

5 Whys

Overview

The 5 Whys is a simple approach to help a team identify underlying reasons for a problem. By repeatedly asking the question ‘Why?’ (use five as a rule of thumb), you can peel away the layers of an issue. This can lead you to the root causes of a problem.

You may need to ask ‘Why’ more than five times before you get to the root cause of a problem.



How to create a process map

1. Write down the specific problem you are trying to solve.
2. Use brainstorming to ask ‘Why?’ the problem occurs.
3. ‘Why?’ until you have reached a useful level of detail — that is, when the cause is specific enough to be able to test a change and measure its effects

It can also be helpful to use the 5 Whys in conjunction with cause-and-effect analysis to explore the different types of causes. For more information on using the Cause and Effect tool see the [SCV Quality Improvement Toolkit](#).

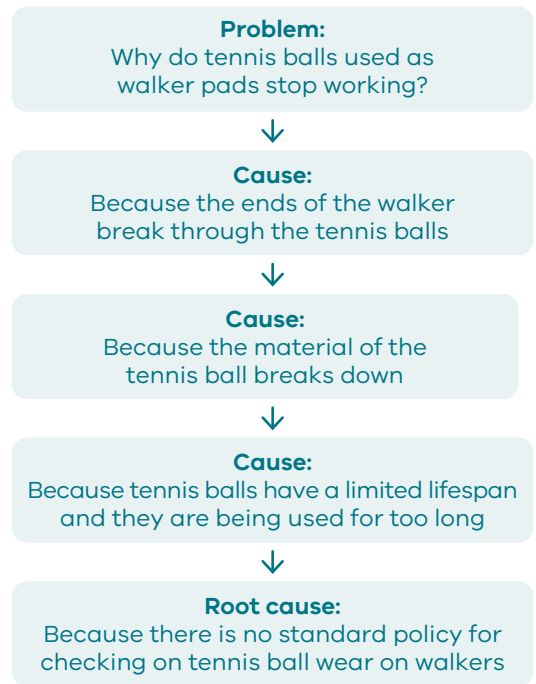


Figure 1: 5 Whys Example

Important considerations

The key is to avoid assumptions and encourage the team to keep drilling down to the real issues that underlie why different factors have contributed to something going wrong.

5 Whys template

Problem:

WHY?

Cause:

WHY?

Cause:

WHY?

Cause:

WHY?

Cause:

WHY?

Root Cause:

Additional resources

To learn more about Quality Improvement you can access the following resources:

- [SCV Quality Improvement Toolkit](#)
- [Institute for Healthcare Improvement website](#)
- [NSW Clinical Excellence Commission Quality Improvement Tools](#)
- [Video resource: 5 Whys at Jefferson Memorial \(2mins\)](#)