Beyond the Symptom: Strengthening Problem Solving through Effective Root Cause Analysis

Agenda

Welcome and purpose	Beyond the Symptom	Why problems keep coming back	Symptom vs root cause	RCA mindset: trust, accountability and follow-through
Practical RCA tools	RCA use case deep dive	From root cause to corrective action	Common RCA Mistakes	Closing takeaways

Beyond the Symptom: Are We Solving the Real Problem?

Before we talk about tools and techniques, let's take a moment to reflect on a common problem-solving trap: fixing what we can see, while the real cause remains hidden.

Source: YouTube search result for "Understand Root Cause Analysis in Just 2 Minutes".

"When problems repeat in our teams or organisations, are we solving the root cause, or are we only managing the symptom?"

Key Takeaways from the Video _Why RCA helps us solve the real problem

RCA reminds us: the visible issue is not always the real problem.

1. Symptoms are signals

They show where to look, not always what to fix.

2. RCA slows the rush to solutions

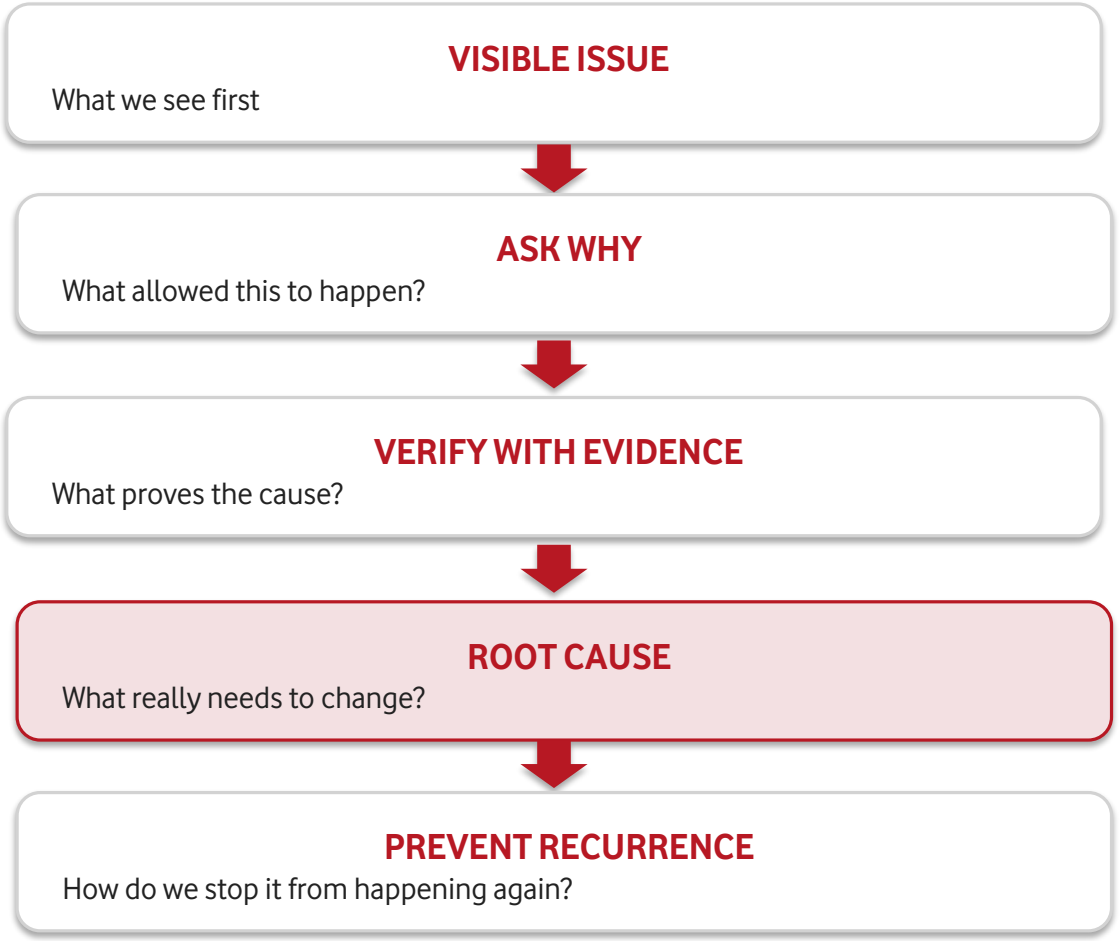
It asks “why did this happen?” before deciding what to change.

