

# MQii Root Cause Analysis Overview

**Root Cause Analysis** is a collective term to describe a wide range of approaches, tools, and techniques used to uncover causes of problems. The 5 Whys Approach used in this template is a process of asking why something failed until an ultimate cause, or root cause, can be determined and acted upon. It is one method of conducting Root Cause Analysis.

**Root causes are underlying causes** – The goal is to identify specific underlying causes. The more specific your team can be about why an event occurred, the easier it will be to arrive at recommendations that will prevent recurrence of the gap.

**Root causes are specific** – The team should avoid using general cause classifications such as clinical error, equipment failure, or external factor. Such causes are not specific enough to allow teams to make effective changes.

**Root causes are addressable** – Root causes are those for which effective recommendations can be generated. If the team arrives at vague recommendations such as, “improve adherence to written policies and procedures,” then your team needs to expend more effort in the analysis process and it is recommended to include more perspectives into the analysis process at this point.

**Root causes are identified when you cannot answer “why?” anymore** – Evidence suggests that typical root causes can be identified after asking “why?” five times. However, a good indicator that you have reached your final “why?” is when you cannot ask “why?” anymore.

**Root causes are not people** – The process of determining the root cause needs to be open and focused on improvement. It is counterproductive to identify individuals. Therefore, no person should be identified as a root cause.

## WHAT IS A ROOT CAUSE?

- Root causes are underlying causes
- Root causes are specific
- Root causes are addressable
- Root causes are identified when you cannot answer “why?” anymore
- Root causes are not people

## ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS TEMPLATE

The template below can be used during the Pre-Implementation phase to identify the root cause of gaps identified during selection of your QI Focus. Understanding the root cause of gaps will enable you to better identify a successful QI intervention approach. This template can also be used during the Implementation and Post-Implementation phases to identify root causes for lack of data results and to identify root causes for successes.

### **Additional Resources on Root Cause Analysis:**

- American Society for Quality (2017). [Root Cause Analysis Overview: What is Root Cause Analysis \(RCA\)?](#)
- American Society for Quality (2017). [Asking Why with Root Cause and 5 Whys](#) (Video)

**References:** 1. American Society for Quality (2017). [Root Cause Analysis Overview: What is Root Cause Analysis \(RCA\)?](#); 2. Barsalou, M. (2017). "[Square in the Crosshairs](#)". Quality Progress; 3. Barsalou, M. (2017). "[Square in the Crosshairs](#)". Quality Progress

