

# What-if Ona



INSTITUTE  
OF NEXT  
BY INFONOMIA



# What-if Ona

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# How the Ona Project was born

For the last 20 years we have been working on innovation, and on many occasions we have seen how inquiring and innovative girls and boys can be.

In fact, there are prominent examples of extremely innovative solutions to real problems that have been thought up by children.

There are numerous projects based on this concept, trying to see how a child's mind can find solutions to real problems that are quite different than the solutions adults give.

For this reason, about three years ago we started to keep a list of some real issues that affect us, but we don't pay too much attention to. We wondered "how would kids themselves think about it?" The results are the 20 questions Ona ponders in this book.

At the end of the text, we have included 20 solutions: how to solve each one of the 20 "problems" Ona wonders about in a way that has already been proposed and developed in the real world.

Therefore, there are two ways to use this text.

First of all, it can be used simply as a story to tell our children or grandchildren (when not for them to read themselves). If you use it this way, the idea is to ask the children how they would solve these issues.

Or secondly, you can also use it within the context of learning about innovation in companies, to see what solutions professionals can come up with to the problems that Ona has detected. If you want to use it this way, it can be useful to contrast the ideas everyone proposes with the 20 “solutions” at the end of the book.

We hope it is enjoyable, and helpful. Because... why innovate if it is not useful, and fun?

My name's Ona,  
Mama says  
I'm curious as a cat.

*What-if-Ona*, she calls me.

I love asking questions even if  
I don't always have the answers.

I think if you have a *why* you  
can always find a *how*.

*What if Ona*



1.

A new day begins and  
while I'm showering I think...

What must the monster  
in the drainpipe  
do with all the water  
that runs down the drain  
while I'm waiting for it  
to heat up?

*What if Ona*





2.

I go outside and imagine...

...that all the chewing gum  
stuck to the pavement  
decides to float away  
like soap bubbles,  
making my scooter go  
extra-super quick.

*What if Ona*



3.

Fine, you must sit down in class,  
but I feel like my ideas  
get stuck to the floor.

What if I let them fly away?  
What if my ideas  
could roll away?

*What if Ona*





4.

Mama asks me why I've lost my coat. She says I must find it.

But what if my coat  
found me?

*What if Ona*



5.

A whole day with my  
backpack on my back...

Do snails get  
a backache, too?

*What if Ona*





6.

Grandpa is full of stories.

What if he stuffed all his  
stories into pots so that  
they would never get lost?

*What if Ona*



7.

My grandmother and her phone  
do not get along...

And what if my Granny's  
mobile phone looked like  
the kind she used when  
she was young?

*What if Ona*



8.

My grandparents have  
given me some money.

When I have enough  
I'll buy a telescope.

In the meantime, how can I  
make this more fun?

*What if Ona*





9.

I have counted stones,  
I have counted people and even birds.  
I have nothing left to count...

What if waiting  
wasn't boring?  
Can you imagine?

*What if Ona*





10.

I like the ground clean at home  
and outside, too.

You've seen it,  
I've seen it.

Who will pick it up?

*What if Ona*



11.

I can't imagine a world without trees...

What if we always  
carried seeds in our  
holey pockets?

*What if Ona*



12.

How come only grown-ups  
can make decisions  
about our future?

But we boys and girls  
have more future.

What if they asked us?

*What if Ona*





13.

Homework must have been invented  
by a very boring person.

What if doing maths  
was like being  
on a game show?

*What if Ona*





14.

I wish I had a big sister that would help me, like my friend Cloe.

What if I adopted one?

What if Ona



15.

My mama also studied violin  
with Professor Shorofsky.

The music I play  
is very old.

Do the classes have  
to be old, too?

*What if Ona*



16.

Trying on clothes in a  
changing room is torture.

Mirror, mirror on the wall:  
who can see how clothes fit  
without even having to take  
off a sock?

*What if Ona*





17.

It's impossible for anyone else  
to be wearing my dress.

I decided to make it myself.

*What if Ona*





18.

Dad is worried.

The washing machine has broken.

An expert could show me  
how to fix it.

In exchange, I could teach  
him to fix “wet homework”.

I’m an expert at that!

*What if Ona*



19.

When my baby sister  
is sad her dummy fixes  
everything.

What if parents  
had a dummy?

*What if Ona*



20.

The day is over. I'm sure our school feels lonely when we all go home.

What if we opened  
the doors so life  
could go in?

