

# “What If?”

Imagine what would happen if gravity stopped for one second every day. What would things be like? What would land surfaces look like? How about the oceans and rivers? How would life have developed under such conditions? Would living things have special “zero-gravity adaptive features?” How would houses be designed? Imagine your living room. How would you design it and its furnishings if gravity stopped for one second every day?

Human beings occupy a special niche in the order of things. Because we have the ability to symbolize our experience, our thinking is not limited to the real and the present. This capability empowers us in two major ways. First, it enables us to anticipate the future. We’re able to ask ourselves: “Suppose it rains tomorrow? What would happen to our picnic? What alternative arrangements should be made?” By simulating such possibilities in our minds, we can plan for the future. Second, since our thinking is not bound by real world constraints, we can generate ideas which have no correlate in the world of experience.

If Soft Thinking is thinking at the “germinal” stage of things, then realm of the possible that is postulated above is the “germinal seedbed”. One of the best soft thinking tools for cultivating this seedbed is the “what if” tool.

Asking “what if” is an easy way to get your imagination going. To do it, you simply ask “what if?” and then finish the question with some contrary-to-fact condition, idea or situation. The “what if” question can be whatever you wish, just as long as it’s not a currently existing situation. The nice thing about “what if” is that it allows you to suspend a few rules and assumptions, and get into a “germinal” frame of mind.

A few examples:

- ☞ What if human life-expectancy were 200 years?
- ☞ What if when you looked in the mirror, there became two of you?
- ☞ What if people didn’t need to go to sleep?

The “What If?” exercise can be done solo or in a group.

Solo:

- ✓ Make a list of possible “what if” questions surrounding a current project. You should come up with at least 5 questions.
- ✓ On a separate sheet of paper, brainstorm as many possible answers to each question as you can think of.

Group:

- ✓ If your group is large, break it up into smaller groups of 3 or 4 people.
- ✓ Each member of the group must come up with one “what if” question.
- ✓ Then, when each member of the group has a question, the group should brainstorm on possible answers to the questions postulated by the group.
- ✓ The group should come up with at least one (more are acceptable, too) answers to each question and present them to the larger group.

What if \_\_\_\_\_ ?

Answer(s):

Oh, I know you want to read this, but do you really need to?

There are several points to this exercise. Among them, the primary one is that we don’t often use our “germinal seedbed” (imagination tools) because we’ve not been taught to. Or, rather, we’ve been taught not to. Our schools and our parents start us off thinking about fairy tales and fantasy, but eventually lead us into a more practical way of thinking.