

Active Learning

Have you tried the 5 Whys



WHAT IS IT?

The 5 whys is a problem solving strategy used to explore the underlying reason for a particular problem.

Over a series of 'why' questions the questioner(s) follows a problem through to its root cause to discover the real reasons behind a problem rather than have the discussion stay focused on superficial issues.

WHY USE IT?

Asking '5 why' questions can develop students' problem-solving abilities and their capacity to detect process issues.

The 5 whys could be used to unpack real life examples of problems in practice. It can be used to:

- analyse a series of prompt questions, problems or scenarios
- scaffold the idea of causation, and the process of unpacking problems
- encourage critical thinking

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Explain to the class the rationale behind the '5 Whys' process, highlighting the need to stay focused on the central issue and keep the process moving (only one or two minutes per question). Stress that no 'one' pathway will satisfactorily solve every problem. Discern the broad focus area and pose the initial 'Why' question to learning teams. After each student briefly suggests an answer to the first 'why', the team chooses the response that meets general agreement and frames a second why question. The same process is framed for the next three questions and then the group is asked to report back.

ACTIVITY

Provide the students with a 5 whys or "fishbone" worksheet, or whiteboard markers. Set the problem or scenario and allow them to work through a set of 5 why questions. You can use the visualizer to share worksheets with the class and discuss outcomes.

WHERE TO FIND RESOURCES

A 5 whys worksheet template and example can be found on the following pages.

Using a fishbone (Ishikawa) diagram for the 5 whys: <http://www.bulsuk.com/2009/08/using-fishbone-diagram-to-perform-5-why.html>

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THE 5 WHYS

Names: _____

PROBLEM:

Question One: Why ...

Responses:

- .
- .
- .
- .

Now choose one response, and ask “why?” to create the next question.

Question Three: Why ...

Response:

Question Four: Why ...

Response:

Question Five: Why ...

Response:

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

AN EXAMPLE OF THE 5 WHYS APPROACH

PROBLEM: Guests at our hotel are not using the new outdoor lounge area.

Question One: Why ... are guests not using the outdoor area?

Responses:

- They seem to prefer the lobby
- It is not signposted effectively
- It is too far from the lifts
- Perhaps it is uncomfortable

Now choose one response, and ask "why?" to create the next question.

Question Two: Why ... do guests prefer to use the lobby?

Response:

- A lot of guests seem to plug their laptops into power outlets near the lobby seating

Question Three: Why ... can't guests power their laptops in the outdoor lounge?

Response:

- There aren't enough power outlets for each table

Question Four: Why ... aren't there enough power outlets?

Response:

- They weren't considered in the design brief for the outdoor area

Question Five: Why ... weren't power outlets in the design brief?

Response:

- We didn't ask guests what facilities would make the new outdoor area more usable

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

We will ask the contractors to retrofit more power outlets in the outdoor area. In future, we will consult guests more when planning changes to facilities.