

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
- Enables simple analysis (no statistical analysis is required)
- Is easy to learn and apply

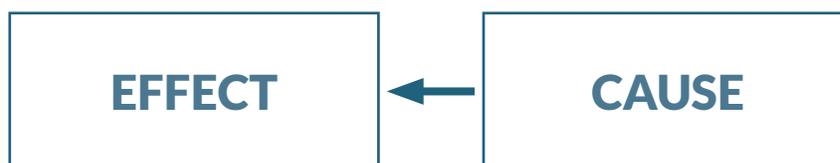
How to use this tool:

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?”

Examples:

Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) Program	Family Planning Agency
<p>Five Whys:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in our TPP program has been dropping. Why? • Youth say our content delivery style is uninteresting. Why? • Facilitators say they struggle to form connections with youth because they feel burned out. Why? • Current facilitators are overworked because we have been unable to hire additional facilitators to fill our staffing shortage. Why? • Potential facilitators who have gone through the interview process and declined a job offer say that our compensation and benefits are uncompetitive. Why?* <p>* (Keep going until you find something you can act on)</p>	<p>Five Whys:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?* <p>* (Keep going until you find something you can act on)</p>
<p>Root cause: The root cause of the decline in youth participation is that our facilitation role is unattractive to potential candidates, which has left us unable to hire and has left current facilitators burned out and unable to effectively engage youth. If we can make our facilitation role more attractive, we can hire new facilitators, alleviate the burden on current staff, and make our program more engaging for youth.</p>	<p>Root cause: The root cause of the decline in patient volume is the appointment template, which restricts scheduling based on appointment type rather than demand. If we revise the template to have only one appointment type, we will have more flexibility to respond to patient demand.</p>

Cause and Effect Relationship Building Block Figure



Five Whys Worksheet

