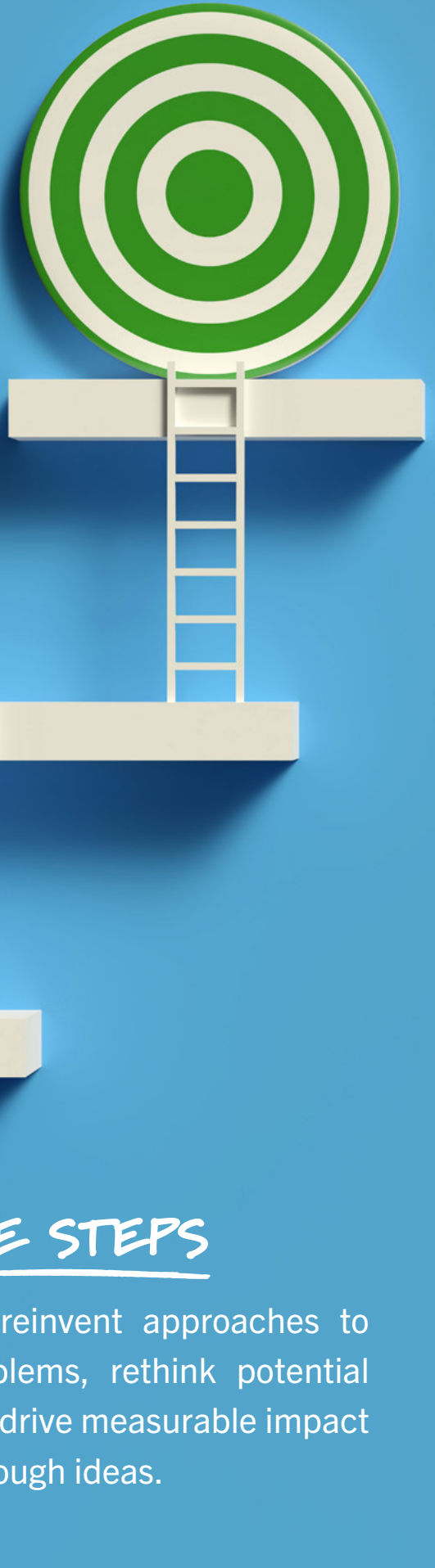# Collegis
EDUCATION

Higher Education Design Thinking

WORKBOOK

3 SIMPLE STEPS

to help you reinvent approaches to complex problems, rethink potential solutions and drive measurable impact with breakthrough ideas.

Find gaps. Reframe challenges. Craft actionable SOLUTIONS.

Creating the student experience of tomorrow won't happen overnight, but it also shouldn't feel like a pipe dream. **Design thinking can help you uncover new ways of thinking with a human-centered approach to problem solving.**

This collaborative process emphasizes empathy, encouraging institutional leaders to immerse themselves in the shoes of their students, faculty and staff. By understanding their experiences, frustrations and aspirations, you can reframe challenges into actionable statements, quickly produce many valuable ideas, inspire broader thinking and build stakeholder consensus along the way.

At Collegis, we practice design thinking and have used its principles to help institutions, teams and leaders push beyond creative plateaus, identify and implement innovative strategies to drive impact, grow enrollment and deliver superior student-centric experiences.

The first step is to bring the right people together, with the right insights, to generate the right solutions. We've created this workbook to help you do just that.

How to Use This Workbook

Without structure, group brainstorms often end in disappointment with a list of unfocused ideas that never get developed. This workbook is designed to help you power past those pitfalls and transform your next group brainstorm into a highly productive session that generates many actionable solutions quickly.