3. Evidence confirms the cause

Facts, data and process evidence separate causes from assumptions.

4. Corrective action prevents recurrence

The best action changes the condition that allowed the problem to occur.



Where do we usually stop? — visible issue, quick fix, or verified root cause?

Why do problems keep coming back?

↻ What recurrence tells us

A repeated problem often signals that the organisation has controlled the visible symptom but not removed the underlying cause.

✓ Key message

A quick fix may restore service today. Effective RCA prevents the same issue from becoming tomorrow's crisis.

Why do problems keep coming back?

SYMPTOM

What is visible
Urgent and noticeable
Often treated with a quick response
Example: delayed resolution

ROOT CAUSE

What is underlying
Hidden or systemic
Requires evidence and investigation
Example: unclear handoffs

Ask why — not who.

Symptoms guide where to look. Root causes explain what must change.

Root Cause Analysis is not blame-seeking

RCA IS	RCA IS NOT
✓ Structured problem solving	✕ Guesswork
✓ Evidence-based	✕ Opinion-based
✓ Process-focused	✕ Person-blaming
✓ Prevention-focused	✕ Quick-fix focused
✓ Learning-oriented	✕ Fault-finding

Quality culture = trust + accountability + follow-through

The RCA thinking model

1. What happened?
2. Where and when?
3. What is the impact?
4. Why did it happen?
5. What evidence supports it?
6. What action prevents recurrence?

! Important discipline

Do not start with the solution. Start with a clear problem statement and evidence.

Practical RCA toolkit

5 Whys

Drill deeper into cause-and-effect.

Fishbone

Explore possible causes by category.

Pareto

Prioritise the biggest contributors.

Process Map

See where handoffs, controls or ownership break down.

Action Plan

Assign ownership and track closure.

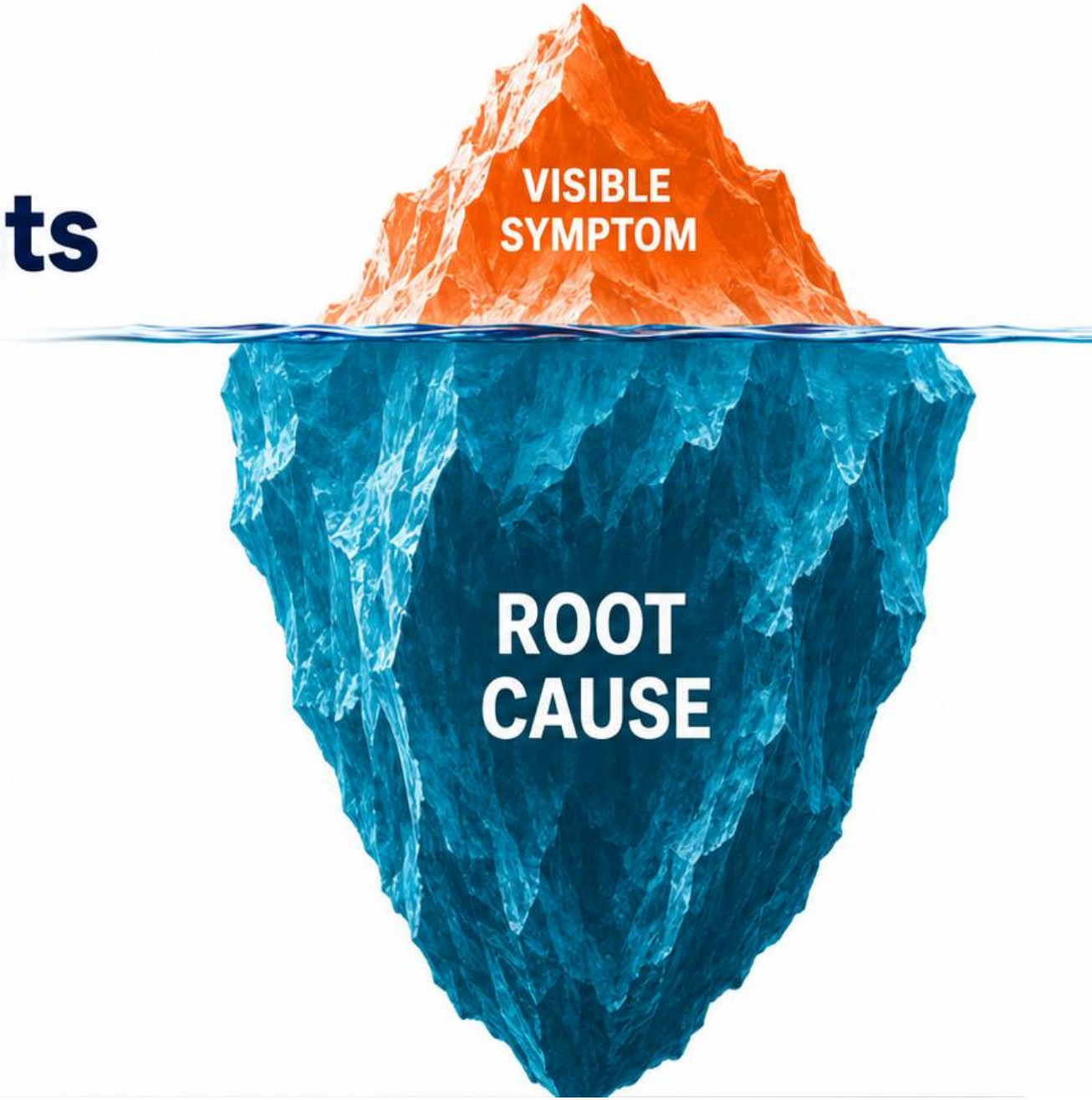
A tool does not create quality by itself. Quality comes from evidence, questioning and follow-through.

