# Break the Frame

Facilitator guide

**About this activity:** the team looks at one problem it is stuck on through the eyes of different people — a customer, a new joiner, a competitor, an outsider. Looking at the same problem as someone else would, the team finds fresh options its own point of view would never have reached.

**What is a frame?** A frame is the way you see a problem. When a team is stuck, everyone is usually looking at the problem the same way — from the same angle. Breaking the frame means looking at it through someone else's eyes, so new ideas can appear.

WHEN DO I USE THIS?

## The right moment

Picture this: the team has spent three meetings on the same problem. Everyone is talking, but the same few ideas keep coming back. Nothing new is appearing, and you badly need fresh options. That is the moment for this activity.

### USE IT WHEN

The team keeps discussing the same problem and gets no new ideas. The same options come back again and again. You have a real, specific problem and need fresh ways to solve it.

### DO NOT USE IT WHEN

The problem is too general ("improve performance," "be more innovative"). The decision is already made. The team has not tried to solve it at all yet — let them try first.

WHAT WILL THE TEAM LEAVE WITH?

## What you'll leave with

### WHAT YOU GET

Two or three genuinely new options that were not on the table before — and, for each one, the viewpoint that unlocked it. Proof of which ideas your starting point of view would never have reached.

### WHY IT MATTERS

Less time stuck in meetings that go in circles, and more time actually executing. The team stops recycling the same ideas and moves forward with options worth trying.

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## PART 1 BEFORE THE ACTIVITY

get ready

1 · WHAT IS MY JOB HERE?

### Your job

Run this activity so that genuinely new ideas emerge. Do not solve the problem. Do not add your own ideas. Your job is to:

- explain the activity and lay out clear instructions
- assign the roles and keep the rules
- keep time and move from one viewpoint to the next
- capture every new idea on the capture sheet
- step in when needed, and guide the team to the comparison at the end

> **The one thing the team should learn:** when you are stuck, the fix is not to think harder from the same point of view. It is to look at the problem through someone else's eyes.

2 · WHO DOES WHAT?

### Roles

| Who | What they do |
|---|---|
| **You (facilitator)** | Run the activity. Lay out the board. Capture the starting answers. Pick the viewpoints and move the problem card to each. Reveal the hidden cards, draw twists, keep time. Capture every new idea on the sheet (or ask one person to be the scribe). Do not join the discussion or suggest ideas. |
| **The team (3–6)** | First, each person privately writes the answer they would choose now. Then the team argues the problem as the assigned viewpoint — not as themselves — and calls out new ideas for the capture sheet. |

> **Say this to the team before you start (in your own words):** "You will each write your own answer first. Then we will argue the problem as different people — a customer, a new joiner, and some surprise viewpoints. Argue as that person, not as yourself. Call out every new idea so I can write it down. There are no wrong answers."

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3 · HOW DO I START?

## Opening script — 2 minutes

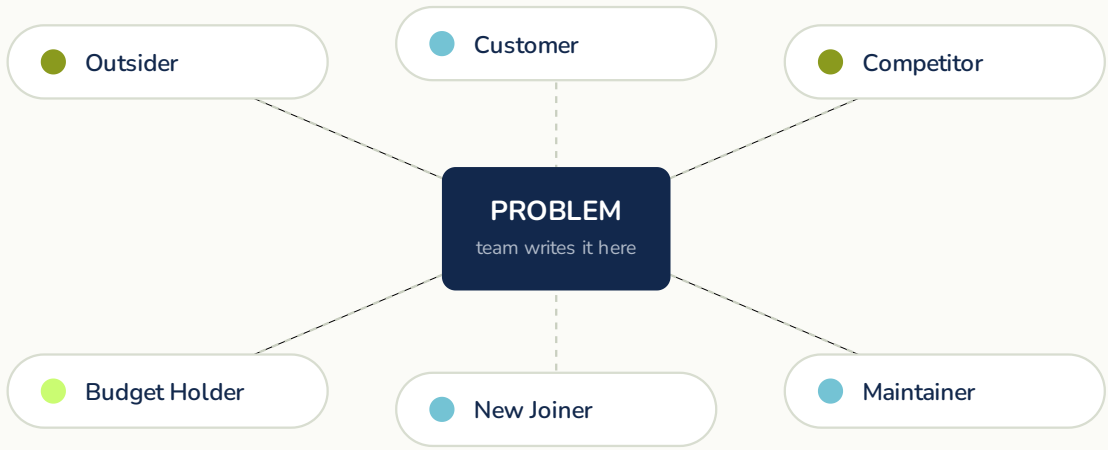
Say this in your own words before you start. Do not read the app page out loud.