Using these three design-thinking methods, you and your team can arrive at the right problem to address, turn it into an action-oriented statement starter and identify a host of viable solutions. In design thinking, we refer to this pairing of methods as a recipe — and this recipe can get you one step closer to your next breakthrough innovation.
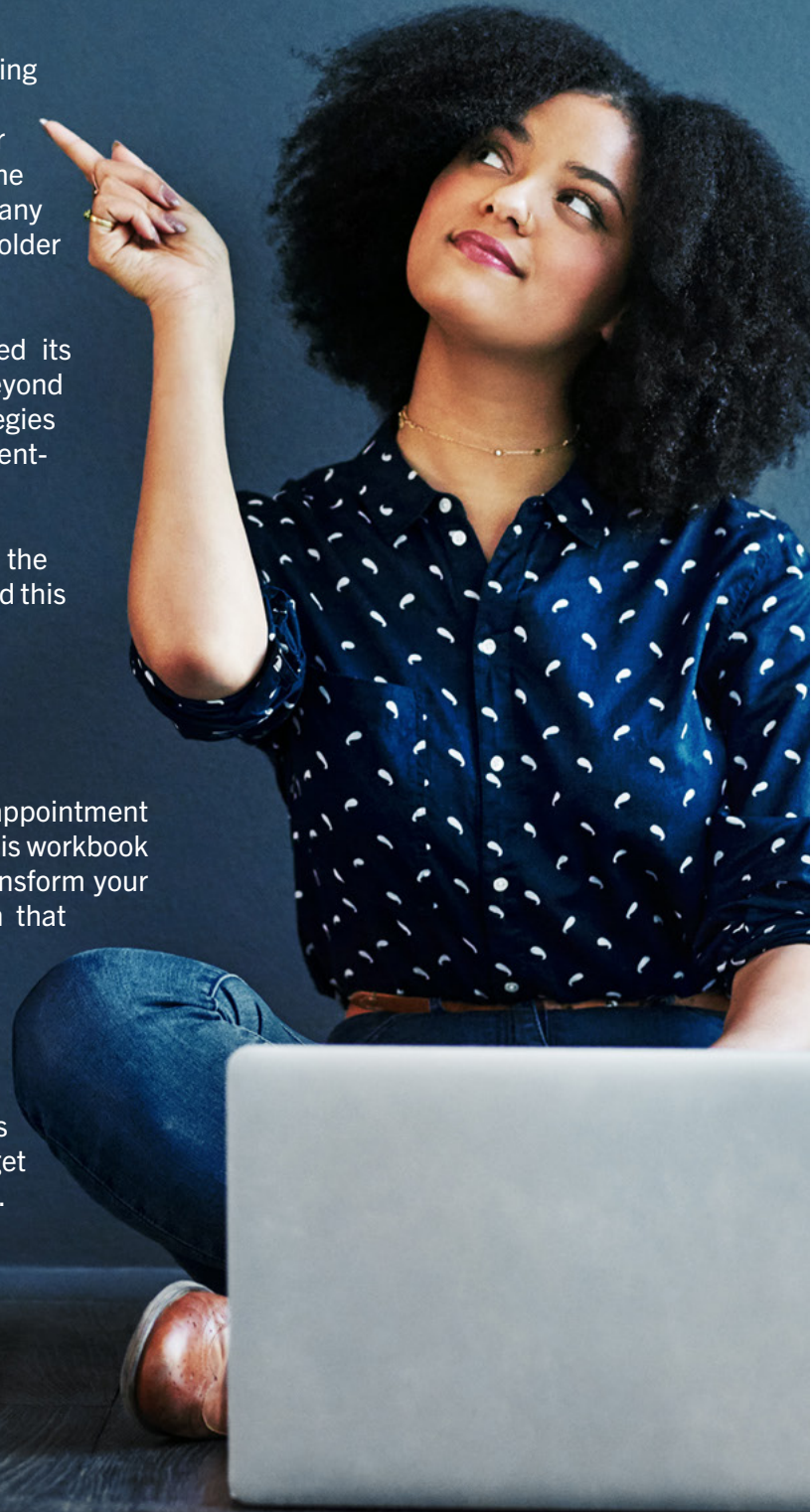
Exercise 1: Abstraction Laddering

Make sure you're focused on the right problem first.

Get started by gathering a team of engaged stakeholders to define the problem you want to solve. Is the first problem that comes to mind the right problem? Is this problem a symptom of something more complex, and if so, what is the root cause? Abstraction laddering helps answer these questions by reframing the initial problem statement at various levels of focus — going more broad as you move up the ladder to narrow as you move down.

