

DIVERGENT THINKING



Divergent thinking refers to ideas that break out of the current paradigm. In the context of process improvement, a paradigm is how a group of people think about the way a particular process is performed. Often, when people have always performed a task a certain way it can be difficult to imagine doing things in a different manner.

Divergent thinking is a thought process or method used to guide groups through exercises that enable them to break out of the current paradigm and come up with many different possible ideas or ways of performing work.

How do you create opportunities for divergent thinking?

Ask the team questions and allow brainstorming and idea generation based on their answers.

- What would happen if we mandated that no patient/ resident would ever have to wait for anything? (no waiting allowed)
- What would healthcare delivery look like for us if we were not allowed to have any walls throughout our facility?
- What would we do if our patient/resident population suddenly doubled, but we were not given any extra resources at all (including space)?

A divergent thinking exercise:

Use the example of a Swiss Army Knife (SAK) with the group to think of all the things they would like to see on a SAK. Usually, a team will start out with items that already exists on a SAK (E.g. corkscrew, can opener, blade, etc.). Point out to the team that most of these things have been around since the SAK was created, in 1897.

At some point someone will suggest an idea of something that is not traditionally associated with SAKs, (E.g. GPS, hair dryer, etc.). This is usually a turning point in the exercise in which the team members realize they are not bound by what they traditionally thought of SAKs and opens the way for many other 'divergent' ideas.

Divergent thinking is sometimes known as “**thinking outside the box**”.