RCA USE CASE

Customer complaints increased by 30%

How to move from symptom → data → root cause → sustainable corrective action

Move from reaction to prevention



RCA Use case

Scenario

Customer complaints increased by 30% last quarter
Customers are waiting too long for their issues to be resolved.

1. What is the symptom?
2. What data would we need?
3. What possible causes should we explore?
4. Which RCA tool would we use first?
5. What action would prevent recurrence?

SYMPTOM → DATA → POSSIBLE CAUSES → ROOT CAUSE → ACTION → EFFECTIVENESS CHECK

An RCA Process

The problem definition should answer

What happened? Where? When? How often? What is the impact?

✓ Corrective action should answer

Who will do what, by when, and how will effectiveness be checked?

↻ Sustainability should answer

Did the problem reduce, stop recurring, or shift elsewhere?

Step 1: Convert the symptom into a clear problem statement

Start by defining exactly what changed, where it changed, and why it matters

SYMPTOM

Customer complaints are up by 30%. Customers are waiting too long for their issues to be resolved.

IMPROVED PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the last quarter, customer complaints increased by 30% because customers waited too long for issue resolution. The largest increase appears in cases that move from frontline support to specialist teams. The impact is repeat contacts, escalations, rework and poor customer experience.

A good problem statement gives the team a target to investigate — not a solution to defend.

Step 2: Gather evidence before choosing the cause

Use data to separate what is visible from what is true.

Complaint data

- Volume trend
- Complaint reason codes
- Repeat contact rate
- Escalation rate

Process data

- Resolution time by stage
- Queue aging
- Handoff timestamps
- Rework loops

Customer evidence

- Call listening
- Voice of the customer
- Case notes
- Customer journey pain points

System evidence

- SR use cases
- Routing rules
- Mandatory fields
- SLA alerts and ownership

Example evidence question

Where exactly does the delay sit: first response, handoff, specialist queue, approval, system update or customer callback?

Step 3: Locate the delay in the process

A process view helps avoid blaming the last person who touched the case.

