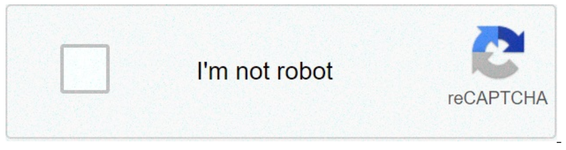

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Root cause analysis tools fishbone

How effective we are at solving problems and keeping them solved depends on our ability to address them at their source. When we put out fires but fail to put in measures to prevent similar ones in the future, we fight the same fires again and again. Instead of increasing our fire-fighting budget, we should increase our investment in prevention at the source. How to Identify Root Causes There are a several common techniques for identifying likely root causes. Either for the sake of simplicity, or because it worked in the past, many organizations zero in only one favored technique. Often this becomes an exercise in compliance. People fill out a root cause analysis template to justify a temporary fix, rather than thinking through how to approach the problem. No single root cause analysis tool or method is versatile or reliable enough to work in every situation. The starter kata approach is increasingly popular due to its simplicity and versatility. Different situations call for different tools. When in doubt, we can go a long way with a combination of fish, trees, and go see. Get a Grip on Reality Solving real problems is easiest when we have a firm grip on reality. Reality tends to exist outside of our heads. But we need our heads in order to process the objective reality that we perceive into actionable thoughts. In short, we need to go see. Directly observing the process is often the simplest way to find the prime suspects that cause a problem. But this option is not always available. This may be due to the nature of the process or problem. This requires us to use a number of techniques to visualize our thinking. Widening the Net through Brainstorming One common technique to visualize our thought process is brainstorming. A group of people knowledgeable about the problem get together and list what they think are the causes. On the positive side, this is easy to do. It is just talking. Done in a structured way with affinity diagrams to simplify and organize brainstorming and PICK charts to help to prioritize, brainstorming can support rapid idea generation. There are also risks. When we brainstorm causes, our thinking can be subjective and unscientific. Our thinking may not be grounded in a thorough understanding of the factors affecting the process. Also, without data to weigh one idea versus the next, the most vocal or highest ranked voices can sway the outcome of brainstorming. Narrowing Down Options with Fishbone Diagrams The fishbone diagram is not a form of brainstorming. We should not be generating creative ideas about what could be causing the problem, i.e. guessing. The fishbone diagram works with a predetermined set of factors known to affect the outcome of a process. In general these are known as the “5M” for manpower, material, method, machinery and measurement. These are the factors that contribute to the majority of problems in manufacturing, healthcare, construction, landscaping and so forth. For retail businesses or the sales process of an organization, we can use “5P” for price, promotion, place, people, product. To identify factors affecting problems in knowledge work, it is a simple matter of adjusting these categories to suit. Simply select four to six plausible factors are known or agreed to affect the outcome the process. Assign each one to one of the rib bones connected to the spine and draw the cause-and-effect spurs. If an organization that has only a limited idea of what factors contribute to a good outcome for their process, they needs to first spend time understanding their processes. Otherwise, problem solving will be superficial. Fishbones Don’t Have Roots, Trees Do The fishbone diagram is not a template for 5 why analysis. Although it is possible to show 2, 3, 4 or more links in the cause-and-effect chain, getting to root cause is not its purpose. The fishbone diagram is more of a map of possible sources of variation in the process. Fishbone diagrams point the way for further investigation. A tree diagram looks like a fishbone diagram rotated 45 degrees. However, it serves a very different purpose. Unlike a fishbone diagram whose purpose is to go deeper down the list of suspects, the tree diagram is used to narrow down and eliminate possible causes. Ideally this leads to one or more addressable root causes. Finally, Five Times “Why?” Many organizations latch onto the 5 why analysis as a go-to root cause analysis tool. It’s true that this approach can help us go past the surface and find causes of many less complex problems. Often, when we start with 5 why without first properly framing the problem, we get stuck. The tree diagram is an appropriate tool for practicing 5 why analysis. It’]s structure lends itself to pursuing multiple lines of questioning, repeating “why?” as often as needed, and branching out multiple times, as roots tend to do. Used in proper combination, these tools and methods help us to see reality clearly, identify areas of investigation, structure our ideas logically and guide our investigation toward finding the root cause. Sometimes things go wrong. Well-planned projects fail, processes break down and employees lose their productivity. To understand what happened, you need to get to the bottom of things. Many organizations use the root cause analysis when a problem or something unplanned happens that will interrupt their business