



Idea Parking Lot Matrix

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Description:

The Idea Parking Lot Matrix is used by a meeting facilitator to support the effectiveness of meetings. By capturing unrelated discussions or comments on paper, rather than allowing those comments to begin extraneous discussions, the Idea Parking Lot Matrix can prevent the planned agenda from being derailed. Meetings sometimes get off track because a person wants to air an unrelated point of view, or because an attendee has not understood the purpose of the meeting, and believes that their point is relevant. These distractions often draw the attention of other group members, and divert attention away from the planned agenda.

The underlying purpose of this tool is to affirm the value of meeting participants by acknowledging their ideas, while maintaining focus on the issue at hand. Through documenting these ideas and comments, participants understand that while their participation is important, there isn't typically time for unrelated discussions. When people's ideas are validated and noted on the Idea Parking Lot Matrix, they are typically able to refocus on the agenda. The Idea Parking Lot Matrix keeps everyone committed to accomplishing the meeting's objectives, while capturing the ideas to be addressed later.

When to Use:

The Idea Parking Lot Matrix can be used in any meeting or group setting, when the facilitator finds that team members are addressing problems or solutions that are not relevant to the issue, discussing issues outside the scope of the current meeting, asking questions that will be answered later in the session or a subsequent one, or focusing on issues that are not part of the meeting (e.g., concerns about the organization, personnel problems, etc.). This tool can also be used when an improvement team is still determining root causes of an issue, and meeting participants begin to suggest solutions too early in the process. The Idea Parking Lot Matrix stores ideas that are not relevant to the current discussion. Ideas are "parked" on a piece of paper, acknowledging the contribution but noting that the issue is not relevant to the current agenda or issue.

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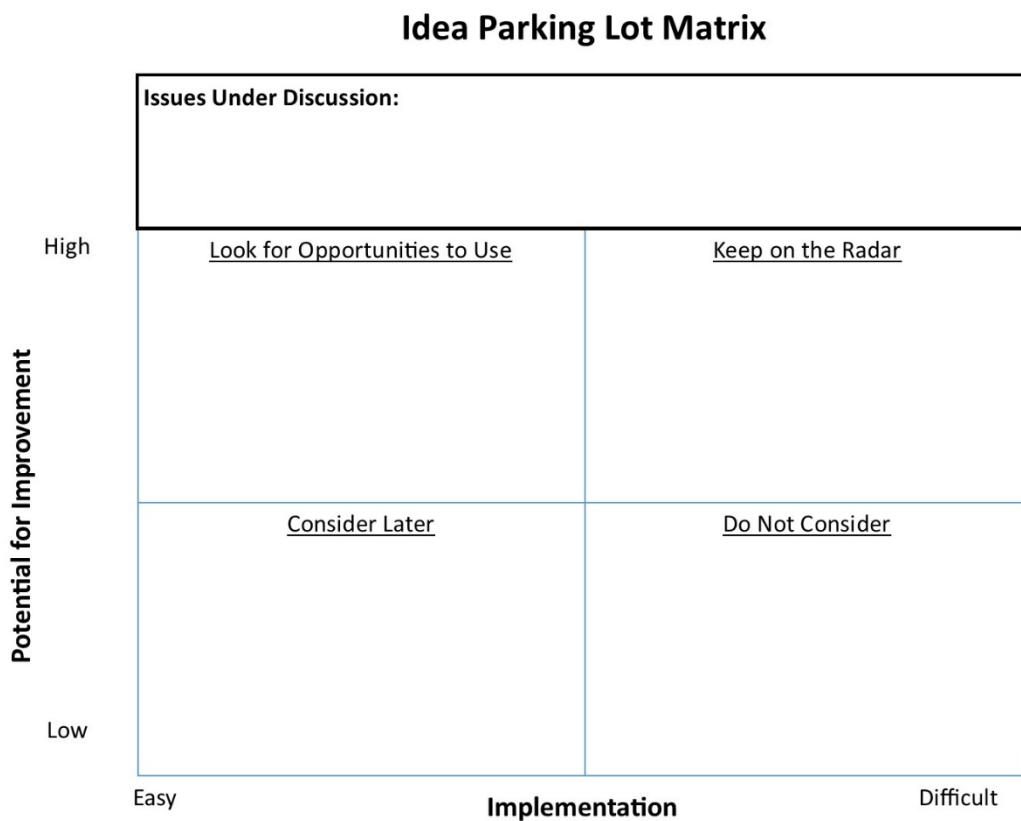
Construction Steps:

1. Draw the Idea Parking Lot Matrix on a piece of flip chart paper as shown in the template below, or print a flip chart sized version of the template.
 - a. Create a grid of four quadrants, adding titles of “Look for Opportunities to Use”, “Keep on the Radar”, “Consider Later” and “Do Not Consider” in the four boxes.
 - b. Title the horizontal axis Implementation, with a scale of Easy to Difficult.
 - c. Title the vertical axis Potential for Improvement, with a scale of Low to High.
 - d. Above the grid, add a box to describe the issue(s) under discussion.
2. In the box marked “Issues Under Discussion,” briefly describe the purpose of the meeting or the issue(s) being discussed. This helps to clarify what is (and is not) relevant, when extraneous ideas arise.
3. Explain to the group how the Idea Parking Lot Matrix works:
 - a. The purpose of the tool is to collect ideas and comments not directly relevant to the issue under discussion, and store them for the future.
 - b. All ideas are welcomed during the meeting.
 - c. Some ideas are not directly relevant to the purpose of the meeting.
 - d. These ideas will be collected on the flip chart.
 - e. These ideas will be discussed later (in the meeting, at a subsequent meeting, through follow-up conversations, etc.).
4. When a meeting participant offers an idea not directly relevant to the issue under discussion, ask the participant to write their idea down on a sticky note. The participant should then be asked to place it on the Idea Parking Lot Matrix within the appropriate quadrant.
 - a. Look for Opportunities to Use: The idea has a high potential for improving the issue under discussion, and is easy to implement.
 - b. Keep on the Radar: The idea has a high potential for improving the issue under discussion, but is difficult to implement.
 - c. Consider Later: The idea has a low potential for improving the issue under discussion, but is easy to implement.
 - d. Do Not Consider: The idea has a low potential for improving the issue under discussion, and is difficult to implement.

The group can *briefly* discuss if the idea is in the right quadrant and move it to the correct quadrant as needed, but group consensus and/or agreement on the final placement of ideas should occur at the end of the meeting (Step 6), in order to prevent this step from derailing the meeting. *Achieving this consensus may prove challenging in certain groups, and the facilitator should be prepared to guide this process.*
5. For the remainder of the meeting, continue to use the Idea Parking Lot Matrix to capture comments or questions that are not directly relevant to the issue under discussion or irrelevant to the agenda.
6. At the end of the meeting, read each sticky note on the Matrix. Determine the final placement of each, and take one of the following actions:
 - a. Remove notes with concerns/questions/issues that were addressed or are no longer relevant.
 - b. Answer relevant questions or make a commitment to provide answers.

- c. For items not relevant to the team or meeting issue under discussion, identify the appropriate person to tackle them and ask a team member to make the hand-off.
- d. If there are actionable items, identify what needs to happen, when, and who's responsible; then add them to the action items list for the meeting.
- e. If the team or meeting is an ongoing activity and there are relevant ideas that should not be forgotten, capture these in an electronic document or leave the sticky notes on the wall-sized chart and hang them each time the team meets for updating.

Example: Idea Parking Lot Matrix Template



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