

- ✓ Supply Chain Consulting
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A background image of a business meeting in a modern office. Several people are seated around a long table, looking at documents and laptops. The scene is dimly lit with a blue tint, suggesting an evening or indoor lighting.

Lean TQM Toolbox Series

The Five Whys

Often, the most difficult part of resolving a problem is not coming up with the solution, but rather identifying the actual root cause. The 5-Whys is a tool that is designed to get to the root of what caused the problem

The objective is to then use "counter-measures," rather than solutions (A counter-measure is an action or set of actions that seeks to prevent the problem arising again, a solution may just seek to deal with the symptom)

The technique generally involves 5 steps:

Step 1. Involve all stakeholders who may be affected by the problem in an open meeting

Step 2. Nominate someone to lead the meeting and someone to document the findings

Step 3. Express the "Problem" and then dig down through the causes by asking "why does this happen" five times.

Eg The vehicle will not start. (the problem)

Why #1? - The battery is dead. (First why)

Why #2? - The alternator is not functioning. (Second why)

Why #3? - The alternator belt has broken. (Third why)

Why #4? - The alternator belt was well beyond its useful service life and not replaced. (Fourth why)

Why #5? - The vehicle was not maintained according to the recommended service schedule. (Fifth why, a root cause)

Step 4. Agree on the best corrective action and assign responsibilities and timelines

Step 5. Share the results

It's important to note that the purpose of the 5 whys isn't to place blame, but rather to uncover the root cause of why something unexpected occurred