

Attachment E

Root Cause Analysis Directions for Using the 5 Whys Approach

The 5 Whys is a simple and practical technique that is very easy to use. It is a question-asking technique that can be used to identify the cause-and-effect relationships that lead to a particular problem. The goal of the technique is to isolate the root cause of a problem or a serious event by repeating the question "Why?" Each question serves as the basis for the next question.

By repeatedly asking the question "Why" (five is a good rule of thumb), you begin to uncover the underlying sources of a problem. The first questions are the most obvious ones and they typically lead to other question. Although this technique is called "5 Whys," you may not need to ask the question five times or you may need to ask the question more than five times, but five is about average. What is important is that you reach what you believe is the root cause of the problem.

There are some important thing to remember when you're using the '5 Whys' approach:

- you want clear and concise answers,
- you want to avoid answers that are too simple, and
- you don't want to overlook important details.

It is also important to remember that each time you ask "why," look for an answer that is based in fact -- what actually happened – not what might have happened.

1. Start with the problem statement you've developed and ask, "Why did this happen?". It is useful to write down the problem to help define it. It is also helpful to do with in a group.
2. Next, ask "why" it occurred. Make sure your answer is factual, and write it down. If you have more than one answer, that's fine, write them all down.
3. Then ask "why" again. If you had more than one answer to your previous question, ask "why" for each of your answers and write them all down.
4. Continue the process until you reach the root cause of the problem. It usually takes about five questions to identify the root cause, but it may take less or more.

This technique can help you to quickly determine the root cause of a problem. It's simple, and easy to learn and apply.

For more information on Root Cause Analysis, review the webinars on the DBHDS Website, "An Introduction to Root Cause Analysis."

<http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov/about-dbhds/news-and-press-releases/news/2015/06/24/11/53/dbhds-webinar>