*What if Ona*







# Real Solutions

①

## Hot water in the shower

To solve the problem of the millions of litres of water we waste in our homes while waiting for hot water in the shower, the entrepreneurs of Aquareturn propose an ingenious system that joins comfort and ecology.

More in [www.aquareturn.com](http://www.aquareturn.com)

②

## Remove chewing gum from the streets

In nearly every city in the world we can find millions of pieces of chewing gum stuck to the pavement. The most common solution is to remove it with a hot water high-pressure wash. However, a few years ago we found out about a young entrepreneur that found a way to use a harmless bacteria that feeds on the materials used in chewing gum.

More in [gumpak.es](http://gumpak.es)

③

## Chairs with wheels in the classroom

Some studies show that using chairs with wheels on them increases students' concentration levels in school. Apparently, being able to simply move back and forth a few centimetres either way breaks the brain's sense of monotony and allows for better concentration. A team of architects writes about it in texts like [thethirdteacher.com](http://thethirdteacher.com).

More in [mirplayschool.com/producto/mia-ruedas](http://mirplayschool.com/producto/mia-ruedas)

④

## Name tags to avoid losing things

Mums and dads all over the world know how easy it is to lose kids' things. To avoid doing so, most people put some sort of tag with the owner's name on their stuff. Some mom-preneurs from Igualada, Spain came up with simple, easy to use, and easy to design personalized name tags via their digital app.

More in [www.stikets.com](http://www.stikets.com)

⑤

## More comfortable and ergonomic backpacks

Every day we see thousands of children with enormous backpacks on their backs, carrying books and other school supplies from home to school and vice versa. Designing backpacks which don't harm their backs is very important, to avoid injuries which may show up later in life. It is very significant that companies such as Miquelrius.com are working on this issue.

More in:  
[youtu.be/XUvWes9VWyw](https://youtu.be/XUvWes9VWyw)

⑥

## Listening to your elders

Older people have lived lots of very interesting experiences. When they tell their stories to the youngest among us, it is a way of "injecting reality" into school, to increase our collective memory and to make senior citizens part of our everyday life. Throughout the world there are diverse projects aiming to use the experience of our elderly to help us all. One interesting initiative is the activity of "listener" that Montse Bueno is carrying out.

More in [l-escoltador.blogspot.com.es](http://l-escoltador.blogspot.com.es)

# Real Solutions

⑦

## Mobile phones for the elderly

Many older people want an easy-to-use telephone, without the bells and whistles which add no value for them. Curiously, this market seems to be dominated by the mantra of “more for less” when what many are asking for is “less is more”. Some manufacturers have understood the quandary, and in consequence have come up with simple mobile phones.

More in:

[www.greatcall.com/jitterbug](http://www.greatcall.com/jitterbug)

[www.doro.espana.es](http://www.doro.espana.es)

⑧

## Saving should be easier

Those of us of a certain age can remember the incentives the banks used to offer for saving money. I can still recall the books they gave me when I deposited 1000 pesetas. Now kids have lots of mobile devices and physical objects, which should make it easy to incentivize saving money.

Check out, for instance, the proposal by piggy banking in [www.kickstarter.com/projects/187482891/erni-ttm-the-smart-piggy-bank](http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/187482891/erni-ttm-the-smart-piggy-bank)

⑨

## Queues, queues, queues what a hassle

Who hasn't waited in a queue at some point? For me, the most extreme case was when I took my children to a theme park in the summertime. Having to wait under the hot sun for hours in order to get on a ride that might last a few minutes, and trying to keep my nervous and anxious children entertained is the queue is something I don't recall too fondly. Today there are many solutions for queuing up virtually: you get a number, and a message is sent to your mobile a few seconds before it's your turn.

A good example:

[www.qminderapp.com](http://www.qminderapp.com)

10.

*Not one scrap  
of paper on the  
ground*

I believe that the best measure of a society's cultural level is how many pieces of litter there are on the ground. Even more telling, watching how citizens themselves bend over to pick up litter, without waiting for a government employee to do so. There are quite a few diverse projects to clean up using the active participation of citizens, such as the one a few years ago in Portugal to clean up the forests. I confess that I cannot help myself: rubbish I see, rubbish I pick up. My children don't like me to do it, but I think it is the best inheritance I can give them—the idea of the commitment one has to their city.

11.

*Planting trees  
to survive*

A few years ago I had the chance to hear about the Felix Finkbeiner Project, a German boy who had mobilized thousands of people throughout the world to plant trees. This slogan “Stop talking. Start planting” has been communicated in hundreds of occasions all over the world. I think it is the sort of project which would prosper in the next year: proposals for people to act on their own, coordinating with others, and without waiting for any “official organization” to do it for them. If the planet can be saved it is because people must (and should) act. Nothing more.

