Instructions for Using a Fishbone Diagram

A Fishbone Diagram helps teams identify, explore, and display the possible causes of a specific problem. It is especially useful during root cause analysis to visually organize contributing factors into categories.

Step-by-Step Instructions:

Define the Problem Clearly
- Write a clear and specific problem statement at the "head" of the fish (the right side of the diagram).
- Use objective, measurable language (e.g., "Customer orders are frequently late").

Draw a horizontal arrow pointing to the problem statement.
- Draw the Main Backbone and Bones
- Add 4–6 major branches (bones) angled off the main arrow. These represent common cause categories.

Choose Standard Cause Categories (or Customize)
- Use one of the following sets depending on your environment:
- Manufacturing: Methods, Machines, Materials, Measurements, Manpower, Environment
- Service / Office: Policies, Procedures, People, Place, Equipment, Systems
- Healthcare: People, Process, Equipment, Environment, Materials, Management

Brainstorm Potential Causes
- With your team, brainstorm possible causes related to each category.
- Add each cause as a smaller branch (sub-bone) under the appropriate category.

Ask "Why?" to Dig Deeper
- For each listed cause, ask "Why does this happen?" to identify underlying issues.
- Add these as additional sub-branches.

Review for Completeness
- Make sure all possible areas have been explored.
- Look for patterns or areas with many causes — this may indicate where the root problem lies.

Identify Root Causes
- Highlight or circle the most likely root causes that contribute to the problem.
- Use other tools (like the 5 Whys) to validate.