STEP 1

Starting in the center, identify a problem, issue or opportunity you want to explore as a group. Write it down and place it in the center of the ladder template.
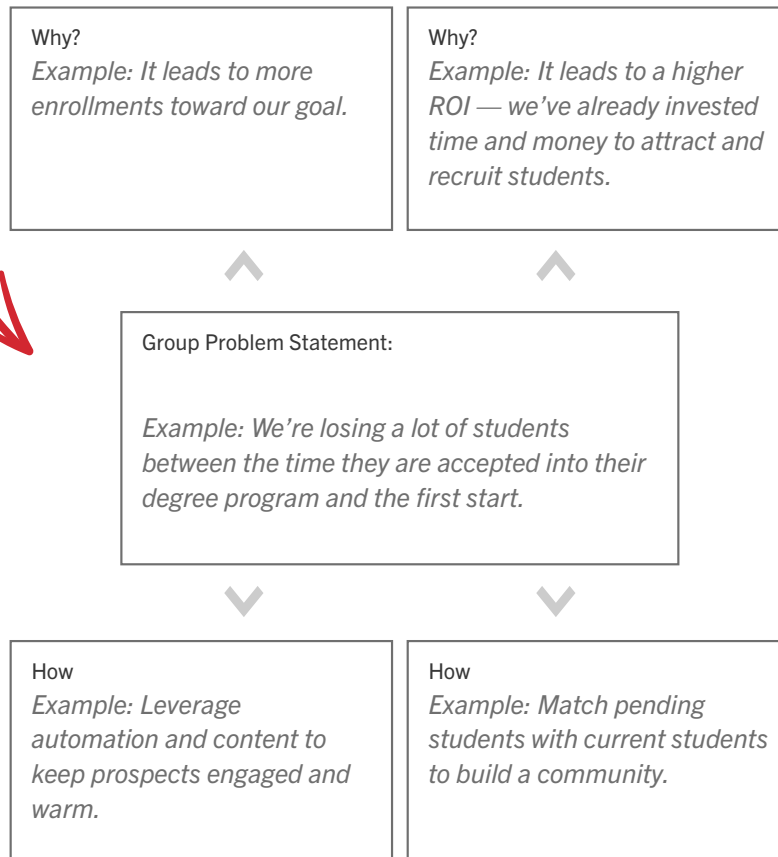
STEP 2

Ask why — why is it important that we solve this problem? Write down as many answers as possible as a group and place them above the problem. Moving up the ladder reframes the problem for broader exploration and identifies potential parent problems of the initial problem statement.

Why?
Example: It leads to more enrollments toward our goal.

Why?
Example: It leads to a higher ROI — we've already invested time and money to attract and recruit students.

Group Problem Statement:

Example: We're losing a lot of students between the time they are accepted into their degree program and the first start.

How
Example: Leverage automation and content to keep prospects engaged and warm.

How
Example: Match pending students with current students to build a community.

STEP 3

Ask how — how might we solve this problem? Write down as many answers as possible and place them below the problem. Moving down the ladder identifies more tactical statements that can solve the initial problem but may be an area the group wants to focus on more discretely.

Now that you have a more comprehensive look at the problem at various levels of focus, discuss which option is best suited for ideation as a group. It may be the original problem, and that's OK! Whether or not the group feels one of the statements above or below the ladder is better suited, the next exercise helps you transform your chosen problem statement into an actionable statement starter.

Abstraction Laddering Worksheet

Why?	Why?	Why?

Group Problem Statement:

How	How	How

Exercise 2: Statement Starters
Make your problem actionable for ideation.

With consensus on the problem statement, your group can use this statement starters exercise to turn it into an open-ended question more suitable for ideation and exploration. Once you've completed this exercise, consider expanding your brainstorming group to include additional stakeholders who have first-hand experience with the problem or should be part of the solution.

STEP 1

Rewrite your problem, but start with "how might we —" or "in what ways could we —"

Example: How might we ensure that students accepted into the program start?

How might we...

Pro Tip
Use Post-it Notes for exercises 1 and 3. You can move them around easily to make more room. Just keep it to one answer or thought per Post-it. Use a new note to capture another answer.

Exercise 3: Creative Matrix
Make your brainstorms and think tanks more productive and creative.

It's time to start ideating solutions using your newly crafted statement starter. The creative matrix is a visual framework that helps organize and stimulate creative thinking while focusing on the people who will benefit from your ideas. It helps teams move past the "where to start" plateau and empowers your stakeholders to generate lots of ideas fast!

STEP 1

Explain the exercise and set some ground rules. The goal here is quantity and speed — you want to generate many ideas quickly. Encourage the group not to censor themselves. They should not think about current constraints, scope, feasibility, cost, or difficulty. Any potential idea that answers the statement starter (aka, solves the problem) is worth capturing on the grid.

