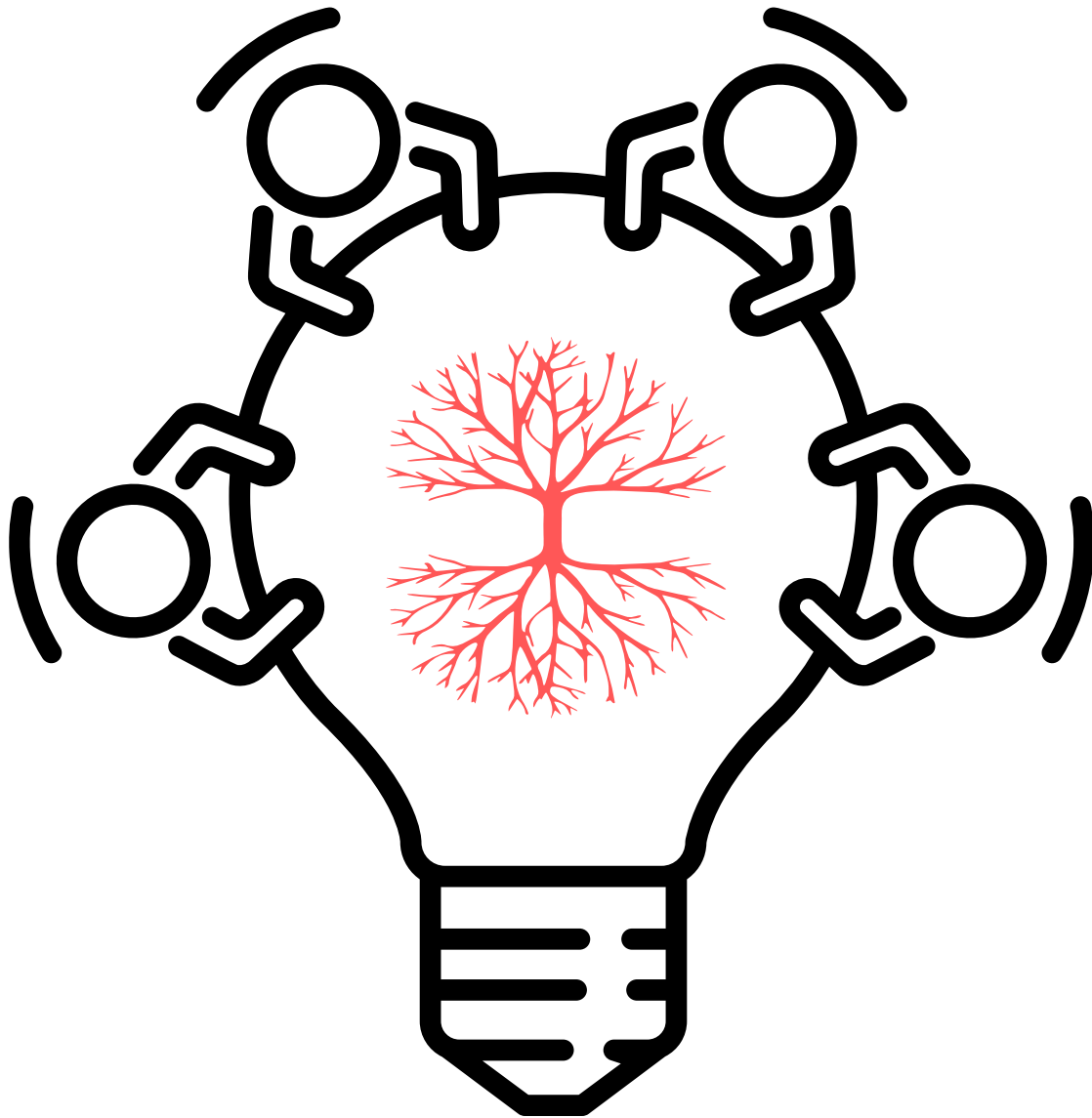


PROBLEM TREE ANALYSIS



How might we work to understand both the root causes and negative effects of problems?

ABOUT THIS PROBLEM TREE ANALYSIS

When you see a problem, one of the first things you should do is identify and analyze the root causes and negative effects of the problem. This helps you to decide where you might step in to address the problem. This PROBLEM TREE ANALYSIS tool will help you and your team do this in a simple and straightforward way.

There are three basic components to this tool. They are as follows:

- **THE PROBLEM:** This is the metaphorical trunk of the tree. Start here with the problem however it is that you're currently defining it.
- **THE CAUSES:** These are at the root level. Why does this problem exist? What's causing it? This is where you'll brainstorm and note down all of the causes you can think of. Use the 5 WHYS technique from the ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS tool to do this.
- **THE EFFECTS/ SYMPTOMS:** These are at the branch level. When the problem occurs/ exists, what happens? What are the negative consequences? Capture everything you can think of here. Try to get to the consequences of consequences. Sometimes the second or third-order consequences are more important to understand than the direct consequences.

"If I had an hour to solve a problem I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions."

ALBERT EINSTEIN
THEORETICAL PHYSICIST

HOW TO USE THIS PROBLEM TREE ANALYSIS

- 1 Start by noting down THE PROBLEM in the middle of the tool. Don't overthink it. Just write something down.
- 2 Next, go to THE EFFECTS/ SYMPTOMS and note down as many as you can.
- 3 Then go to THE CAUSES and do the same.
- 4 To conclude, go to NOW WHAT? and note down a few priority next steps based on what you've learned and/or new insights you've gained from using this tool.

NOTE:

This is an essential tool. I always use this when I'm facilitating, consulting, and/or teaching changemaking innovation. Apart from the explicit goal, this helps teams get into the spirit of brainstorming and "yes...and-ing."

I prefer to have people draw this on a whiteboard whenever possible. Have people work in small teams. Make sure everyone has a marker.

WHAT “HATS” DO YOU WEAR?

12 APPLICATION IDEAS



BUSINESSES

Get your team members into the habit of building problem trees together when confronted with problems and presented with opportunities.



PARENTS

Teach your children to use this methodology in their studies and as they explore the world.



LIFE COACHES/ MENTORS

Use this with your mentee to help get to the root causes of problems and to understand effects.



ENTREPRENEURS/ INNOVATORS

This is an essential methodology to understand the pain points and negative effects of those pain points. This helps you decide where you can add unique value with your “pain reliever” solution.



EDUCATORS

Teach your students to use this methodology during class (social studies, history, etc.) and while doing project work, community work, etc.



NON PROFITS

Use this together with community members to understand the context and where you can provide the most targeted support.



CONSULTANTS

Build problem trees with your clients so that you can come to mutual agreement and decide where to prioritize your efforts.



COMMUNITIES

Use this within your own community to understand so that you can all get on the same page and work together to solve problems in the most impactful way.



FACILITATORS

Have participants use this technique when working with each other. Have them practice first on a universal problem.



VOLUNTEERS

Use this as a guide to understand how you can best help people you hope to support through your volunteering. This should inform how you prioritize your efforts.



STUDENTS

Use this when working with people during service learning work in your community in order to build empathy, better understand the situation, and prioritize how you might participate.



INDIVIDUALS

Use this for any challenge you're confronted with in work and life. This helps you decide what you can change and what you can't.

PROBLEM TREE ANALYSIS

COLLABORATIVE CHANGEMAKING TOOL

CLICK HERE OR ON THE TOOL TO ACCESS THE GOOGLE SHEET.
MAKE AN EDITABLE COPY.

THE EFFECTS/ SYMPTOMS						
THE PROBLEM						
THE CAUSES						
NOW WHAT?						