Root Cause Analysis Series

Step 1: Problem Definition Guide

LME/MCO: Select Your LME/MCO

This worksheet will help you develop and refine your problem statement (the starting point of your root cause analysis). It is important to be investigative and name the problem in a data-driven way. How the problem is framed will directly impact the root cause (the core issue) and causal factors (those contributing to the core issue) that are identified, and ultimately the appropriateness of proposed solutions.

Part 1: What Have We Observed?

Use this section to describe what you've seen directly or heard from other LME/MCO staff, direct care staff, hospitals, etc. that have led you to believe there is a problem in need of a response. Describe the observation(s) in simple terms.

Part 2: How Do We Know?

*Oftentimes, our observations are as complex and layered as the problem itself. Use this section to break down each observation one by one (as needed) and name a few potential sources of data that support it. Data sources can include databases, document reviews, expert interviews, surveys, literature reviews, etc. Depending on the complexity, these observations may contribute to a singular problem statement, or more than one. If multiple observations are identified, choose **one** as your focus for part 3. Make extra copies of this page for more space as needed.*

Observation 1:	
Possible sources of supporting data:	
Observation 2:	
Possible sources of supporting data:	
Observation 3:	
Possible sources of supporting data:	

Part 3: Gathering and Reviewing the Data

Devote some time to locating the sources of data identified in part 2. You may find that based on available data, you opt to focus on one of the listed observations to start. The data should not only help you understand more about your observations (the "what"), but can help to further define the population impacted (the "who"). Sometimes the data will support the initial observations; other times it may introduce a new perspective. As you learn, be sure to document your findings, as you will likely want to revisit them later.

Part 4: Crafting an Initial Problem Statement

A problem that is well-defined is one that is specific enough to be actionable but not so specific that relevant causes are excluded. For example, something like *"children waiting a long time for placement"* could be considered a problem, but it's too vague to move forward. Instead, a **problem statement might look like *"In Imagination County from January to March, children identified as meeting the state settlement complex needs definition (e.g., criteria qualifying them as Children with Complex Needs) waited, on average, 5 days longer to achieve requested placements than other children/youth not meeting the definition."*** This identifies the problem, names the boundaries of focus (could be a physical location, age group, shared diagnosis, etc.), and a baseline measurement of it. After the initial problem statement is crafted, it can still be refined or changed based on what is learned about related primary and secondary causes.

Observation of focus (example: children waiting a long time for placement):
Boundaries (example: Imagination County, Jan-Mar, CWCN qualifying children):
Baseline data (example: on average, 5 additional days spent waiting on placement):
Initial Problem Statement ***(Combine the problem of focus, boundaries, and baseline data to form problem statement):***

Part 5: Reflection Questions

1. Were there surprises from the data?
2. What additional questions (if any) do you have after reviewing the data?

Remember to be flexible in approaching this process. The problem statement may need to be adapted as causal factors are considered later.