



THE PROPELLER

Why is it that it's so much easier for us to come up with solutions and answers for other people's problems than for our own ones? Is it because we're initially lazy, well aware of the answer to our problem but ignoring it, so we don't have to face the effort the solution requests? Perhaps it is, in some cases at least. Giving instructions is much more comfortable than getting the work done yourself, isn't it? Or is it that giving advice is somehow cheap and without consequences? True, because if it turns out bad, we don't have to pay the price for it. It was not our problem, to begin with. Yes, that certainly plays a role in our heroic daring to others and our silent cowardice to ourselves.

But there might be another reason as well: we often simply don't see the solution, because we're blinded by the constraints that seem inevitable to us. It's like we're in a maze and can't find our way out because we're standing in the middle of it. In such a case, we actually need to be lifted up from the maze to see all of the the obstacles that keep us from reaching the exit.

That's exactly what The Propeller will do: give you an overview to not only see the obstacles but also find your way out. First, you outline the challenge. Secondly, you identify the constraint that blocks you from finding a satisfactory solution. And thirdly, you ask the question why it is a constraint and what it exactly impedes. Great if you can find an answer to that and even greater if you can overcome the obstacle by finding an alternative solution. If not, dig deeper, ask yourself the why-question again and again. And with each answer may come a better solution. That's how it works. But there's more. The Propeller also stimulates you to finetune your ideas and translate them into real and applicable solutions.

You can apply this technique all by yourself, but like many other techniques, it's way more fun and much more rewarding to do this in a group. You can download the PDF-file of the graph free of charge at www.whentheboxisthelimit.com/propeller

How it works:

STEP 1

- Print the graph in a large size, minimum A2, but bigger is better, certainly when you work in a group.
- Put the graph on the table or hang it on the wall. See what works best for you / your team.
- Provide post-its to everyone, preferably small ones that will fit into the blue and green boxes on the graph.

STEP 2

- Discuss the central question or problem and make sure that everyone understands it clearly. Write the question down if necessary and keep it visible during the entire process.
- Take a large post-it note and write down the constraint. Define it concisely and clearly, and stick it in the dark blue area in the middle of the propeller graph.

- Limit yourself to one constraint at a time. If there are more, you can go through the process again at a later stage or use a second graph simultaneously, that may be handled by another team where relevant, appropriate or necessary.

STEP 3

- Try to describe why it is a constraint. There can be more than one reason, and that's why the graph foresees three 'A' areas around the central constraint. I recommend you use all three of them.
- Write the restriction caused by the constraint(s) on (a) small post-it note(s) and stick them in the clear blue areas marked 'A'.

STEP 4

- Now it's time to come up with alternatives. How can you

overcome this constraint? How can this issue be solved differently? Be creative and come up with an original idea for each constraint defined 'A'.

- Use your imagination. In this stage of the process, don't be too harsh on yourself or others if the idea is not quite realistic yet.
- Stick the idea on the green areas marked 'A1'.
- than one reason, and that's why the graph foresees three 'A' areas around the central constraint. I recommend you use all three of them.

STEP 4+

- You can do STEP 4+ later and continue with STEP 5, or you can decide to go for this challenge straight away.
- Try to enhance the feasibility of the alternative idea you came up with in 'A1' as much as possible. Build on the basic form of the idea, try to finetune it, and ask yourself 'how could it really work?'
- As this is a process, stick your first ideas on the 'A2' area, and continue to stick subsequent ideas to increase the feasibility into the other areas 'A3', 'A4' and 'A5' that lead to the periphery of the graph.

STEP 5

- We have defined why the main constraint restricts us in STEP 3 (in the 'A' area). But there might be a more 'underlying' or primary obstacle. We want to dig deeper.
- Based on the defined restriction, we ask ourselves again 'why is this a restriction?' The answer to that question, we write down on a small post-it note and stick it in area 'B'. And we do so for all three 'B' areas.

STEP 6

- This is a duplication of STEP 4, except that we're now talking about the constraints stuck in the 'B' areas. Follow the same instructions as in STEP 4 and replace 'A' with 'B'.
- Stick the ideas onto the green areas marked 'B1'.

STEP 6+

- This is a duplication of STEP 4+, except that we're now talking about the alternative solution stuck in the 'B1' area. So follow the same instructions as in STEP 4+ and replace 'A1' through 'A5' with 'B1' through 'B4'.

STEP 7

- The same scenario repeats itself, always digging deeper, until you reach the 'E' areas.