



The Innovation Lab
"THE 5 WHYS"



WHAT ARE "THE 5 WHYS"?


“The 5 Whys” is an activity which involves asking why repeatedly when a problem or challenge is identified.

This exercise can help you to get beyond the obvious symptoms of a challenge to discover the root causes.


The point of this exercise is to help you to avoid acting on assumptions or misleading conclusions when considering and addressing an identified challenge or “wicked problem”. Instead, “The 5 Whys” exercise can support you to uncover the root causes of your challenge and act responsively to create a responsive counter-measure / innovative solution.

“The 5 Whys” exercise is particularly useful when you are trying to tackle a “wicked problem”. A “wicked problem” can be defined as a problem which:

- doesn't have a clear definition or singular cause;
- has no clear framing or is contested;
- has no fixed or final solution;
- is often a symptom of another problem.



WHY YOU
SHOULD
DO “THE 5
WHYS”
EXERCISE



"THE 5 WHYS" EXERCISE

"The 5 Whys" exercise involves a very simple process. It does what it says on the tin!

The activity can be done anywhere with anyone, and all you need is some time to think it through or discuss with others, and perhaps a laptop, pen, or paper to jot down your thoughts.

"The 5 Whys" process is as follows:

- **Draft a challenge / "wicked problem" statement** - define your challenge clearly and succinctly. Remember to include all the important details such as what the challenge is, who is involved and effected, the frequency and scope of the challenge, etc;
- **Ask yourself and others why the problem happened** - as you do so, consider that if the problem was solved, would you still have the same answer when you ask "why"? If it is recurrent, then then your answer is likely a contributing factor to the problem, not a root cause. Conversely, if the answer is a root cause then ask yourself if there may be others.
- **Keep asking why** - if the answer provided is a contributing factor to the problem, then you keep asking "why?" until the root cause(s) have been identified. This usually takes between three and five round of questioning.
- **Create your counter-measure solution** - after asking "Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why?", you can start to think about what solution could address some if not all of the root causes identified.

DEFINE THE PROBLEM

WHY?

WHY?

WHY?

WHY?

WHY?

COUNTER-MEASURE SOLUTION

"THE 5 WHYS" TEMPLATE

IDENTIFIED ROOT CAUSES:

-
-
-
-
-



DEFINE THE PROBLEM

WHY?

WHY?

WHY?

WHY?

WHY?



COUNTER-MEASURE SOLUTION:



 CONGRATS! 

You have completed “The 5 Whys” exercise.