

# How to facilitate blue sky thinking - TalkWise worksheet

In pursuit of innovation, leaders often call for blue sky thinking. But what does 'blue sky thinking' actually mean? What does it sound like? And what voices do you need to put it into practice?

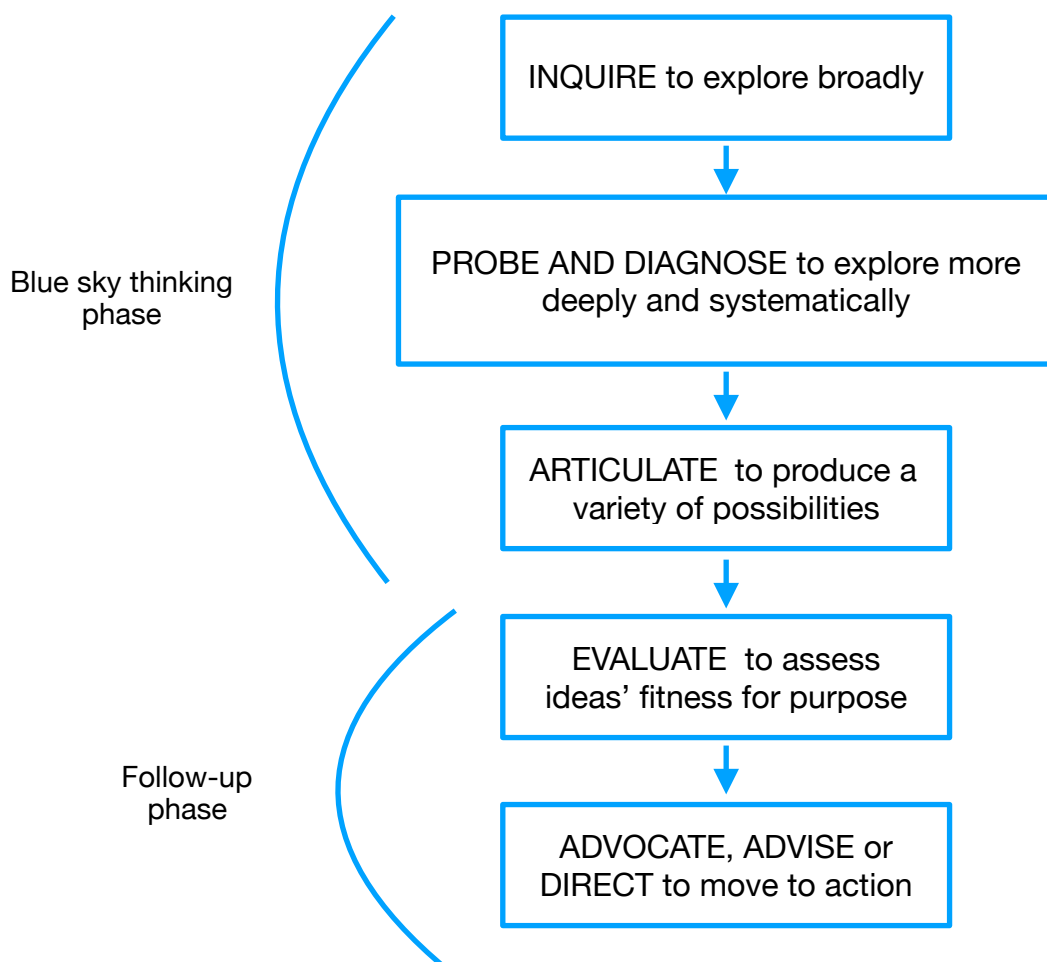
Let's assume that blue sky thinking is a call for thinking that might be different from the prevailing norms. Thinking that is new and unfamiliar, unclouded by presuppositions or habitual tendencies. Thinking that offers a longer and clearer view of things, somehow uplifting and energising in its impact.

This, then, presents a major obstacle in the habitual nature of our patterns of thinking and talking. We all have our own distinctive individual profiles of 'voices' which shape and constrain how we think and talk. To truly achieve blue sky thinking we must, therefore, not only recognise and manage our own patterns of thinking and talking, but also face the challenge of what happens when we encounter other people's tendencies.

So, what can we do to invite and support blue sky thinking?

## A process to facilitate blue sky thinking

Blue sky thinking needs to be pursued through a particular type of organised conversation, and this means a conversation which uses specific voices in an unusually deliberate way. Since the objective of blue sky thinking is to discover new, longer, wider views of things, then exploration is the priority. In VoicePrint terms this means using the voices of Inquire, Probe and Diagnose.



Think about a team, group, or situation in which you would like to do more blue sky thinking. Make some notes on what each phase might sound like in practice. You might also about the VoicePrint tendencies in your group or team, and identify one or more individuals with strengths in the required voices, who can help maintain the correct focus for each phase.

| Phase   | Voice      | Sounds like   |
|---|------------|---|
| 1. Explore broadly  | Inquire    | <i>e.g. What would be entirely new and different to the way we do things at the moment?</i> |
| 2. Explore more deeply and systematically   | Probe      | <i>e.g. What happens if you reverse that logic?</i>   |
|   | Diagnose   | <i>e.g. What might flow from that alternative starting point?</i>                           |
| 3. Produce a variety of provisional possibilities   | Articulate | <i>e.g. We could describe this as...</i>  |
| 4. AFTER THE BLUE SKY PHASE<br>Assess the ideas in terms of fitness for purpose... and test in practice | Evaluate   | <i>e.g. The potential benefits of this idea are...,while the potential drawbacks are...</i> |