## Key Takeaways

### Summary

- Traditional brainstorming is held back by social inhibition, production blocking, and anchoring bias – simultaneous digital input addresses all three.

- Research on cooperative learning (Gillies, 2016), collective intelligence (Woolley et al., 2010), and dialogic teaching shows that structured group ideation significantly outperforms unstructured discussion.
- DiBL Brainstorms give facilitators active control over the experience: visualise, filter, highlight, prioritise – not just collect.
- Six ready-to-use templates – from Quick Brainstorm to Funnelled Brainstorm – mean you can run your first session in minutes, not hours. Compared to tools like Mentimeter, Wooclap, AhaSlides, and Kahoot, DiBL goes beyond the brainstorm moment to support the full facilitated learning journey.
- A DiBL Brainstorm should always end with a prioritised set of ideas and clear ownership – turning input into action.

## Continue Reading

### Build It Yourself

Ready to create your own brainstorm in DiBL? Our builder guide walks you through the technical setup step by step.

### Whitepaper 7: Building Brainstorms – How to Build with DiBL Series

#### More in the Ways to Use DiBL Series

Whitepaper 2: Dilemmas – Facilitated decision-making through branching scenarios

Whitepaper 3: Presentations – Interactive, facilitator-led content delivery

Whitepaper 4: Quiz & Mini-Games – Knowledge checks with scoring and gamification

Whitepaper 5: Simulations – Multi-round scenarios with variables and consequences

Whitepaper 6: Survey & Polls – Real-time data collection and evaluation

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