> SAY
>
> “We are stuck on this problem. We keep getting the same ideas. Today we will not think harder — we will look at the same problem through other people’s eyes: a customer, a new joiner, someone from outside. First you each write your own answer. Then we argue the problem as these other people. At the end we compare. You will see that the best new ideas come from a point of view we would never normally take. There are no right or wrong answers. We will leave with two or three new options to try.”

4 · HOW DO I PREPARE?

## Setup and materials

PROBLEM AT THE CENTRE · SIX VIEWPOINTS AROUND IT




*Plus a face-down deck of hidden viewpoints — drawn one at a time, unseen in advance.*

**Board:** open it flat. The six core viewpoint cards sit around the edge.

**Problem card:** blank, in the centre. The team writes the problem on it.

**You move the problem card** to each viewpoint as you use it.

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| Material | What it is, and when you use it |
|---|---|
| **Viewpoint cards (6 core)** | Customer, competitor, new joiner, maintainer, budget holder, outsider. The front names the viewpoint; the back has a question to argue from. Used in every round (step 5). |
| **Hidden viewpoint cards (8)** | Surprise viewpoints the team does not see in advance (for example a regulator, a future customer). Used face-down; opened in step 6. |
| **Twist cards** | Short cards in three colours that change a round: a constraint, a clash between two viewpoints, or a pattern-break. Used only if a round feels predictable (step 7). |
| **Problem card** | The blank card. The team writes its problem on it and you place it in the centre (step 3). |
| **Capture sheet** | One sheet. You write every new idea on it as it is called out. |
| **Timer** | You use it to start and end each round. |

**Are the viewpoints fixed?** Yes — the six core and eight hidden cards come in the kit. But you or the team may swap one out: if a card does not fit your problem, remove it and add one that matters more.

**Words to know:** a **viewpoint** (point of view) is a person whose eyes you look through — you argue the problem as they would. A **hidden card** is a surprise viewpoint kept face-down until you open it.

5 · HOW DO I FRAME THE PROBLEM?

## Get the problem right first

This step decides the activity's success. A general problem does not give new ideas. Make it narrow and specific before you start.

| Too general — do not use | Narrow — use this |
|---|---|
| "Improve performance." | "How do we reduce onboarding time by 30%?" |
| "Be more innovative." | "How do we meet the deadline after losing two people?" |
| "Grow the business." | "How do we cut customer complaints without adding headcount?" |

**Rule:** a good problem starts with "How do we…" and ends with a clear result. Fix the problem card before round one.

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## PART 2 DURING THE ACTIVITY

run it

**Before you begin — 30-second check**

- ✓ The problem is written on the card and is narrow and specific
- ✓ The board is out and the six viewpoint cards are in place
- ✓ The hidden cards, twist cards, capture sheet and timer are ready
- ✓ The team understands: argue as the viewpoint, not as yourself
- ✓ Everyone is ready to write their own answer first (step 3)

6 · WHAT DO I DO NOW?

## Run the activity

Set up › Write the problem › Own answer › Viewpoint › Hidden card › Twist › Compare › Carry forward

| | |
|---|---|
| **1. Set up**<br>5 min | Appoint yourself facilitator. Set up the board with the six core viewpoints around the edge. |
| **2. Write the problem**<br>5–7 min | As a team, agree the one real problem you are stuck on. Write it on the blank card and place it in the centre. Keep it specific. |
| **3. Write your answer first**<br>3–4 min | Each person privately writes the one idea they would recommend if the team had to decide right now. Collect these and set them aside, unread. You come back to them at the end. |
| **4. Argue from a viewpoint**<br>5–8 min | **You pick** one viewpoint card and move the problem to it. The team discusses the problem as that person — not as themselves. As ideas emerge, write each one on the capture sheet. Use two or three viewpoints in total (you choose), mixing core and hidden.<br>> **Say:** "If you were the customer, what would you do about this?" |
| **5. Draw a hidden viewpoint**<br>5–8 min | For at least one round, pick a card from the face-down deck and open it — it could be a regulator, a future customer, someone from a very different world. Argue the problem from this new viewpoint. |
| **6. Add a twist**<br>5–8 min · optional | Only if the activity starts to feel predictable. Draw one twist card and run the next round using it.<br>**Constraint · olive** "Half the budget."<br>**Collision · sky** "Two viewpoints at once."<br>**Pattern-break · lime** "The opposite of your answer." |

