



EXERCISE: What's in a Meme? (or a Name or a Frame)

Goal

This exercise helps harness collective creativity when groups are trying to come up with a core creative concept—a meme for their campaign, a name or a specific messaging frame. It's basically 3 categories to structure a group brainstorm in. We've found this exercise alleviates some of the pressure (be creative now!) from the group brainstorm and encourages strategic thinking and dialogue in the creative process.

The Three Categories

FUNCTION: What does the name do? (Ex: mobilize X constituency, name the problem, offer vision...). This category tracks ideas about goals.

SENTIMENTS: What are the core sentiments the name has to communicate? (Ex: threat, inspiration, hip...) This category allows for a conversation about tone/brand.

ELEMENTS: What are some elements of the name? (Ex: the issue, group's core concern...) This allows for a conversation about the actual content of the name. (Ex - "I know the name has got to have the word justice in it")

Facilitator Directions

First: Write the three categories up on three different pieces of big paper and display all three simultaneously. Introduce the exercise and clarify that it is designed to start the process of developing creative terminology and is intended to produce a range of ideas not one definitive answer. It is important to manage the group's expectations about the outcome.

Second: Explain the different categories and make sure everyone understands the distinctions. A few examples usually help with this.

Third: Briefly go through brainstorming within each category to get the creative juices flowing and test that the categories are really understood and working for everyone. This is an opportunity for the facilitator to model the exercise with clarifying questions where needed ("You said that was a function but that sounds more like a sentiment to me? What do other people think?").

Fourth: Open up the brainstorm to all 3 categories simultaneously with facilitator pushing the conversation where appropriate with elicitive questions. ("Okay if that is one of the elements what is the function that is serving?")

Close/Next Steps: The process can end by identifying a short list of the group's favorites. Perhaps a name will have emerged or merely a creative direction. After the session, a summary of the creative work should be written up and distributed to participants for further thought or deferred to a smaller group for more creative work and decision-making.

Tips

Pay attention to group energy and participation. People have very different approaches and stamina regarding group brainstorming. The exercise shouldn't run much more than 30 minutes unless there is a lot of energy. If energy is low you can offer the group a chance to work either in pairs or individually to do a bit of quiet time and individual brainstorming and then come back and share it with the group. Likewise although the importance of a core meme or name is usually self-evident, it's helpful if participants have some familiarity with story-based strategy since that provides some working terms and strategic concepts to explore the different political dimensions of a creative concept.