

The 5 WHYs

The 5-Whys is a simple brainstorming tool that can help you identify the root cause(s) of a problem. Use this tool to ask “why” questions to drill down to the root causes.

Asking the 5-Whys allows teams to move beyond obvious answers and reflect on less obvious explanations or causes.

Step-by-step instructions

1. State the problem you have identified as a strategic problem to work on.
2. Start asking “why” related to the problem. Like an inquisitive toddler, keep asking why in response to each suggested cause.
3. Ask as many whys as you need in order to get insight at a level that can be addressed (asking five times is typical). You will know you have reached your final “why” because it does not make logical sense to ask why again.

The 5-Whys is a strategy that is often used after an issue has been identified using another tool, such as Process Mapping. Guard against using the 5-Whys questions on their own to avoid a narrow focus or bias.

EXAMPLE

STUDENT FAILED TO COMPLETE PROPER APPLICATION PAPERWORK

Why? Student was told incorrect process

Why? Student worker told them wrong process

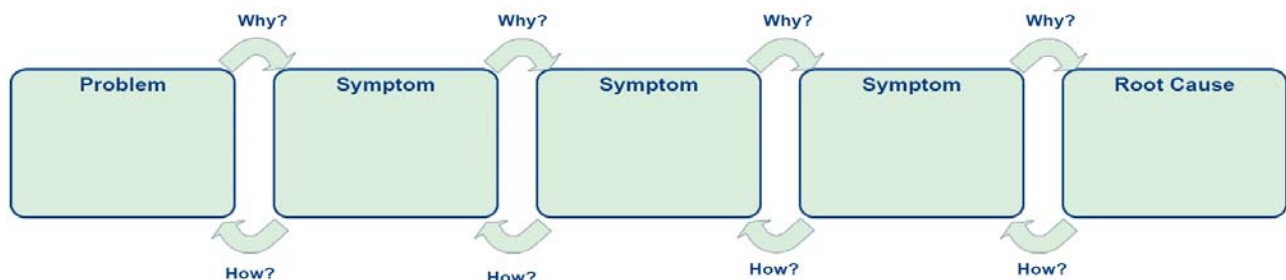
Why? Student worker was incorrect in their thoughts on the process

Why? No one trained the student worker

Why? No one was assigned responsibility for training

It is said that only by asking "Why?" five times successively, can you delve into a problem deeply enough to understand the ultimate root cause. By the time you get to the 4th or 5th why, you will likely be looking squarely at management practices (more than five whys may be required for complex problems).

At this point you understand the root cause, and can see where a change is needed.



Asking Powerful Questions

5 Whys Worksheet

Define the Problem:

Why did this happen?

Why?

Why?

Why?

Why?

Action/Resolution:

Asking Powerful Questions

5 Whys Worksheet

Define the Problem:

Why did this happen?

Why?

Why?

Why?

Why?

Action/Resolution:

CAUSE AND EFFECT ANALYSIS

(CAUSE MAPPING)

Define the problem (s)

Define the possible/multiple causes and identify solutions:

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CAUSE AND EFFECT ANALYSIS

(CAUSE MAPPING)

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↓	↓	↓
↓	↓	↓
↓	↓	↓

CAUSE AND EFFECT ANALYSIS

(CAUSE MAPPING)

Define the problem (s)

Titanic sank (loss of asset)

Define the possible/multiple causes and identify solutions:

Water filled the hull



Hull Buckled



Strength of hull not enough



Build Stronger Hull

Didn't turn in time



Speed/size of rudder



Going too fast
Rudder not big enough



Go slower
Add larger rudder

Struck iceberg



Didn't see iceberg



Lack of binoculars



Provide binoculars/other
visual aid

CAUSE AND EFFECT ANALYSIS

(CAUSE MAPPING)

Define the problem (s)

Loss of 1500 Lives

Define the possible/multiple causes and identify solutions:

Lack of life boats



Have enough boats for all passengers



Lack of life vests



Have enough life vests for all passengers



Temperature of water



Winter travel



Have only summer voyages

