

# Bird-in-Hand

»Who Am I? What Do I Know?Whom Do I Know«

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	FACILITATORS	CATEGORY	DURATION	LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY
5	1 + 1 Notetaker	Emphathize, Define, Ideate	20-25min	Easy

## Description

The bird-in-hand principle is a method for developing ideas based on individual competencies and attributes of the people who are working together on a new project. It is part of the principles of Effectuation by Professor Saras D. Sarasvathy. She was researching in the field of entrepreneurship and examined decisions of successful entrepreneurs.

"In a cognitive science—based investigation into the thinking processes of founders of public companies, ranging in size between \$200 million and \$6.5 billion, whose résumés included more than 15 years of multiple startups, it was found that subjects started with a given set of means, rather than a predetermined goal or an opportunity to which they were strongly committed. That was the case even when they were provided with strong market research data supporting a clearly defined opportunity. In fact, starting with exactly the same "opportunity," the 27 expert entrepreneurs ended up building a variety of different ventures in 18 completely different industries!" (Sarasvathy, 2008b)

Sarasvathy emphasizes that the bird-in-hand method is not a goal-driven but a means-driven approach. "The emphasis here is on creating something new with existing means rather than discovering new ways to achieve given goals" (Sarasvathy, 2008a).

In comparison to most usability methods applied in a design thinking process, the bird-in-hand method it is not focusing on users and the environment. Instead, it focuses on resources that are currently available — that means skills, experiences, attributes, values, knowledge and contacts of the people who are using this approach to develop new projects. Nevertheless, the method can best be assigned to the empathize, define and ideate phases of the Design Thinking process.

Using the bird-in-hand method, people have to answer three main questions (Sarasvathy, 2008b):

Who am I?

What do I know?

Whom do I know?

The question “Who am I” means “traits, tastes and abilities”.<sup>1</sup> “What do I know” refers to “education, training, expertise and experience”.<sup>1</sup> “Whom do I know” asks for “social and professional networks”.<sup>1</sup>

These questions refer to experiences from work, values, strengths, education, etc. It might also help to ask: “What is your background, what have you worked with before and what have you learned from it?”<sup>2</sup>

Mortensen (n.d.) suggests to use the bird-in-hand method especially for projects with high uncertainties: “We have established that in projects with a high degree of uncertainty you should start acting based on the means readily available to you, rather than spending a long period strategizing.”

## Materials

- ▶ Paper
- ▶ Pen
- ▶ Post-Its
- ▶ Cardboard
- ▶ Board or Wall or online tool (e.g. miro)

## Preparation

The answers to the three main questions from the bird-in-hand method should help to find out what skills, values, knowledge, networks, etc. you and other workshop participants or group members have in a team and what these can be used for. The attributes will be collected and reflected in the group. On the one hand, the team gets an overview of its existing resources. On the other hand, all participants can rediscover their own skills from a different perspective and learn how to use them to develop new ideas and in new areas.

Before the method is applied in a workshop, the participants should answer the following questions individually to be able to introduce themselves in a short time without thinking about the answers too long: What is your background? What have you worked with before and what have you learned from it?

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.effectuation.org/?page\\_id=4055&principle=bird-in-hand](https://www.effectuation.org/?page_id=4055&principle=bird-in-hand)

<sup>2</sup> <https://innovationenglish.sites.ku.dk/metode/method-bird-in-hand/>

The materials listed above or an adequate online tool should be prepared. Then the participants should be seated in groups of five people (or be put into breakout rooms in the zoom version of the workshop).

Each group needs one moderator and one notetaker. The time for the whole workshop should be set to 20-25 minutes with an interruption after ten minutes to give all groups the final task.

### Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Imagine you are a small startup with a team of 5 people (1 moderator, 1 notetaker for this workshop).
2. Your final goal is still top secret. That is because it is not about reaching a certain goal but about defining the goal through your personal skills and characteristics.
3. The group members introduce themselves to each other. Tell your colleagues who you are, what you know and who you know. Meanwhile, the listening participants make notes with the attributes, which they derive from the personal introductions of the others. (5 minutes: 1 minute for each group member)
4. After this, reflect the introductions and collect all the values, attributes, knowledge and contacts of all the group members on post it's. (5 minutes)
5. After these 10 minutes, the admin tells you the final task:
6. "Develop something that helps elderly people in their everyday life!"
7. Now you have 10 more minutes to develop an idea that builds on the skills and knowledge of your group. Do not only think about the finished product, but also about who will be responsible for which tasks. Explain the connection between the idea and the competencies of the group.
8. Present your ideas.

### Remarks, Tips, Limitations

#### **Sarasvathy's Principles of Effectuation:**

"Saras Sarasvathy's theory of Effectuation (2001) describes an approach to making decisions and performing actions in entrepreneurship processes, where you identify the next, best step by assessing

the resources available in order to achieve your goals, while continuously balancing these goals with your resources and actions."<sup>3</sup>

Sarasvathy says that Effectuation is based on given resources compared to other processes, which try to achieve a set goal by taking a strategic approach.

### **“The four principles of effectuation are:**

- ▶ Bird-in-Hand: You have to create solutions with the resources available here and now.
- ▶ Lemonade principle: Mistakes and surprises are inevitable and can be used to look for new opportunities.
- ▶ Crazy Quilt: Entering into new partnerships can bring the project new funds and new directions.
- ▶ Affordable loss: You should only invest as much as you are willing to lose.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Answering the three main questions of the bird-in-hand method:**

Ditte Hvas Mortensen (n.d.) from the Interaction Design Foundation suggests to use different kinds of mapping in her article about the Principles of Effectuation. “Who I am relates to your identity: your values, attributes and abilities” (Mortensen, n.d.). To find these things out, she suggests to use Value Mapping. Furthermore, she explains Competence Mapping and Network Mapping to answer questions number two and three from the bird-in-hand method.

## References

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<sup>3</sup> <https://innovationenglish.sites.ku.dk/model/sarasvathy-effectuation/>

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