

listing the people associated with the problem, and/or concepts to help them find where the problem originated. The same can be done for the assets.

Participants may notice that there are problems to the problems (or problems to the assets, or assets to the assets, or even assets to the problem!). As a facilitator, do not share with participants that this “secondary problem finding” (or asset finding) is part of the process to discovering the root cause. It would be beneficial for the facilitator to take notes on the group’s dynamics, and share any observations of the group process during the processing discussion.

Facilitators can also process this activity using the Five Whys developed by Rick Ross (1994). Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (2013) describe this approach as:

Ask yourself the most simple of questions, such as, ‘Why does your organization (or group or community) exist?’ This question is relevant whether it is asked about student government, a service organization, the chess club, a residence hall floor or house government, a fraternity or sorority, or a club related to your major. Probe deeply. Now take the reason you have given and ask why that answer is important. Take the answer to that second Why? and ask Why? again. Do this until you have asked Why? a total of five times. Doing this helps you get closer to the essence of why the group exists.
(p. 392)

The Five Whys approach works to help identify root causes as well as assets within an organization or community.

Activity Four: Root Causes: From a Tree to a Forest¹

Time: 30 to 60 minutes

Learning Outcomes Participants will

- Identify the root causes of social issues and distinguish those from the surface-level issues.

¹ Adapted from Doerr, E. (2010). What is social change? In W. Wagner, D. T. Ostick, S. R. Komives, & Associates (Eds.). *Leadership for a better world: Instructor manual* (p. 10–31). A publication of the National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs. San Francisco: CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Focus on how they can be involved in specific change for that issue.
- Identify the interconnectedness of issues by demonstrating the shared root causes of various issues.

Materials

- Markers
- Large paper (1 paper per group), or a prepared worksheet that includes an image of a tree with leaves, a trunk, and roots
- 1 extra-large piece of paper prepared with a large tree that includes leaves, a trunk, and roots

Detailed Instructions Part 1 – Root Causes Tree

Convene participants in a circle (for a small group), or divide participants into small groups of 3 to 5 members (for a large group). Pass out markers and paper. Ask participants to draw leaves, a trunk, and the roots of a tree on their paper. (Alternatively, distribute a worksheet that has a pre-drawn tree.)

Have participants discuss amongst themselves some of the social issues that they see in their community or around the world. Ask them to identify one issue that is important to all of the people in the group and ask them to write that issue on the trunk of the tree.

Ask the participants to think about some of the root causes to that problem. For example, for homelessness, root causes might include living wage, resources, healthcare, social inequality, or natural disasters. Have them write these root causes on the roots of the tree.

Ask the participants to think of possible solutions to the problems written on the roots, and ask them to write these solutions on the leaves of the tree.

Ask the participants to think of ways they can possibly be a part of meeting the needs related to the root causes. Have them write that on the side of the paper next to the trunk. Emphasize that these are ways to meet the needs of the root causes, and not anything else.

Ask each group to present their issue and root causes. Have the group convene in a circle so everyone can see each other and begin discussing the questions listed below as a group. The facilitator should write the themes and

discussion issues that come up on a flip chart or whiteboard and could use the extra-large tree as an example for the large group.

Part One Discussion Questions

- Were there any themes that emerged amongst the root causes? What were they, and why do you think they came up?
- In looking at the root causes, what do you think the “surface-level” issues might be?
- How is that different from a root cause?
- Do you think it is better to only work on the root causes and not just at the surface? Do you think you can do them together? If so, how?
- Do these root causes seem easy to combat?
- Do the ideas that you brainstormed for meeting the needs of the root causes seem feasible or easy to do?
- How can you get started to combat the root causes of the problem?
- How is this activity relevant when discussing social change?

Part 2 – Root Causes Forest

If the large group creates one tree, begin discussion about what other issues might share the same root causes. It may be useful to do two root cause trees and demonstrate the interconnectedness between them.

Have participants post their root cause trees around the room, and then move around the room taking note of the root causes of the other trees. After a few minutes, begin a discussion about the interconnectedness of root causes, using the questions listed below.

Part Two Discussion Questions

- Did any of you see trees/issues that had the same root cause as your issue?
- Do you see how those issues might be connected?
- What does this mean in terms of social change?
- What happens if we only looked at the one tree? Do we see the forest if we concentrate on that?
- How does the forest look?

Facilitator Notes This activity works best in a large room so that people can move around. When working in large groups, the facilitator should have enough space so that participants can work in smaller groups without distracting the other groups.

If a group has come together to decide on how to work on a specific problem, the activity can be followed up with an action plan of sorts in order to begin addressing the problem. Understanding the root cause is the first step to achieving change.

The issues that are brainstormed can be adapted to the learning context. Homelessness is a good example for participants in a social justice education context. However, there might be more relevant community issues for participants in a student government association. The issue can be something that participants have already decided to work on together in that case.

Activity Five: Paradigms of Service²

Time: 20 minutes

Learning Outcomes Participants will

- Reflect on past service experiences to explore social change elements and possible pitfalls.

Materials

- Worksheet with activity questions

Detailed Instructions Ask each participant to think of a past experience engaging as a volunteer for a social cause or community organization. These can be any type of engagement, from one-time activities to prolonged engagements. Explain Keith Morton's (1995) classic work, *The Irony of Service*, to describe three forms of service: *Charity* (work that addresses immediate needs); *Projects* (work that builds the capacity or efficiency of groups who attend to immediate needs); and *Social Change* (work aimed at

² Developed by Daniel T. Ostick