



Template

How to Use the 5 Whys

The 5 Whys root cause analysis model follows a very simple step-by-step process.

1. Define the problem.

If you can, observe the problem in action. Discuss it with your team and write a brief, clear problem statement that you all agree on. For example, “Team A isn’t meeting its response time targets” or “Software release B resulted in too many rollback failures.”

Then, write your statement in the space provided at the top of the next page.

2. Ask the first “Why?”

Ask your team why the problem is occurring. (For example, “Why isn’t Team A meeting its response time targets?”)

Asking “Why?” sounds simple, but answering it requires serious thought. Search for answers that are grounded in fact: they must be accounts of things that have actually happened, not guesses at what might have happened.

Your team members may come up with one obvious reason why, or several plausible ones. On the template, record their answers as succinct phrases, rather than as single words or lengthy statements, and write them in the interactive space directly below the first “Why?”.

3. Ask “Why?” four more times.

For each of the answers that you generated in Step 2, ask four further “whys” in succession, and write the responses in the boxes underneath each “Why?”. Each time, frame the question in response to the answer you’ve just recorded. By the time you’ve answered the fifth “Why?”, you should have a much clearer idea of what to do about the problem.

4. Write your countermeasure.

Finally, write your proposed countermeasure to the problem in the final box. Remember: a countermeasure is an action or set of actions that seeks to prevent the problem from arising again, while a solution may just seek to deal with the symptom.



Problem

Why?

Why?

Why?

Why?

Why?

Countermeasure