MAS
MANAGEMENT
SYSTEMS PTY LTD

Root cause analysis means digging deeper

We've written [previously](#) about root cause analysis and just how important it is for your quality system.

Root cause analysis (RCA) is about problem solving - sort of like CSI for your quality system.

As you get better at performing RCA, your process will be less reactive and more proactive, leading to improvements in your business.

There are different approaches to RCA. The 5 Whys technique, Failure Mode and Effects Analysis (FMEA) and the Cause and Effect or Fishbone Diagram are three of the most popular.

The 5 Whys technique relies on the person carrying out the RCA to ask at least those five questions of "why" to drill down into an issue. This technique seems to be the most popular since its implementation doesn't require specialised knowledge or resources to be effective.

Let's look at the 5 Whys technique in a little more detail.

It's a team sport

You will reach a consensus very quickly if you're working on your own. But to carry out an effective RCA, you'll should assemble a team.

These need to be the relevant people to ensure you get different viewpoints on the problem. In our previous article we used the example of a customer complaint about late delivery results. The team in this case should comprise those who had direct involvement with the process plus a moderator or facilitator.

This moderator or facilitator role is an important one in the process. It needs someone experienced enough to steer the team and ask the right 'why' questions plus maintain gentle control over the process.

Before beginning the RCA process, it's essential that the problem statement is correct and that the team agrees on it. The question in our example was 'Why weren't the results delivered on time?' and NOT 'Whose fault was it that the results were delivered on time?' As with any systems issue, depersonalising the problem will go a long way to getting to the bottom of it.

And of course, this technique doesn't mean just asking a series of random questions. The answer to each question should lead to the next.

Don't stop 'til you get enough

The moderator may begin by asking each of the members to consider the problem statement then define what they believe is the issue and list their responses.
For a moderator, the key here is sorting through the responses and concentrating on those backed by facts, not emotions.

www.masmanagementsystems.com.au

It may also mean that the team doesn't stop at 5 Whys. In the case of a complex issue, it could take many more questions to break down the problem.

This is where the skills and abilities of the moderator is important. As well as keeping the team on track, they may see other issues that need to be raised separately or require further investigation.

Team building

This process of asking questions and drilling down to find a solution encourages a collaborative workplace.

Consider and respect the opinions and viewpoints of each team member. In addition, this openness within the team should aim to build consensus on how to deal with the issue. This is not about finding fault or blaming individuals, it's about discovering flaws in the process and providing solutions.

The next step

Once the team has agreed on the root cause, it's time to take action – corrective action. Decide on the best actions that will protect your process from recurring problems.

Document a summary of the root cause analysis process and circulate this across the organisation. Delegate team members tasks to apply the agreed actions and give them a timeframe for both implementing the action and assessing the results of the changes determined.

Bringing the team back together to examine the results of the actions will reinforce the importance of the process and consolidate their teamwork.

How can we help?

We run an excellent training course on root cause analysis which Maree can run for you as an inhouse session.

She has extensive experience as a facilitator and can guide your team to the best outcomes.To arrange a confidential discussion on how we can help, phone Maree on 0411 540 709 or email info@masmanagementsystems.com.au

Remember you don't have to do this alone!

www.masmanagementsystems.com.au