

Root Cause Analysis Using “Five Whys”

What is it and how can it help me?

This technique involves repeatedly asking the question “why?” to peel away the layers of a problem and identify its root cause. Once the source of an issue is identified, you are better able to focus efforts on the true cause of a problem, not just its symptoms.

The Five Whys Technique

- Identifies the root causes of a problem
- Determines the relationship between different root causes of a problem
- Is a simple analysis tool since it is easy to complete without statistical analysis
- Is easy to learn and apply

How to use this tool:

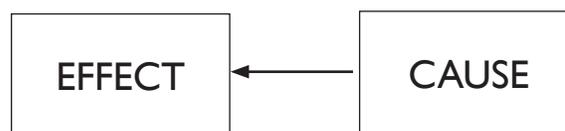
1. Write down the specific problem. Writing it down formalizes it and helps you to describe it accurately. It also helps all members of a team to focus on the same problem.
2. Brainstorm causes of the problem. For each possible cause, continue to ask why, noting the reason for each below.
3. Continue this process until the team agrees that they have identified the problem’s root cause. This may take fewer or more than five “whys?”

Example

- Patient volume has been dropping. Why?
- Patients are going elsewhere for care. Why?
- Patients sometimes wait more than two weeks for an appointment. Why?
- We don’t have enough appointments available. Why?
- Our appointment template has a limited number of appointments for each visit type per day. Why?*

* (Keep going until you find something you can act on)

The root cause is the appointment template which restricts scheduling based on appointment type rather than demand. If the clinic revises the template to have only one appointment type, they will have more flexibility to respond to patient demand.



Cause-and-Effect Relationship
“Building Block”

Five Whys Worksheet

