

Root Cause Tree Diagram Template

A Root Cause Tree helps identify and visualise the underlying reasons behind a problem. Instead of treating symptoms, it guides teams to find the real causes so they can design permanent and effective solutions.

1. Purpose of This Tool

- ☐ Identify the root causes of recurring or complex problems.
- ☐ Move beyond surface symptoms to find the real issue.
- ☐ Support structured, fact-based analysis.
- ☐ Build shared understanding among teams and stakeholders.
- ☐ Prevent similar problems from recurring in the future.

Tip: The goal is to fix the system, not the person.

2. How to Use This Template

1. Define the problem clearly at the top of the tree.
2. Ask “why” repeatedly to uncover contributing causes.
3. Organise causes into logical categories such as people, process, technology, or environment.
4. Continue exploring each cause until you reach an underlying issue that can be addressed directly.
5. Validate findings with evidence before taking action.

Tip: Be disciplined about asking “why” until the explanation is no longer opinion but fact.

Notes

3. Root Cause Tree Layout

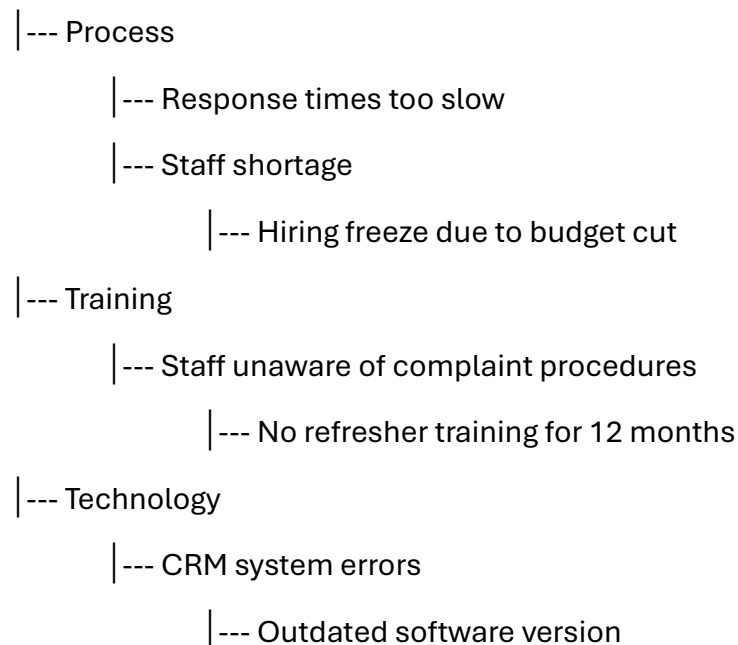
Level	Description	Example
Problem	State the issue clearly and factually.	“Customer complaints have increased by 30% in three months.”
Primary Causes	The main contributing categories.	“Process delay,” “Training gaps,” “System failure.”
Secondary Causes	The underlying factors within each category.	“Outdated process map,” “Inadequate onboarding,” “Server downtime.”
Root Causes	The fundamental issues that enable the problem.	“No process ownership,” “Lack of training plan,” “Insufficient system maintenance.”

☐ Work downward from problem to root cause, verifying each step with data or evidence.

Tip: The deeper you go, the closer you get to prevention rather than correction.

4. Example Layout (Visual)

Problem: Customer complaints increased



☐ This diagram can be recreated in Word using SmartArt (Hierarchy layout) or drawn manually in workshops.

5. Category Table for Brainstorming

Category	Example Causes	Notes / Evidence
People	Lack of skills, unclear roles, low motivation	
Process	Inefficient workflow, missing documentation	
Technology	System limitations, integration errors	
Environment	Noise, workspace layout, distractions	
Policy / Governance	Lack of clear ownership or accountability	

☐ Use categories to prompt deeper thinking during team discussions.

Tip: Grouping causes helps identify systemic patterns, not isolated incidents.

6. Root Cause Validation Table

Suspected Root Cause	Evidence Supporting It	Confidence Level (Low / Medium / High)	Verified? (Yes / No)
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☐ Test assumptions before acting on them.

☐ Look for measurable data or direct observation to confirm accuracy.

Tip: Evidence distinguishes real causes from opinions.

7. Recommended Solutions

Verified Root Cause	Proposed Solution	Owner	Deadline	Status
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☐ Align solutions to root causes, not symptoms.

☐ Prioritise quick wins alongside long-term improvements.

Tip: Always verify that each action directly addresses a validated cause.

8. Follow-Up and Monitoring

Review Date What Was Implemented? Result / Impact Further Action Needed

- ☐ Review regularly to ensure solutions are effective.
- ☐ Capture learning to improve future problem-solving efforts.

Tip: Sustained improvement depends on follow-through, not discovery alone.

9. Reflection Questions

- ☐ Did we uncover all the possible causes, or did we stop too early?
- ☐ Did team dynamics or bias influence our analysis?
- ☐ What data confirmed or challenged our assumptions?
- ☐ What can we do to prevent this type of issue from recurring?

Tip: Reflection strengthens future diagnostic skills and decision-making.

10. Root Cause Summary

Problem Root Causes Identified Actions Taken Results Achieved Next Steps

- ☐ Summarise findings in a concise report for leadership or stakeholders.
- ☐ Use insights to inform continuous improvement initiatives.

Tip: Root cause work is only complete when actions lead to measurable improvement.

How to Use This Template

Use this tool in workshops, team reviews, or after any significant issue or failure. Combine it with the Problem Definition Canvas for full clarity before developing solutions. By identifying and addressing root causes, you create a culture of learning, accountability, and continuous improvement.

Notes