More in [www.plant-for-the-planet.org](http://www.plant-for-the-planet.org)

12.

*Children coming  
up with solutions to  
real problems*

There are many educational projects based on posing real issues to students so that they can use their creativity to come up with unconventional solutions. The idea is that they apply a fresh point of view to problems that adults cannot solve. One such instance is developing ideas to achieve world peace, one of the aims of [www.worldpeacegame.org](http://www.worldpeacegame.org)

# Real Solutions

13.

*Fun  
maths*

How many people have not been able to reach their dream career in the sciences or technology because they got stuck on maths somewhere in primary or secondary school? Why are maths infamous for being “hard” or “boring”? Isn’t there another way to learn about them? Isn’t it true that in the future everyone will need a certain capacity for quantitative analysis to understand numbers and the connections among them? Many ideas for explaining and learning maths in a new way have been proposed.

One of them is by Theonni Pappas  
here: [eu.ixl.com](http://eu.ixl.com)

14.

*A big brother,  
to help me*

Bullying, also defined as child abuse carried out by classmates, is an increasingly serious problem throughout the world. One of the solutions people are experimenting with in some places is to put students in touch with a young person that has already been through it, who knows what it is all about and how it feels, and who can help support them and make them see the good things the future holds. One good example, successfully applied in neighbourhoods with a high risk index of social exclusion in the United States, is the Big Brother/Big Sister program.

More in [www.bbbs.org](http://www.bbbs.org)

15.

*Music, a painless  
way to learn*

I will always have to fight my frustration of never having learned to play an instrument. I’m so envious when I hear someone who knows how to play. As with maths, many of us give up on trying to learn because the process looks so dull. It is paramount that new and better methods of learning music are created. It’s true that discipline is necessary to learn music, but there have got to be better ways to learn by playing.

Example: [www.aprendomusica.com](http://www.aprendomusica.com)

16.

## Trying on clothes should be easier

What a pain having to get dressed and undressed to try on clothes at a shop. It's the main reason I don't like to go clothes shopping, just to avoid that! Luckily, numerous companies are developing Virtual Reality apps so that you can see what you would look like with those clothes on without getting undressed. It simply shows a virtual image of you in the mirror, with the item of clothing superimposed. The advances made in this concept of "magic mirror" are surprising.

See: [memorymirror.com](http://memorymirror.com)

17.

## Do it yourself (DIY)

In a culture where everything seems to revolve around manipulating symbols on a screen, reencountering your ability to make something with your own hands is a true pleasure. When you become swept up in building something you get close to that state of happiness which psychologists call "flow": time doesn't go by, you enjoy being submerged in what you are doing. DIY is the original "maker" culture, taking advantage of the brain-hand connection and multiplying it with tools and other materials.

Example: [makezine.com](http://makezine.com)

18.

## Repair, don't throw away

Why throw away something broken, when it can probably be fixed easily? Well, it can be repaired by somebody who knows how, that much is clear. There are handy people who know how to fix stuff, either because they have worked in a workshop, or they have always been interested in figuring out how things work. In cities all over the world, Repair Cafés are popping up, spaces where people bring in their broken objects and contact with those who know how to fix things.

More in [www.repaircafe.org](http://www.repaircafe.org)

# Real Solutions

19.

## Dummies for adults

The intensity and complexity of modern life means that many have a hard time finding balance, and often times find themselves feeling sad, lost and alone. It's no wonder there are so many proposals to "find" balance: mindfulness, yoga, Pilates, and the like. Some of them influence the body, while others focus on the mind and psychology. One such example is Superbetter. Furthermore, companies try to make a place where employees can develop and be happy.

See [www.myhappyforce.com](http://www.myhappyforce.com)

20.

## Open classrooms when school is over

What a waste to think that thousands of schools close every day once classes are finished. Luckily, there are more and more schools opening to allow other kinds of activities, such as afterschool programs or adult education projects, to take place. Schools are a key infrastructure for neighbourhoods, and should be taken advantage of as much as possible. Allowing trained adults to set up a variety of activities, not necessarily classes, but skills which will help renovate how we learn.

Example: [ajuntament.barcelona.cat/educacio/ca/patis-escolars-oberts-al-barri](http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/educacio/ca/patis-escolars-oberts-al-barri)







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