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**7. Compare and reveal**
5–7 min

Read out the answers everyone wrote at the start. Then read the new options on the sheet. Show which ideas are new.

> **Say:** "Which of these would never have come from where we started? The best new ideas came from the Customer and the New Joiner — not from where any of us began."

**8. Carry it forward**
5 min

Pick the two or three best new options to take forward. **Pick by a show of hands:** read each new option, the team votes, keep the top two or three. Note which viewpoint unlocked each. Photograph the sheet and share it with the team.

**These times are indicative.** A full run is about 35–45 minutes for two or three viewpoints; for a deeper session, run more viewpoints (about 60–90 minutes). The time you need will vary with the complexity of the problem, the size of the team, and the time the team has available. Keep each round short — about five minutes, then move.

GOLDEN RULE

**Never skip the comparison (step 7).** That is where the learning happens — the team sees that its best new ideas came from a viewpoint it would never have used. If time is short, run fewer viewpoints, but always compare.

**One more thing:** keep each person arguing as the viewpoint, not as themselves. That is what makes the new ideas appear.

## While you run — when to step in, when to wait · a principle, not a step

### STEP IN

Someone argues as themselves, not the viewpoint. → Say: "Not as you. As the customer."

A round goes quiet. → Open a hidden card.

The room is quiet and low-energy. → Use an unusual hidden card (a future customer, a regulator).

### WAIT

The talk gets loud or funny. → Let it run.

An idea sounds not practical. → Write it down anyway.

One viewpoint gives nothing. → Move to the next one.

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## PART 3 AFTER THE ACTIVITY

use it again

7 · HOW DO I FINISH?

### Closing script — 2 minutes

SAY

"Today we saw something. We were not short of ideas. We were all looking at the problem the same way. When we looked through other people's eyes, new options came fast. Next time you are stuck, do not push the same view harder. Ask: who else would see this differently? You are leaving with [name the options]. Try them this week."

8 · DID WE GET A GOOD RESULT?

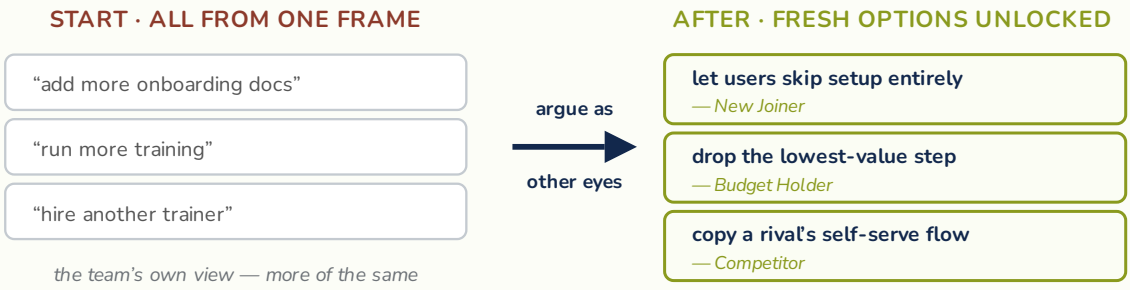
### Check your run

**GOOD RUN**

Two or three new options are on the sheet. The team can name which viewpoint gave each one. The team sees its best new option came from a point of view nobody would have thought of.

**WEAK RUN**

The team argues politely as itself. The new ideas are the same as the first answers. You skipped the comparison step, so no one saw the difference.




**The team was never short of ideas — it was stuck in one frame.**

*Each fresh option carries the viewpoint that unlocked it.*

9 · HOW DO I MAKE THIS A HABIT?

### Build the habit — 30 seconds

THE HABIT

"Who else would see this differently?"

