The Five Whys protocol is a simple but powerful tool for cutting quickly through the outward symptoms of a problem to reveal its underlying causes. It facilitates teams through a line of inquiry to reach a shared understanding of the cause of the problem. The Five Whys is most useful when considering simple to moderate problems.

**Participants**

**Roles:** Facilitator, notetaker

**Group Size:** 4+ people

**Time:** 10-20 minutes

**Materials**

**In Person:** Whiteboard or flipchart paper, markers

**Virtual:** Virtual shared workspace



**Instructions for Use**

**1. Assemble a Team.** Identify and gather a diverse group of stakeholders familiar with the problem.

**2. Define the problem.** State the problem and why it’s the focus of the conversation (include data points, references to previous meetings/discussions or rationale for the problem).

**3. Ask the First Why?** Ask the participants why the problem is occurring.

**4. Ask “Why?” Four More Times.** Ask subsequent “Why?” questions. Each time, frame the question in response to the answer received.

**a.** Example:

 Why do our team meetings always run late?

 We don’t start on time.

 Why don’t we start on time?

**b.** Continue asking “Why?” questions until everyone involved is satisfied they have arrived at the root cause.

**5. Document the underlying cause.** Invite participants to consider next steps including improvement planning to address the identified cause(s).