

# Understanding the Problem

## RCA: Root Cause Analysis



### Understanding the Problem

It is not always clear why things are not going as intended. We might assume to know the cause, make a change, and still see not see the desired effect. When faced with this situation, it is important to understand the underlying cause or the source of the problem in order to identify lasting solutions.

### RCA<sup>1</sup>

A Root Cause Analysis (RCA) is a tool to examine in detail what is causing a problem and identify a solution for the underlying cause. There are several methods for doing root cause analysis, but this facilitation sheet will provide three techniques which are recommended for conducting root cause analysis – brainstorming, a fishbone diagram, and a why-why analysis.

### How to facilitate a Root Cause Analysis



1-2 hours depending on the number of people and complexity of the problem being discussed.



5-20 people: MoH staff instrumental in introducing DMPA-SC, private sector and SMO actors, and FP implementing partners implicated in various aspects of scale up

The steps for conducting an RCA are as follows:

#### Preparation:

- (1) Clearly articulate one to two problems that need addressing. Do not try to tackle every problem in your project or program.
- (2) Write out the first problem on a flip chart.
- (3) Decide as a team whether you will use the brainstorming approach, the why-why methodology or the fishbone diagram. Why-why analysis and fishbone diagrams should be used for more complex problems as they foster a deeper analysis of the problems.

### Methods:

#### BRAINSTORM

- (1) Start the brainstorm by asking the group why this problem occurred. Clarify that the team has 2-5 minutes for idea generation and encourage the group to brainstorm freely. Follow the rules of brainstorming, namely:
  - Individuals in the group verbally suggest ideas and the facilitator writes them on the flipchart
  - Criticism of the ideas is withheld – no criticism is made
  - New perspectives and unusual ideas are welcomed (new ways of thinking may provide better solutions later)
- (2) Once the idea generation portion is over, review the ideas on the flip chart. Combine similar ideas and continue to improve ideas in the large group: many good ideas may be combined to form a single better idea.
- (3) Rank the ideas and/or select the most appropriate ideas by voting.

#### WHY-WHY:

- (1) Write out the main problem on a flip chart and ask the team “why” you think this problem has occurred. List proposed answers underneath the main problem.
- (2) Explore one proposed answer at a time. Ask “why?” again and continue to ask why up to another 4-5 times to identify an actionable cause or causes of the problem. Use a table like the one below.
- (3) Remember, with the why-why analysis, the point is to keep asking “why?” (up to five times) until an actionable cause or causes of the problem have been identified. By the 4th or 5th why, the team should find at least one actionable cause of the problem.

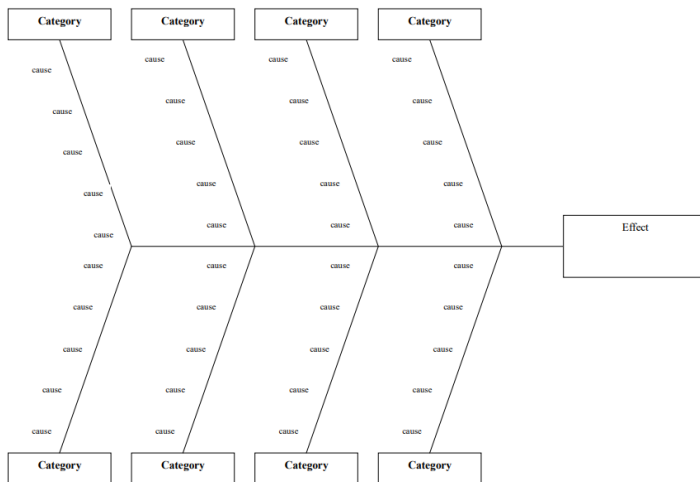
#### Why-Why table

Define the problem:	
Why is that happening?	
1	Why is that?
2	Why is that?
3	Why is that?
4	Why is that?
5	Root cause

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from inSupply/JSI's IMPACT Team SOPs

## FISHBONE

- (1) From initial problem (labeled as the mouth of the fish), brainstorm and agree on the major categories of the problem. Write these as “bones” of your fish, from the main arrow.
- (2) Brainstorm all the possible causes of the problem. Ask “Why does this happen?” As each idea is given, the facilitator writes the causal factor as a branch from the appropriate category (places it on the fishbone diagram). Causes can be written in several places if they relate to several categories.
- (3) Continue asking “Why” about each cause. Write sub-causes branching off the cause branches.
- (4) Probe as necessary to generate deeper levels of causes and continue organizing them under related causes or categories.



## Synthesis:

- (1) For each cause of the problem, identify actions that should be taken and write them on the flip chart.
- (2) For each action, identify all tasks required, determine who is responsible and set a deadline. Capture all details in the action plan.
- (3) Repeat the process with the second prioritized problem.

## How and when this can be used in the context of DMPA-SC Scale up

This technique can be used routinely at progress review meetings such as Technical Working Groups, steering committee or other stakeholder engagement meeting, or it can be used only “as needed” when a particular problem is identified. This technique is also widely used for supply chain quality improvement teams to identify root causes for supply chain problems. National or subnational committees looking at DMPS-SC logistics may also find this a useful exercise.

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