This week, when the team gets stuck, do not think harder from the same point of view. Stop and ask: who would see this problem differently — a customer, a new joiner, someone outside? Then argue as them.

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## Appendix · Reference

You should not need this while you run the activity. Read it before, or use it if something goes wrong.

10 · WHAT IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG?

# Recovery guide

| What happens | What to do or say |
|---|---|
| The team argues as themselves | Say: “Not as you. Argue as the customer. What would they do?” Point at the card. |
| The problem is too general | Say: “This problem is too general. Let us make it narrow. Not ‘improve performance’ but ‘how do we reduce onboarding time by 30%?’” Do not start until the problem is narrow. |
| People speak over each other | Pause the round. Say: “One at a time — I want to hear each idea. Let us go round the table, one point of view each.” Take ideas in turn so nothing is lost. |
| A sharp disagreement breaks out | Step in. Say: “We are not deciding which idea is right today — we are collecting options. Write both down. We choose later.” Park the disagreement; right now the goal is range, not the answer. |
| A round goes quiet | Say: “Quiet round. Let us add a surprise. We open a hidden card.” Or draw a pattern-break twist. |
| The room is quiet and low-energy | Open the most unusual hidden cards (a future customer, a regulator, someone from a very different world). They get a laugh and get people talking. |
| Someone says “this is just role-play” | Say: “Yes. And watch how many new ideas we write down by the end.” |
| No new ideas at the end | Say: “We did not get many new ideas. That is unusual. What was most different about the viewpoints we tried?” Then open one more hidden card. |
| Time runs out before the comparison | Run fewer viewpoints. Never cut the comparison. Two viewpoints plus the comparison is better than four with no comparison. |

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11 · WHAT DO I WRITE DOWN?

## The capture sheet — what you fill in

One sheet runs the whole activity. You write on it throughout (or a nominated scribe does). It carries the reveal on a single page the team keeps.

**1 · STARTING ANSWERS** — written privately, before round 1

Add developers · Push the deadline · Cut scope

*set aside, unread, until the comparison*

**2 · NEW OPTIONS, VIEWPOINT BY VIEWPOINT**

| Viewpoint | New option it produced |
|---|---|
| New Joiner | Let customers self-serve onboarding |
| Budget Holder | Drop the lowest-value workstream |
| Visitor from 2035 | Stop the slowest feature entirely |

**3 · FRESHEST OPTIONS TO TAKE FORWARD** (✓ = never in the starting answers)

✓ Self-serve onboarding ✓ Stop the slowest feature

*Zone 1 is filled privately and set aside. Zone 2 fills as you run the viewpoints. Zone 3 is the reveal: tick the options that never appeared in Zone 1 — those are the ones the team's own point of view would never have reached.*

12 · WHAT DOES A GOOD RUN LOOK LIKE?

## Worked example

The problem: "How do we reduce delivery delays?" The team discussed it for three meetings. The starting answers (written alone) were add developers, push the deadline, cut scope — the same three as always. Then the team argued as the New Joiner, the Budget Holder, and (from a hidden card) the Visitor from 2035. The two freshest options — let customers self-serve onboarding, and stop the slowest feature — came from viewpoints the team would never have taken on its own. Neither was in the starting answers. That gap is the whole point: the team was never short of ideas, only stuck in one way of seeing the problem.

13 · WHAT GOES WRONG MOST OFTEN?

## Common mistakes

- **Skipping the first answers.** Without them, there is nothing to compare. Always collect them before round one.
- **Skipping the comparison.** Without it, this is just a normal idea session. The comparison is what teaches the point.
- **Letting people stay themselves.** "What I would do is…" is not the activity. Push them into the viewpoint.
- **Looking ahead in the hidden deck.** The surprise does the work. Keep the hidden cards face-down until you open them.
- **Long rounds.** Keep each round to about five minutes, then move. Long rounds tire people out.

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14 · WHERE DOES THIS FIT?

## Other tools

| If the problem is… | Use this instead |
|---|---|
| You have new options but cannot agree which comes first | **Prioritise Under Pressure** — agree one shared order. |
| The problem depends on something you treat as fixed | **Assumption Breaker** — test what is fixed and what is not. |
| A constraint has just arrived and the team must adapt | **Decide Under Pressure** — find the real barrier first. |

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