

**ONE DICE. ONE GRID.
TWO HUNDRED EIGHTY-ONE TRILLION IDEAS.**

**T H E
T H I N K I N G
G R I D**

by Ravi Ruparel, BSc BFP FCA



SAMPLER INCLUDING SYNOPSIS, CONTENTS AND INTRODUCTION

RAVI RUPAREL

The Thinking Grid

A Sampler

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Synopsis

Post-it notes. Coloured pens. Creative blocks - no ideas. Even in a world of machine learning, advanced technology, and deep scientific understanding, brainstorming is still stuck in the old age. That's why Ravi Ruparel, London-based creative and business strategist, adviser, and inventor, came up with the Thinking Grid, where, with one dice and one grid, anyone can come up with up to 281 trillion ideas in a matter of minutes.

The Thinking Grid is a tool that Ravi has developed and refined to help assist, organise, and elevate brainstorming of all kinds. It is a straightforward resource but is supported by an even more incredible amount of science and mathematics, which he explains in plain English in this informative book. You will see how, by combining the ordinary structure of a grid with the element of chance that the roll of a dice can bring, you can quickly attempt to solve any challenge creatively and smartly. You will also see how the Grid can be adapted and used for different businesses or creative situations for individuals, teams, and companies.

The author stumbled upon the basic idea and power of the Grid 6 years ago, put it to use, and started to see incredible results. The Grid has successfully been used to train people to create

marketing campaign ideas, immersive experiences, and new products worldwide. The principles can be applied to much wider problem solving across industries, locations, and cultures.

The book goes further than simply showing you how to play and use the Grid. It includes a detailed review of the neuroscience and mathematics that power the Grid, with written explanations of the big concepts that allow the Grid to work. The neuroscience review includes an examination of the Einstellung effect, the Proactive brain concept, dual speed processes, synaptic plasticity and grid cells theory. The supporting mathematics review looks at permutation computation, powersets, probability and compounding.

The Thinking Grid is also packed with the author's thoughts on how to really power up the process, as he shares top tips from the many observed sessions he has joined across the world and amazing examples of successful applications. These include how to leverage digital information to support neural knowledge like using Google search data or feeding off the back of social media hashtags to check what is trending, remixing the way you play the grid, tips on how to play with colleagues and, perhaps most importantly, how to flip the grid to become the simplest project management tool.

Invest just a short amount of time learning about the Thinking Grid and setting yourself and/or your team up for years of increased productivity, creativity, and, of course, tons and tons of ideas.

Introduction: Nigel

Everything you are about to read is inspired by a conversation I had with Nigel from Manchester.

At the time of our conversation, I had a portfolio of interests, including being the COO at a creative agency based in a basement in Fitzrovia, London, which focused on stunt marketing. I managed to combine my love of art, science, technology, and business and helped create Banksy-style, traffic-stopping marketing stunts to raise awareness for big brands and companies (like launching Playstation 4 by abseiling and rebranding London's OXO tower with the shapes of the PS4 controller). Nigel saw this company's successes and, during our conversation, asked me to come and talk to his team about how on earth we were creating and selling such audacious projects to clients.

What Nigel didn't know was that I had been arrogantly working on a holy-grail side project to write a definitive algorithm that would help people invent and create - for months, in a separate business a-formula-for-everything type thing. This wasn't working out too well and certainly wasn't going to be ready when Nigel wanted me to speak to his team. So, I took the basic elements and ideas from what I had done with the formula and decided to turn them into something new. Within a few months, I had created a dice game to play with Nigel's team, and off I

went one day to Manchester on the 9.08 am train from Euston. This game is the basis of the Thinking Grid, a tool that will help you create up to 281 trillion ideas, but hopefully, just the one you need will transform your life.

Since this first call, I have gone on to adapt and refine things. The game has been played with people across the world. Ideas generated have been turned into businesses, campaigns, and stunts, and many of these creations have since won accolades, awards, and, most importantly, made millions of people smile. So far, marketing projects have been implemented in 30 countries, and the media reach has been over 1 billion people. Several businesses have been created using this process, and two have been sold. I have also consulted with neuroscientists and mathematicians who have provided insight into the Thinking Grid's power. Software developers have helped me to create online versions, where you can play remotely with others or enable a self-populating mood board grid that will crawl the internet and bring you back inspiring images to help you to think.

I have created and delivered the wild and wacky, like robots that ride horses and machines that melt plastic bottles and turn them into medals for football competitions. I have also returned to my roots as a Chartered Accountant and business adviser and applied the process to create and grow new ventures with the same originality and impact as marketing ideas.

It's been quite an enriching adventure for all involved, and Nigel and his team have won awards for multiple projects that we have worked together on. I have had many memorable moments and

hope that you create many of your own as well.

Thank you, Nigel.

