Conducting root cause analysis using the Why Tree (or Five Whys)

Find the root cause(s) for each performance gap or strength using the method that best suits the needs of the group. Below is a description of the Five Whys or Why-Tree process.

The **Five Whys** exercise is a questioning technique for going beyond symptoms of problems to identify the underlying or root causes of a problem. To facilitate the Five Whys or Why-Tree process, follow these steps:

- State the problem/gap/strength as accurately and succinctly as possible.
- Below it, list the possible causes of the problem/gap/strength by asking the question “Why?” or “Why is that true?” or “Why is that happening?”
- For each of the causes, again ask the question “Why?” and list the responses below.
- Continue this process at least 5 times or until you have reached the source of the problem, the lowest level cause stakeholders can do something about, or the response “That is just the way it is, or that is just what happened.”

**Using the Why-tree process to uncover the underlying reasons for a gap in a supervisory system**

**Gap: Supervisors are not making appropriate number of supervision visits**

1. Did not know how many visits were expected
   - Why?
     - Have no job description
       - Why?
         - No one developed a job description
         - Why?
           - No support system for them
             - Why?
               - Have no supervisor
2. No one told them
   - Why?
     - No one’s job to tell them
6. Not in their training
   - Why?
     - Did not request funds
       - Why?
         - Did not know how to complete the funding request form
         - Why?
           - Were not trained
           - Why?
             - No guidelines
         - Why?
           - No funds
         - Why?
           - No transport
Below is an example of using the Why-tree process on a strength, rather than a gap, to uncover why it is a high performing area. In examining strengths, you can use these lessons to scale-up this successful activity to other facilities or apply lessons to other areas/activities in their facility.

Using the Why-tree process to uncover the underlying reasons for a high-performing activity area

Strength: High % of children up-to-date on all required vaccinations

- Vaccination services are well organized
  - Why?
  - Effective systems to maintain stocks of vaccines/supplies, ensure proper transport & follow-up
    - Why?
    - Good reporting system on communicable diseases linked to WHO regional reporting requirements
      - Why?
      - Vaccination services an MOH priority and source of pride
  - Vaccination services available at all levels of MOH clinics and in all regions
    - Why?
    - Clients accept vaccinations & there is high compliance
      - Why?
      - Believe in value of vaccines to protect children from preventable diseases
        - Why?
        - Respect for medical authority
  - Strong political commitment to offer vaccination services
    - Why?
  - Belief in value of children in society
Example of Root Cause Analysis Using Why Tree

Providers are not counseling postpartum clients about family planning (FP)

Why?

Did not know to counsel on FP services

Why?

Have no job description

Why?

No one developed a job description

Why?

I don’t know

Why?

No one told them

Why?

No one’s job to tell them

Why?

Have no supervisor

Why?

No support system for them

Why?

I don’t know

No time

Why?

Too many patients to see

Why?

Supervisor did not plan duty roster to provide for enough staff

Why?

I don’t know

Did not know to counsel on FP services

Why?

No time

Why?

Supervisor did not plan duty roster to provide for enough staff

Why?

I don’t know

Providers are not counseling postpartum clients about family planning (FP)

Why?

I don’t know

Have no job description

Why?

No one developed a job description

Why?

I don’t know

Why?