Detailed Directions for Facilitating a 5 Whys Discussion

Group Size

Directions

5 Whys Root Cause Analysis can be conducted with small or large groups.

Facilitator Tips

If more than 10 people will participate, divide the group into small groups of 5 – 7 people. That way, everyone will have an opportunity to contribute to the discussion.

Organizing for Discussion

Directions

Each small group will need:

- A **facilitator** to:
  - ◊ Keep the discussion moving and on track
  - ◊ Ensure everyone gets a turn to speak and actively participate.
- A **recorder** to:
  - ◊ Write down ideas from the discussion using a flip chart or using the 5 Whys Graphic Organizer
  - ◊ Review with the group to ensure accuracy of what is recorded

Facilitator Tips

- The **facilitator** and **recorder** should also actively participate in the discussion.
- If there are multiple small groups participating, have each group report out at each Stage of the 5 Whys process.
- Each small group may have different responses at each stage. That's OK and beneficial to determining root cause.
- After Stage C discussion is complete, gather all the notes from each small group. Complex problems require
- Teams to implement multiple strategies.
- Each root cause identified by a group should be considered by the Team and added to the plan as goals and strategies, as the Team agrees.

Stage A: Defining the Problem

Directions

- The Team chooses a problem to analyze for root cause
- The facilitator starts the discussion by asking 'What' questions. To get started, ask a question such as 'What is the problem with_____?
- Continue to ask 'What' questions until a specific description of the problem is emerges.
- Use the criteria in the column to the right to assist in determining when a clear description of the problem has been reached.
- Recorder writes down 'What' questions and responses, accurately recording the final version of the 'What' question, that meets criteria in the column to the right, for use in Stage B.

Facilitator Tips

- It may be helpful to review the 5 Whys Stage A examples.
- 'Problems' are frequently initially stated as phrases or broad areas. Stage A provides the process for developing a specific description of the problem
- Criteria for Stage A Problem Statements:
  - ◊ Provides a complete and accurate description of the problem
  - ◊ Includes more information than a word or two about a broad area of concern
  - ◊ Is based on facts and not opinions or conjecture of what might or could happen
  - ◊ Is understood in the same way by all members of the Team

Stage B

Directions

- Facilitator starts the discussion by using the problem statement that emerged from the 'What' question discussion.
- Start the problem statement with a 'Why' question.
- Recorder takes notes on responses
- After Team discussion, recorder writes down final response to the '1st Why' question
- It is critical that the 5 Whys process gets started on the right track
- Use the criteria in the right hand column to determine when the 1st Why question response is on track.

Facilitator Tips

- Use the criteria for the '1st Why' to assist in determining when Team discussion has landed on an appropriate statement to move on.
- Stage B criteria useful for wv Why:
  - ◊ Is understood in the same way by all members of the Team
  - ◊ Is factual and objective and not based on conjecture or opinion
  - ◊ Does not fault particular people or systems
  - ◊ Does not cite a lack of adequate time, personnel or money as the problem

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Stage C

Directions

- Facilitator starts 2nd Why discussion by beginning the response to the 1st Why with the word 'Why'.
- Team discussion follows, as in Stage B
- Recorder takes notes and writes down final response for 2nd Why question
- Begin each new 'Why' discussion by using the final response from the previous 'Why'.
- Continue to ask 'Why' questions until the Team agrees they have reached root cause
- Use the same criteria as for the 1st Why to make a judgment that each 5 Whys response is on track for leading to root cause.
- The types of root causes listed in the right hand column is not exhaustive – Team's may identify other areas within their sphere of influence to address

Facilitator Tips

- Asking 5 'Why' questions is only a rule of thumb.
- The Team's discussion may take a fewer number of Why questions, or it may take more.
- The Team generally knows when they have reached root cause. Here are some guidelines that point to the types of root cause Team's often identify:
  - ◊ Flawed or absent knowledge process or procedure
  - ◊ Pervasive misinformation or misunderstanding about roles and responsibilities of one another's systems
  - ◊ A disconnect in practices or procedures across service systems
  - ◊ Flawed or absent communication within or among service systems
  - ◊ Flawed or absent procedure or process across systems
  - ◊ Real or perceived disconnect in communication or across systems

Ongoing Root Cause Analysis

Directions

- Always begin consideration of new goals with a '5 Whys' discussion.
- 5 Whys is a simple discussion process, and with practice, it becomes an automatic discussion, without needing to write everything down
- Always refer to the 5 Whys criteria and guidelines to ensure the Team's discussion stays on track

Facilitator Tips

- Teams may return to a previously started 5 Whys to pursue a different thread, based on the same Stage A Problem Statement, that leads the Team to a different root cause
- Teams may need to return to a previously started 5 Whys after gathering data or information that was needed to respond to a 5 Whys question and move on to root cause