STEP 2

Explain the matrix setup. The matrix is represented by a grid, using a vertical and a horizontal axis and other inputs. Place your statement starter in the upper-left corner of the matrix.

STEP 3

As a group, identify the people, groups of people, or market segments you want to ideate solutions for. Write them down and place them in the top row of the matrix.

STEP 4

As a group, select your solution enablers. These are categories to inspire broader thinking when brainstorming solutions. It gets groups out of their comfort zone to help them arrive at more innovative solutions they may otherwise not consider. Place one solution enabler in each box within the first column, leaving the last box for the Wild Card category. In this category, you can place ideas that benefit the people/groups/segments in the first row but may not align with one of your chosen solution enablers.

Statement Starter	University Staff	Accepted Students
Tech and Digital Media		
Policies and Procedures		
Games and Competitions		
Events and Programs		Example: Match students awaiting start with current students to create a buddy program
Wild Card		

See More Examples in the Appendix

STEP 5

Put 15 minutes on the clock. Have each participant use that time to write down as many ideas as they can think of related to the statement starter. Encourage the team to have at least one idea in every quadrant on the grid. Once you have an idea, place it at the intersection of the solution enabler and the people/group/segment it serves or benefits. Once time is up, have each participant share their ideas with the group, giving a bit more context to help the group better understand the concept.

STEP 6

Once all participants have shared their contributions, have the group vote on their favorite ideas. Each participant gets two votes, one for the best overall idea and one for an honorable mention. This can help you focus on a finite number of great ideas and create a short list of solutions to explore and scope.

Pro Tip

Want to solve a few problems in one matrix? Pick a primary statement starter that is broader and sits at a higher focus. Place that in the upper-left corner. Then, instead of people, use the first row to list other "how might we" statements that are spin-offs from your primary, just at a lower focus. Think back to the abstraction ladder exercise and the insights identified when we asked "how" to move down the ladder.

Statement Starter

Appendix

Sample Statement Starters

Exercise 2: Statement Starters (Step 1)

How Might We...

- grow total enrollments by 25% over five years?
- redefine what education looks like in 2050?
- create a contactless admissions experience?
- make higher-education a right for everyone?
- we better align to workforce needs?

- eliminate the financial barriers that make education attainment difficult?
- attract and enroll a more diverse student body?
- ensure that every student who starts finishes their degree?

Sample Persona Targets

Exercise 3: Sample Personas (Step 3)

- Undergraduates
- Graduate Students
- Alumni

- Faculty
- Administrators
- Staff

- HR Professionals
- Hiring Managers
- On-Site Students

- Distance Learners

Sample Solution Enablers

Exercise 3: Solution Enablers (Step 4)

Facilities & Physical Environments

Class Environments | Permanent Structures | Temporary Installations | Common Areas

Gamification

Motivations | Rewards | Badges | Points | Prizes | Scoring | Leaderboards

Digital Experiences and Products

Websites | Mobile Apps | Widgets | VR | Augmented Reality | Smart Watches | Calculators

Processes, Policies & Procedures

Assessments | Regulation | Guidelines | Process Maps | Workflows | Approvals | Requirements

Student Personalization

Dynamic Content | Targeting | Outreach

Courses and Credentials

Degrees | Courses | Micro-credentials | Certifications | Workshops | Training

Events and Orientations

Meetups | Conferences | Orientations | Onboarding | Workshops | Commencement

Content Marketing

Articles | Blogs | Series | Newsletters | Videos | Webinars | e-Books | Whitepapers | Interviews

Communication and Outreach

Nurture Campaigns | SMS | Email | Conversations | Video Conferences | Q&As

People and Partnerships

Students | Faculty | Staff | Corporations | Third-Parties | Influencers | Ambassadors | Alumni | Boards | Associations

Social Media

Videos and Pictures | Posts and Messages | Likes | Followers and Friends | Platforms

Replace Wondering With *DOING*

At Collegis Education, we are never held back by tradition, convention or limitation. We are constantly learning and looking forward, enabling innovation for higher ed. Solving complex challenges isn't easy — but the exercises outlined in this workbook can help you take the first steps toward broader, creative thinking and problem solving within your institution and its teams.

Let us show you how

Plug into Collegis: your thought partner and tactical pro, all in one. Our design-thinking experts can build a custom workshop to give you a better vision of how to fit into learners' lives and what's possible when you do.

CollegisEducation.com/Rethink

Collegis
EDUCATION