FIVE WHYS?

.. *and therefore* ..

PREREQUESITES
- A problem or an unclear statement
- At least one conversation partner
- Enough "Whys" :)

TIME
5-15min

WHAT
Five Whys is a simple tool, to find out the **root cause** of a problem, to dig deep into your end-users or to **uncover** useful **insights**.
It was invented by Toyoda Sakichi to explore the cause-and-effect relationships in industrial manufacturing, but in general it is applicable to any field.

WHY
In most cases root causes are **hidden** behind symptoms, and the first reaction is to discover those symptoms. As symptoms are caused by further causes, fighting the symptoms can only give you short-lived results, as the root cause still exists.
Besides, also with information based problems you need to take care of finding out the root cause: For example a specific customer desire might be based on a **root desire** that could be solved in a much more efficient way.

A lot of times when asking something the answers are not clear, or not complete. So to know that your work is based on correct assumptions, asking and digging deeper will allow you to better understand your conversation partner.

HOW TO
In its simplest form, you would repeatedly ask "**Why?**" until you are satisfied with the answer. Still there are some rules to ensure that you get the most out of the method.

FIND THE ROOT CAUSE Don't stop, until you determine the root cause - the number of iterations is flexible and doesn't necessarily have to be five, as it depends on how complex the actual topic is. Sometimes asking three times might be enough, but in other cases you might need to dig much deeper. But be sure to take it step by step and don't be tempted to jump directly into conclusions.

ENSURE YOU FOUND THE ROOT CAUSE Take great care to distinguish symptoms and root causes - the latter can be verified by turning around the answer and saying: "[*root cause*] and therefore [*symptom*]".

DON'T BLAME This exercise should be used to find out causes and insights - not trying to blame anybody. People will give you less information once they know that you are looking for somebody to blame.

DON'T FEEL STUPID At the first sight it might look strange to repeatedly ask "Why?". You should incorporate a part of the last answer in your next question, so you don't lose track of information and show your conversation partner that you are picking up the conversation. You can also warn your conversation partner about the technique you are using, to make sure that nobody feels interrogated.

EXAMPLE
Five Whys can be used in one-to-one conversation as well as in big groups and in many different situations. These two simple examples should give you an idea on how you could use this method.

PROBLEM
"The production server is down."
"**Why** is the server down?"
"There was a new commit that broke the system."
"**Why** did it break the system?"
"Because the code wasn't checked for a condition that affected another part of the system."
"**Why** was the check for that part of the software omitted?"
"The system is very big and ***there is no testing automation available yet.***"

In this example, instead of blaming a specific developer, you can find out faults in your processes to optimize the operations in your team.

INSIGHT
"Please add a new button here."
"**Why**?"
"The customer needs a new button here."
"**Why** does the customer need a new button?"
"The end-users cannot see the other button, that is on the bottom."
"**Why** can't they see the button?"
"On iPads the button is not in the visible scrollarea."
"**Why** is that button not in the visible scrollarea on iPads?"
*"**This part of our web page is not responsive yet.**"*

Here the insight allows you to figure out a solution that is more human centered or technically viable.