

How to Do Root Cause Analysis in a Hurry

The logic of Problem Analysis provides a strong foundation for diagnosing root causes of specific “deviation type” problems. As a Decision Focus practitioner, you know the method is even more useful when using Decision Focus 6.0 software. However, you can’t always rely on having software or a reference manual handy when a problem arises. Or, you might be in a meeting where others who are not familiar with Problem Analysis object to it because they don’t have experience with the tool. Or, you might simply need to solve a problem “on the fly” because of extreme time pressures to act.

When you find yourself in these situations, don’t settle for poor quality problem diagnosis. Instead, use the process questions below as a road map to guide the problem solving effort. Each of these questions focuses on a key phase of Problem Analysis. They ensure the right questions are asked and the right information is analyzed before action is taken.

DATA COLLECTION – Description Step:

- What specific object/item has the problem? What is the focus of our investigation?
 - What exactly is wrong? Can you draw a picture of the problem? What is the most similar object that might have the same defect, but doesn’t?
 - Where specifically is it happening? Where would you go to see it happening? Where is it not happening?
 - When did you first see the defect? Since it started, what’s the timing pattern (continuous, cyclical, random)?
 - How many objects/items have the problem? Is it getting worse? How severe is the defect itself? Is it changing over time?
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DATA ANALYSIS – Distinctions Step:

- What’s different about the objects/items that are having the problem vs. similar objects that are not having the problem?
- When comparing the conditions that define the problem with conditions that are outside the boundary of the problem, what sets them apart?
- What’s different about the environment where the problem is happening vs. the environment where it’s not happening?

DATA ANALYSIS – Changes Step:

- What recent changes (changes that happened before the problem occurred) might be part of the cause of the problem?
 - When and where did these changes happen?
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HYPOTHESES – Possible Causes Step:

- What about these changes could cause the problem?
 - What specifically happened? Explain the phenomenon that caused the problem.
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EVALUATING THE HYPOTHESES – Testing Step:

- How well does each Possible Cause fit the facts surrounding the problem?
 - Are there any “holes” in your hypothesis?
 - Which Possible Causes can be eliminated because they don’t explain the facts?
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VALIDATING THE ROOT CAUSE – Verification Step:

- What can be done to verify the cause and be 100% certain?
 - Is this verification plan the least expensive, least disruptive and most expedient?
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IMPLEMENTING CORRECTIVE ACTION – Action Step:

- What’s the most pragmatic corrective action strategy?
- Do we need to take action right now for temporary relief until permanent corrective action can be taken?



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