

The Five R's

Context:

To “zoom out” and see the system around an area of work

Purpose:

To engage participants in an activity that breaks down several elements of a complex problem, specifically to consolidate a group's perspectives on the system. This activity will help participants identify additional and hopefully “higher leverage” interventions to test. This activity will also improve understanding of the broader system and can help decision makers “see” otherwise unanticipated consequences of “solutions”

Status: New

Primary nature of group task: Divergent, if brainstormed independently; convergent if integrated

Time:

- Preparation time: 15 minutes to prep the facilitation team and distribute materials
- Time required during session: 10-15 minutes for individual brainstorming; 0-60 minutes to discuss/integrate
- Follow-up Time: Can take time to synthesize results of individual brainstorming, if it's not done with the group. May want to iterate the integrated 5 Rs virtually or in a future meeting.

Materials needed:

- Facilitator prepare to describe a system as all of the interconnected factors, forces, and entities shaping outcomes of interest
- Slide or handout with 5 R's described
- Blank paper – structured (handout with boxes for each “R”) or unstructured (post-it notes)
- Writing utensils

Inputs:

- The group needs to decide on the focus to be explored here – what, generally speaking, will improvement efforts target?

Outputs:

- Discussion of 5 R's, with written synthesis if prepared

Roles:

- Facilitator presents this activity and supports individual brainstorming and group discussion, as appropriate
- Note takers, as appropriate (on board or more detailed computer notes)
- Individuals to brainstorm and discuss results

Steps:

1. The facilitator provides an overview of systems, systems thinking, and the 5 R activity at a high level

- a. System – not limited to something that could be diagrammed with an organizational chart but instead the set of important interconnected factors, forces, and entities shaping outcomes of interest (give an example related to the group’s initiative).
 - b. Systems thinking – helps us get our head around the system in a structured way
 - c. Five Rs – a very simple framework (five questions) that can really help us see things differently, in terms of the specific results we want to impact or need to measure, the stakeholders who have a role in affecting or are affected by changes in these results, the resources that could be leveraged to make change, the important relationships involved in this work, and rules governing things.
2. The facilitator reminds the group to stay focused on their work when thinking about the Five Rs: *“Today you are going to describe, first independently and then together, the five R’s with your group. The goal of this activity is to help the group develop a richer and shared understanding of the context around your work.”*
 3. The facilitator sets a time parameter for brainstorming and then discussing each R. For example, *“We will give you approximately 3 minutes to brainstorm each R – 15 minutes in total. We’ll then spend 45 minutes sharing and integrating our thoughts.”*
 4. The facilitator asks the group to brainstorm each R, one at a time.
 - a. Results - What does success look like? How will we know if the system is functioning?
 - *“Start with your problem...What other important “upstream” and “downstream” results should (and can) we track? How “strong” is the overall system? How could we even describe that?*
 - *Think about both actual AND desired!*
 - *What are we mandated to report?*
 - b. Roles - Who are the actors involved in shaping these results? Who is affected by results?
 - *“Just because your problem is local doesn’t mean all actors are! Remember to ask both ‘who affects’ and ‘who is affected?’ by your problem! Think about actual AND desired!*
 - *Are roles changing over time? Make sure to include important actors now and in the future!*
 - c. Resources - What are the resources, or “inputs” available to your initiative?
 - *“Think broadly!*
 - *Budgetary allocations*
 - *Personnel*
 - *Time*
 - *Data*
 - *Sphere of influence*
 - *Trust...*
 - *Think about both actual AND desired!*
 - *Make notes about any important changes over time*
 - d. Relationships - What are the most important relationships between actors?
 - *It’s not enough to name two actors – you must describe the nature of a given relationship! “Who does what to/for/with whom? When? Why? How? --*
 - *Relationships, or “connections” can come from:*
 - *Collaboration*
 - *Data sharing/communication*
 - *Being linked by formal systems, or incentives*
 - *They may be hierarchical, one or bi-directional*

- *Think about both actual AND desired!*
 - *Make notes about any important changes over time*
- e. **Rules** - What are the rules governing what happens in this system? Rules assign roles, affect relationships, and shape access to resources.
- *Again, can be imposed locally or at other levels.*
 - *Can be formal (laws, mandates, eligibility criteria) or informal (norms)*
 - *Think about both actual AND desired!*
 - *Make notes about changes over time*
5. You can choose to brainstorm and then discuss each R one at a time, or to ask participants to brainstorm all five Rs before discussing. We suggest brainstorming and then discussing each R, in order, if the group includes <15 people. If more individuals are present, it can be challenging to move so frequently between individual brainstorming and then group work. In any case the facilitator might move from brainstorming to discussion as follows:
- a. *“First let’s come up with a list of results (fill in the R you’re working on). I’d like to go around the room, and ask everyone to share one idea at a time. Pay attention, if someone says something you wrote, try not to repeat it – let’s get an exhaustive list!” Go around the room in order, so everyone knows when it’ll be their turn to share. Keep them to one idea per person to ensure equal opportunities to contribute.*
 - b. As the pace of new ideas slows down, the facilitator should ask the group if there are any last ideas that haven’t been shared before the group moves to the next R – cycle through all Rs.
 - c. Make sure to document what is shared – either take individuals’ ideas written on post-it notes, collect them as they share, and cluster them on the wall. Or, write new ideas into a list on a flip chart. Make sure someone is taking more detailed written notes as well.
6. The facilitator may ask for volunteers to share insight on this process and how it has helped them breakdown and better understand the problem
7. An electronic version of the group’s five R ideas should be shared with others for additional feedback. Things will change over time, and so will the group’s understanding of the system!

Evaluation criteria:

Fill in.

Contributors to this script:

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History:

Adapted from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) report *Local Systems: A Framework for Supporting Sustained Development*. Adapted for use by the National Maternal and Child Health Workforce Development Center and the Family Planning National Training Center.

Other versions of this script:

None known

References:

USAID. (April 2014). “*Local Systems: A Framework for Supporting Sustained Development* “ Retrieved from: <http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/LocalSystemsFramework.pdf>

Notes:

This activity can be adapted to various time allotments. It can serve as a rapid fire brainstorming or can serve as a lengthier activity to really dig into the problem the group wishes to address. The activity can be formally recorded on flipchart paper or can remain as a discussion among the group.