I

Part One: Meet the Thinking Grid

1

The Grid and the Dice

Boring Brainstorms

Over the 25 years of my professional career, I have attended countless brainstorms across many different organisations. Some were for planning new business propositions. Some were for solving problems that the business was facing, and others were to create new marketing ideas for product launches, campaigns, and content advertising. The one thing that each of these types of brainstorms has in common is that they haven't really advanced much over this time - nearly all brainstorms involve getting a group of people together, and perhaps using coloured post-it notes and maybe some coloured pens to write up ideas. That is the level of sophistication in the process, and if you were lucky, it was being held in a swish hotel or board room with tea and fancy biscuits. Normally, they are dominated by one or two vocal ideators, often the boss or a senior leadership team member. As it is usually the same group of people at each brainstorm, a pattern tends to form and the general structure

and method of generating ideas become habitual. Not even the pandemic of 2020 saw any real innovation to the brainstorming process. Life was turned upside down when people were forced to work from home, and they connected on group video calls, yet people were still defaulting to their old ways of brainstorming. Eventually and somewhat inevitably, over time, fewer, weaker, less diverse ideas surface to the top. For me, brainstorms should be fun and inspiring, but they often escalate into a chore. The risk that businesses will struggle to generate fresh ideas is not because of the people involved or the tools - it's the process. I certainly believe that each of us has a creative brain, it's not a magical gift but the way you manage information, process it, and the mindset you adopt that will influence you and your teams creative potential.

Further to this, I have increasingly found the process of ideating and brainstorm to be old-fashioned, particularly given that we live in a world with artificial intelligence, machine learning, algorithms and technology. As well as this, these sessions are not great for people like me, who can get impatient, distracted and bored at long meetings, even though we love coming up with ideas. So, I have created a simple way to make a brainstorm more engaging, inspiring and productive - The Thinking Grid. As I'll share later, The Thinking Grid is now the main way that one of my businesses creates product inventions and relies on many others that I have trained as part of their brainstorming process. This chapter is dedicated to explaining how to use a grid and a dice to generate ideas. Over the past six years, the process of playing the game with clients has led to incredible projects, and I have been fortunate for these to have led me to have travelled the world, met some of the most famous people

in music, politics and business. I even met the Pope, in Rome, whilst working on a project at an event he was speaking at.

I am not fixed on the Grid being the only way to generate ideas. I actively encourage diverse thinking tools - I regularly explore new ways to keep fresh. In the past, these have included hypnosis, maze walking, art therapy, and sound therapy and many more. I was a mischievous and happy child, not afraid to skip school, set up schemes and projects, or graffiti on walls (my mum was not impressed when I returned home with paint all over my hands). My first encounter with a framework to develop myself aged 16 was a book about mind mapping by Tony Buzan. This launched my academic journey and is partially responsible for my transformation from a smiley but naughty boy to a smiley straight-A student, Economics graduate, Chartered Accountant, and beyond. I am sure that this focus on thought frameworks combined with Microsoft Excel and Google Sheets' overuse in my professional career has positively influenced my mild obsession with the Grid pattern.

The Forest

I typically introduce the Grid in face to face creative workshops with clients. It can be played solo or by a group of people. Whenever I start a training session for the Thinking Grid, I begin with a short story, where you visualise that the mind is similar to a forest. Imagine this: you're the first person to arrive at a new, previously undiscovered forest and you want to get to the other side. How do you know which direction to travel - which direction is the safest, quickest, or most interesting? You don't

know, and so you have to adventure through it. If, however, you are not the first, and many people have visited the forest before you, it is likely that there is already a trodden path that you can see, so the natural reaction, for most people, is to walk that path to get to the other side.

Your brain processes in a very similar to this and, over the years, the way you approach solving problems or coming up with new creative ideas are influenced by what you have done previously - the path that you follow. So, if you, for example, use Post-it notes to brainstorm, you will continue to use post-it notes - the mind is 'efficient' and likes to make the minimal amount of effort to get the answer you need. In many cases, this isn't good, as you fall into lazy patterns, but, by augmenting your instincts to a new method like The Thinking Grid you can increase your own and your teams' creativity and productivity by massive amounts. The neuroscience of the process is further examined in chapter 5. We will look at the 'Einstellung effect' and evidence that the Thinking Grid has similarities with the brain's inherent structure of processing information in more detail.

The Steps

I want to show you how to play the Thinking Grid using an example from the animal kingdom.

Step 1: Having a Clear Understanding

Let's pretend the universe has asked us to create a new creature. What are we looking to achieve? What is our brief - our mission?

I suggest that it is:

“To create a unique animal made from animal features, including their colour and sound.”

The keywords here are animals, features, colour, and sound.

Step 2: Making the Grid

Next, we need the key element of The Thinking Grid... the grid itself. We can make a simple grid on a sheet of paper, or online software (Google Sheets or Microsoft Excel) - I usually make this 8 columns wide, and 6 rows deep, which creates many possibilities. In the top row of each column, we are going to add a keyword from our brief. In this example, we'll use 4 columns. So, from our animal kingdom brief, the keywords we'll use are:

Animal	Features	Colour	Sound

Figure 1: Setting up a simple Thinking Grid

If you are playing in a team, this is a great moment to discuss, agree, and align the headings together.