processes. It helps dig deeper and find effective solutions. In this post, we will look at what is root cause analysis, the root cause analysis steps, and root cause analysis tools. What is Root Cause Analysis Root cause analysis is a method that helps understand the primary cause of a problem or why a problem occurred in the first place. It helps you to dig into the underlying causes of the situation, thus allowing you to find appropriate solutions for it. There are several root cause analysis tools and techniques that can be used in the investigation of a problem. But before we get to that, let’s understand how to conduct a root cause analysis first. Root Cause Analysis Steps A root cause analysis may take several hours of your time. It would be easier for you if you involve a team of relevant people; for example, if you are investigating bottlenecks in a process, it would help to have the process owner and other experts for the analysis. Follow the steps below to conduct a successful root cause analysis. Step 1: Define the problem Define the problem your organization is facing and gather data and evidence relevant to it and necessary to understand the current situation. Create a problem statement which should include information about the problem like the actual impact, potential impact, the focal point, etc. However keep the statement concise. Step 2: Determine the factors that caused the problem. Gather a team of people directly involved in the execution of the process and corrective actions, and experts whose input can help find solutions faster. Together with the team, brainstorm the possible factors for the problem by asking ‘why?’. You can use a 5 whys diagram or a fishbone diagram here. Step 3: Identify the root cause. Dig deeper by continuing to ask why after the first layer of causal factors. Keep at it until finally you have discovered the fundamental cause for the problem at hand. Step 4: Decide the corrective actions Decide the corrective actions you need to take to eliminate the problem and prevent it from recurring. Make sure that you clearly communicate them to the people who will be involved. Step 5: Review and evaluate Review and evaluate the impact of the corrective actions. Make improvements as necessary. Root Cause Analysis Tools Many root cause analysis tools are out there. Following we have listed some that are widely used and more effective in problem-solving. 5 Whys Analysis To carry out a 5 whys analysis, you need to gather a team of people who are affected by the problem. As the name suggests, in the 5 whys analysis the question ‘why?’ is asked five times in the course of finding the root cause of a problem. You can use a 5 whys template like the one below to facilitate the brainstorming session. Once you have asked ‘why’ five times and figured out the root cause, come up with improvement measure you need to apply. Assign everyone the corrective actions that need to be taken. 5 Whys Analysis (Click on the template to edit it online) Cause and Effect Analysis Once you have identified the problem, you can use the cause and effect analysis to explore the causes of a problem and its effects. For the analysis, you can use a cause and effect diagram, which is also known as a fishbone diagram or the Ishikawa diagram. Just as it helps explore the factors that are preventing an outcome, it can also be used to identify the factors needed to generate the desired outcome. Fishbone Diagram (Click on the template to edit it online) Here’s how to use the cause and effect analysis to solve business problems. You can also refer to our guide on fishbone diagrams to learn how to use the tool in more detail. Pareto Chart Pareto chart is a combination of a bar chart and a line graph. While the length of the bars represent the frequency or cost of faults, they are arranged in such a way that highlights the most frequent to least frequent. The chart helps prioritize your issues based on the cumulative effect they have on a system. The Pareto chart is based on the theory that 80% of the total problems that occur are caused by 20% of problem causes. This means if you have solutions to your major problems, you can also solve a majority of your other smaller problems. Learn how to create a Pareto chart step-by-step here. Pareto Chart Example (Click on the template to edit it online) Scatter Diagram Scatter diagrams or scatter plot diagrams can be used to visualize the relationship between two variables. Once you have created a cause and effect diagram and identified potential causes to your problem, you can use the scatter diagram to determine which causes are responsible for the variation. While the independent variable is plotted along the horizontal axis, the vertical axis is for the dependent axis. Learn more here. Scatter Diagram Example (Click on the diagram to edit it online) Fault Tree Analysis Fault tree analysis is a deductive analysis to that visually represent the failure path. You can use the fault tree analysis to determine the possible causes of a problem or an event. The fault tree starts with the event at the top and the possible causes are placed below. Fault Tree Analysis (Click on the template to edit it online) Anymore Root Cause Analysis Tools? What other root cause analysis tools do you use? Have you got any more tips on accelerating the root cause analysis steps we have discussed above? Do share them with us in the comments below. 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