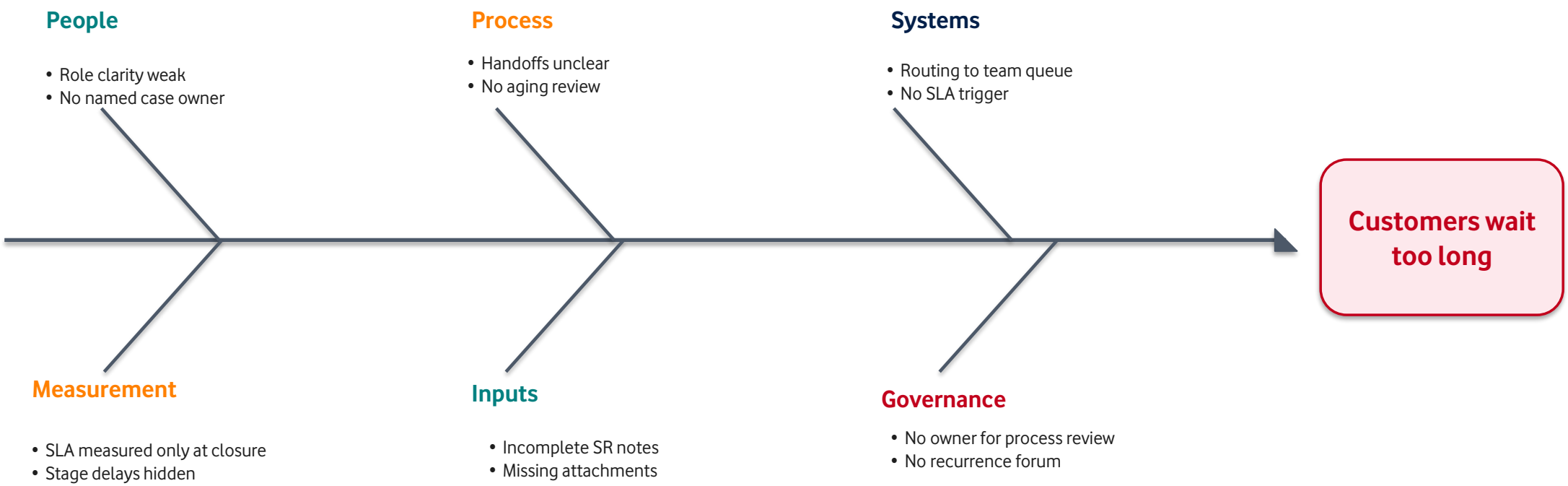
Example finding
Most delay occurs after the case leaves frontline support and before a named specialist accepts ownership.

RCA implication
Focus on handoff ownership, queue controls, incomplete case information and SLA visibility by stage.

Do not ask “who delayed it?” first. Ask “Where does the process allow delay to sit unnoticed?”

Step 4: Explore possible causes before deciding the root cause

Use a fishbone lens to avoid jumping to the most obvious explanation.



Possible causes are hypotheses. Evidence decides which causes are true.

Step 5: Verify the root cause with evidence

A cause becomes a root cause when evidence shows it drives recurrence.

Evidence check	Example finding	What it proves
Queue aging report	62% of delayed cases sat in specialist queue for >48 hours	Delay is concentrated after handoff
SR notes audit	45% of routed cases had missing fields or unclear next action	Poor input quality slows resolution
Workflow review	Cases route to a shared queue with no named owner or trigger	Ownership control is weak
Call listening	Customers repeat the same story across multiple contacts	Customer pain is caused by handoff failure

Verified root cause
The process allows delayed cases to remain in shared specialist queues without named ownership, stage-level SLA triggers or complete case information.

Evidence prevents RCA from becoming opinion-based problem solving.

Step 6: Move from root cause to sustainable action

Corrective action must change the condition that allowed recurrence.

Weak actions

- Remind teams to resolve complaints faster
- Send another communication
- Ask managers to monitor closely
- Close the RCA once actions are assigned

Stronger corrective actions

- Assign a named owner at each handoff stage
- Add mandatory SR fields before specialist routing
- Configure an aging trigger after 24 hours
- Review aged queues daily for 4 weeks
- Track effectiveness after implementation

Complaints
−20% in 6 weeks

Resolution time
72h → 48h

Aged queue
−50% >48h

Repeat contact
−15%

Test the action: will it still work when nobody is watching?

What weakens problem-solving?

- ✕ Jumping to solutions
- ✕ Blaming people
- ✕ Using opinions as evidence
- ✕ Stopping at the first why
- ✕ No owner for actions
- ✕ No follow-up check

Better practice

Problem clarity + evidence + process view + ownership + follow-up = sustainable improvement

RCA is a behaviour, not only a tool

Make RCA part of everyday problem solving.

Ownership

Clear accountability without blame

Evidence

Data before assumptions

Collaboration

Cross-functional input

Process thinking

Fix the system, not only the event

Follow-through

Check whether the fix worked

Continuous improvement culture means making problems visible, asking better questions and closing the loop.

Closing takeaways

1. Symptoms tell us where to look.
2. Evidence tells us what is true.
3. RCA helps us understand why the problem exists.
4. Corrective action must prevent recurrence.
5. Sustainable improvement requires ownership and follow-through.

"Effective problem solving is not about reacting faster to the same issue. It is about understanding the cause deeply enough to prevent recurrence."

Thank You