Diamond Challenge
for High School Entrepreneurs

Venturing for Social Good

Session 4-Solution generation and screening

"In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing. The worst thing you can do is nothing."

Theodore Roosevelt

Once you've identified a societal or environmental problem that you are passionate about solving, the next step is to generate a lot of possible solutions and then apply a set of screening criteria to determine the best one to move forward with. This video describes creativity techniques that may prove useful for generating possible solutions. It also discusses how to utilize screening criteria.

Generating solutions is an exercise in imagining possibilities. It involves creativity and divergent thinking. There are a lot creativity techniques, including brainstorming, reverse brainstorming, brainwriting and attribute listing. Let's talk about each of these techniques briefly so that you can give them a try.

Let's start with one you've probably used before – brainstorming. Brainstorming involves setting aside a short amount of time – like maybe 15 or 20 minutes - during which your team will try to generate as many ideas as possible. It is important to avoid evaluating ideas while brainstorming. It is also best to brainstorm while in an active posture or standing, with the group close together in front of a whiteboard or flipchart that can be used to record ideas. Using a framing statement is a great way to focus a brainstorming session. For example, if you are trying to brainstorm solutions to the problem of ending childhood hunger, then you might start your session with a framing statement like "how might we make sure that all children have enough to eat?"

A second creativity technique - reverse brainstorming - involves generating lots and lots of ideas for how to make the problem WORSE. The basic idea underlying reverse brainstorming is that utilizing an alternative perspective can help to uncover some really interesting ideas that you wouldn't have thought of otherwise. Specifically, once you've generated some great ways to make the problem worse, you can consider whether doing the opposite would be a great way to solve the problem.

A third creativity technique – brainwriting – is a lot like brainstorming, but it involves having members of your team write down their proposed solutions before sharing them. Brainwriting ensures that all members of the team can contribute ideas without fear of evaluation or judgment. It works by having team members write down three ideas in five minutes and then repeating the task several times. For example, if you have four people on your team and you complete five rounds of brainwriting, then you would generate 4 people x 3 ideas x 5 rounds = 60 ideas in less than 30 minutes.

[graphic – 4 people x 3 ideas x 5 rounds = 60 ideas]

A fourth creativity technique is attribute listing and modification. For this technique you would start with an existing solution for the problem you're trying to solve and then consider how you can make it better. For example, offering recycling receptacles is one way to promote environmental sustainability, but could existing receptacles be improved? If we list the attributes of a commonly used recycling can – its size, color, location, use of slogans and graphics, and other attributes - then we can consider what changes – modifications and additions – might make the existing solution better. For example, would making the cans twice as large or colored like a rainbow encourage more recycling? Would the addition of a new feature like having the cans say "thank you for recycling" make a positive impact?

Once you've used brainstorming, reverse brainstorming, brainwriting and attribute listing and modification to generate possible solutions to your problem, it's time to screen your ideas to pick the one that seems most promising. Utilizing a set of screening criteria is highly recommended for this purpose.

Screening criteria describe solution characteristics that are either desirable or undesirable. Undesirable characteristics can be used to screen out ideas. Desirable characteristics can be used to screen in ideas.

Examples of undesirable, screen out characteristics include:

- The solution generates beneficiary dependence rather than self-sufficiency
- The solution lacks of a clear source of revenue or a customer segment who would be willing to pay enough to make it sustainable
- The solution would require a significant investment of time, money and other resources to conduct a pilot test of its efficacy
- The solution would require engaging in ethically questionable activities or transgressing relevant laws

Additional screen out criteria might relate to a lack of passion for the solution and team member skill deficits. If you are not willing to spend at least a few years of your life working to develop and implement the solution or if your team lacks critical skills and could not easily obtain them (by adding team members or outsourcing), then it is probably best to eliminate the solution from consideration.

Examples of desirable, screen in characteristics include:

- The solution promises high potential societal or environmental impact in terms of the number of people affected and/or the magnitude of the impact
- The solution offers a clear opportunity to generate revenues needed for long-term sustainability
- Key stakeholder support for the solution is available
- The solution can be easily tested at low cost

Additional screen in criteria might include your teams' enthusiasm for the solution and the feasibility of implementation.

Applying screen out and screen in criteria will help you to choose your most promising solution. As we'll discuss in the next video, your chosen solution provides the basis for formulating an initial social impact model or vision for how the solution will create, deliver and capture value from beneficiaries and payers (aka - customers).

In closing, I'd like to share a quote from author Kevin Michel:

"In every moment of choice, you create a new destiny"

I hope this and the other venturing for good videos are helping you to make choices that will destine you to change the world.