6W Method

Idea In Short

The 6W Method is a simple yet powerful technique for gaining a comprehensive understanding of a situation or problem. By systematically exploring six fundamental questions – Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How – teams can uncover hidden assumptions, identify critical factors, and establish a common ground for further analysis.

The 6W Method is a powerful tool in the arsenal of design thinking and problem-solving techniques. This method provides a structured approach to gaining a fundamental understanding of any given situation or scenario. By asking six key questions - Who, Why, What, When, Where, and How - teams can quickly assess new situations and develop a shared understanding of complex problems.

This method encourages a structured and inquisitive approach. It prompts individuals to move beyond superficial observations and delve deeper into the intricacies of the situation. By asking "Who" is involved, we consider the stakeholders, their roles, and their perspectives. "What" helps us define the scope of the problem, identify key objectives, and understand the desired outcomes. "When" establishes a timeline, identifying critical deadlines and potential points of intervention. "Where" pinpoints the location or context in which the situation unfolds, considering geographical, cultural, and environmental factors. "Why" explores the root causes, motivations, and underlying reasons for the situation. Finally, "How" delves into the processes, methods, and actions involved.

Understanding the 6W Method

At its core, the 6W Method is about asking basic questions to uncover the essential elements of a situation. The method's name comes from the six key questions it employs: Who, Why, What, When, Where, and How. Each of these questions targets a specific aspect of the problem or scenario, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the issue at hand.

The "Who" question identifies the people involved in the situation. This could include stakeholders, users, customers, or any other relevant individuals or groups. Understanding who is involved helps to clarify the human element of the problem and can reveal important perspectives or needs.

The "Why" question delves into the reasons behind actions or situations. It helps to uncover motivations, goals, and underlying causes. This question is crucial for understanding the purpose or necessity of certain elements within the problem space.

The "What" question focuses on identifying relevant actions, events, or objects. It helps to define the scope of the problem and clarify what exactly is happening or needs to happen.

The "When" question addresses the temporal aspects of the situation. This could include timelines, deadlines, or critical time factors that influence the problem or potential solutions.

The "Where" question identifies relevant locations or contexts. This could be physical locations, digital spaces, or even abstract contexts that are important to understanding the full picture.

Finally, the "How" question explores the methods, processes, or means by which actions occur or could occur. This question often leads to insights about potential solutions or improvements.

Case Study - Community Mobile App

Imagine a team tasked with developing a new mobile application for a local community. Using the 6W Method, they would begin by asking:

- **Who:** Who are the target users? What are their needs and expectations? Who are the key stakeholders, such as community leaders, local businesses, and government officials?
- **What:** What are the specific goals of the application? What features and functionalities should it include? What are the key performance indicators for success?
- **When:** When will the application be launched? What are the key milestones and deadlines? When will user feedback be collected and analyzed?

- **Where:** Where will the application be primarily used? Will it be used primarily indoors or outdoors? Will it require access to specific locations or data?
- **Why:** Why is this application needed by the community? How will it address specific community needs and improve the quality of life?
- **How:** How will the application be developed, tested, and launched? How will user feedback be gathered and integrated into the development process?

The 6W Method is a valuable tool for teams seeking to gain a comprehensive understanding of complex situations or problems. By systematically exploring the Who, Why, What, When, Where, and How of a situation, teams can quickly build a shared understanding and uncover important insights. While the method requires time and effort to implement effectively, the resulting clarity and shared understanding can be invaluable in guiding further actions and decision-making. Whether used in design thinking, project management, or problem-solving contexts, the 6W Method provides a structured approach to breaking down complex situations into manageable components.

Summary

The 6W Method provides a valuable framework for gaining a comprehensive understanding of any situation. By encouraging systematic inquiry and prompting individuals to consider all aspects of a problem, this method enables deeper insights, improves communication, and lays the foundation for more effective decision-making.