Step 3: Expand the Possibilities

Now take each word and write 6 related words. The idea here is to set up a full range of possibilities and expand the options. Knowledge, both neural (personal learning, experience and curiosity) and digital available is critical in the process to create ideas. Let's put these into our grid:

Animal	Features	Colour	Sound
Reptile	Sharp Teeth	Rainbow	Howl
Fish	Long Tail	Invisible	Whistle
Bird	Longue Tongue	Green	Bark
Mammal	Wings	Purple	Purr
Crustacean	Shell	Blue	Squeak
Insect	6 Legs	Sparkly	Hum

Figure 2: A completed Grid with trigger words

As you will read later, the number of possibilities of a sequence you open up by taking these steps is insane. In a 3 x 3 grid, the number of possible combinations is 511 and in a 6 x 8 grid is 248 trillion! Let me say that again, by adding 5 columns and 3 rows to a 3x3 thinking grid, the number of possibilities increases to a number that is too long to write down. This is just the start of the wonder of maths and the Thinking Grid, examined further in chapter 4. There are several online tools and tricks to help select words detailed in chapter 7 where I discuss how to quickly review existing and free big data sources found in reviews of internet search and hashtags on social media.

Step 4: Generate your Sequence

Once your board is full, each person should grab a dice (or use an online dice), and roll it for each column. You will randomly select one of the six options in each column - do this for all of the columns. Each person will most likely have their own sequence (I have yet to facilitate a session where two people had the same sequence). It is tough for you to generate chance in your own mind, the acceptance of thinking outside of your mind with a Grid and dice is a huge step to augmenting your current process.

Chance has often been used to decide between two equally strong ideas by tossing a coin, but I have not seen many other examples in my research's brainstorming process. The selection of a sequence by chance means that you are highly likely not to have forced yourself to think about that combination of words and this, in turn, increases your chance of generating a fresh idea. Chance influences your mindset and reduces the risk of overthinking at this early stage. Your sequence is what it is, it was created for you. On many occasions, without the Grid, I have witnessed people freezing up during a brainstorm through fear and overthinking. However, when using the Grid, they are presented with a sequence, it helps them overcome this fear. If a great idea is not easily created (because the sequence is not that great) it does not feel like a fault with them, it's just the roll of the dice and you can increase your luck by rolling it again and creating a new sequence. There is, to some extent, removal of fear of failure.

In a group game, each person will have their own sequence and turn - the brainstorming process has also been democratized.

Everyone has a turn to consider and discuss their sequence and the ideas that flow.

Animal	Features	Colour	Sound
Reptile	Sharp Teeth	Rainbow	Howl
Fish	Long Tail	Invisible	Whistle
Bird	Longue Tongue	Green	Bark
Mammal	Wings	Purple	Purr
Crustacean	Shell	Blue	Squeak
Insect	6 Legs	Sparkly	Hum

Step 5: Reflect

Once you have completed Step 4, you should have a sequence: a series of phrases or words you will now write down. This animal kingdom example might be a humming green-winged crab or a rainbow colour bird with 6 legs that barks. You might not use every word of your sequence; you might use them all. One thing is for sure that the ideas or suggestions will flow and typically each person will have 3-4 ideas based on their sequence within a few minutes.

Once you have taken a few moments, share your ideas, and discuss. What does your unique animal look like? Give it a name.

Following your planned session, pin the grid to your wall or fridge, breathe and mull over your thoughts and conclusions. You are likely to validate or eliminate ideas or create new ones.

The grid can't think like you; you will have to think, choose the best ideas to go further and explore and make happen. You will hopefully have more options to reach your best conclusions.

* * *

This chapter has looked at the grid and the dice in a fundamental way to use them to generate ideas quickly and in a massive volume. I really hope that the penny has dropped and the rest of the book will add significant creative value to this basic introduction. You can play Thinking Grid by yourself, or play it with a group of people and it is straightforward. The animal kingdom example is basic, but it hopefully shows you it works. I doubt very much that without a Grid I would have been able to create a humming green-winged crab using post-it notes. On many occasions, playing with teams, I have been able to, within 20 to 25 minutes, get teams of up to 20 to generate more than 50 quality ideas. This is definitely time-saving, but what's magic is that some of the ideas are highly original and can really help you make the difference to your plans.

Now that I've explained the process let's go deeper into applying the grid, why the grid works, adapting the grid, and making ideas happen.



About the Author

Ravi Ruparel is an award-winning creative and business strategist with a portfolio of board positions, investments and patents. He has helped several entrepreneurs build and sell their businesses worldwide and develop many inventive marketing campaigns for some of the worlds biggest brands. He has worked for businesses of all sizes, across the world, and millions have seen and benefitted from his creative work. As a Chartered Accountant and Economics graduate, he supports his creative adventures with a strong financial grounding to ensure client and project success. He is fortunate to have carved out a unique career that combines technology, science, creativity and business. Ravi likes to apply this combination of interests to projects that make people smile and leave them with better health, education and great lives. He is the Chair of the Digital Education Awards and Trustee and Governor of Finton House School.

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