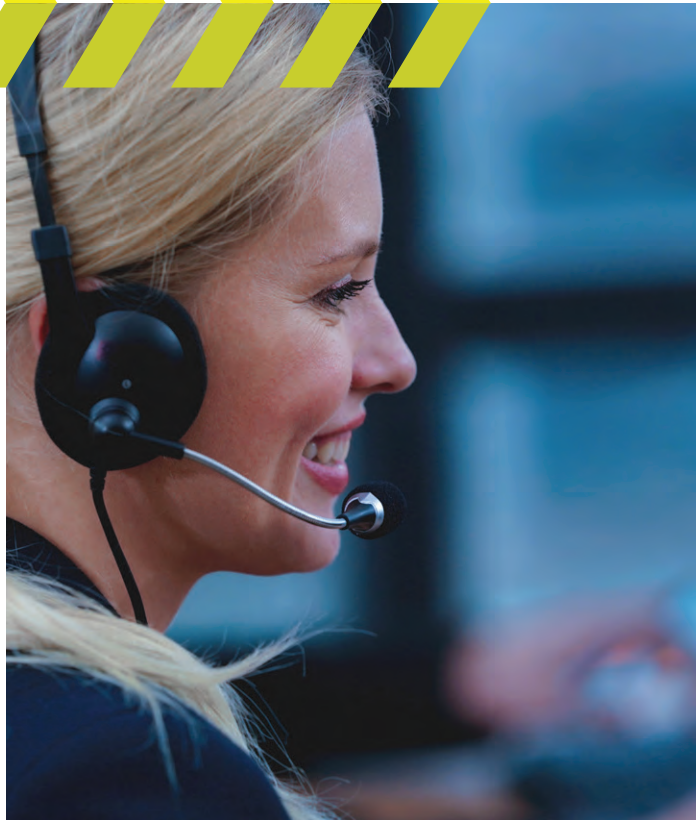


Aptean Respond

Root Cause Analysis: Harnessing Your Untapped Resource

How effective root cause analysis
can transform your business





Taking the time to step back, evaluate and then informatively tackle the root cause is a core part of any quality assurance and customer service improvement programme.

Professional complaint handling involves so much more than resolving the individual complaint. It's vital to use the information you get to avoid the same complaint in the future, addressing any underlying issues to ensure more customers are not affected. Fortunately, your most valuable information is already at your disposal: the very issues your own customers are already complaining about.

Root Cause Analysis

In our fast-paced world, it's all too easy to fall into the trap of immediately troubleshooting and problem-solving the symptoms that present themselves on the surface.

Taking the time to step back, evaluate and then informatively tackle the root cause is a core part of any quality assurance and customer service improvement programme. Root cause analysis helps to understand the source of a problem in a faster, more efficient and cost-effective way. The benefits of robust root cause analysis have far-reaching implications for improving customer satisfaction, building customer loyalty and reducing operating expenses.

Not only does root cause analysis help to reduce operating expenses, it's also a platform for monetization. Effectively tracking and addressing customer complaints prevents similar complaints recurring later down the line. In doing this, not only are you improving customer satisfaction rates, you're able to dedicate your employees' talents and time to other valuable parts of your organisation.

Master the basics

Root cause analysis provides a methodology for identifying and correcting the sources of problems. It differs from troubleshooting and problem-solving in that these disciplines typically seek solutions to specific difficulties, whereas root cause analysis is directed at understanding the wider underlying issues.

It shouldn't be seen as merely a problem-solving method, but rather as a vital component of the executive decision-making process, as well as a good tool to monitor the efficiency, quality and cost-effectiveness of business operations.

Customer complaints and feedback can drive tangible business improvement, which is exactly what regulators want organisations to do when analysing root causes of complaints.

Root Cause Analysis Basics


Symptoms of the Problem Above the Surface (Obvious)

The underlying Cause Below the Surface (Not Obvious)



The 7 Aims of Root Cause Analysis within Complaint Management

1. Meet your regulatory requirements
2. Identify the issues that caused the complaint
3. Establish if there is more than one factor causing the complaint
4. Decide the changes required to prevent the recurrence of complaints
5. Find the fastest, most effective and economical route to resolution
6. Assess the wider impact, find out if other customers have been affected and proactively provide resolutions
7. Provide compliance statements and event descriptions for management as well as regulatory reports



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The 5 Whys

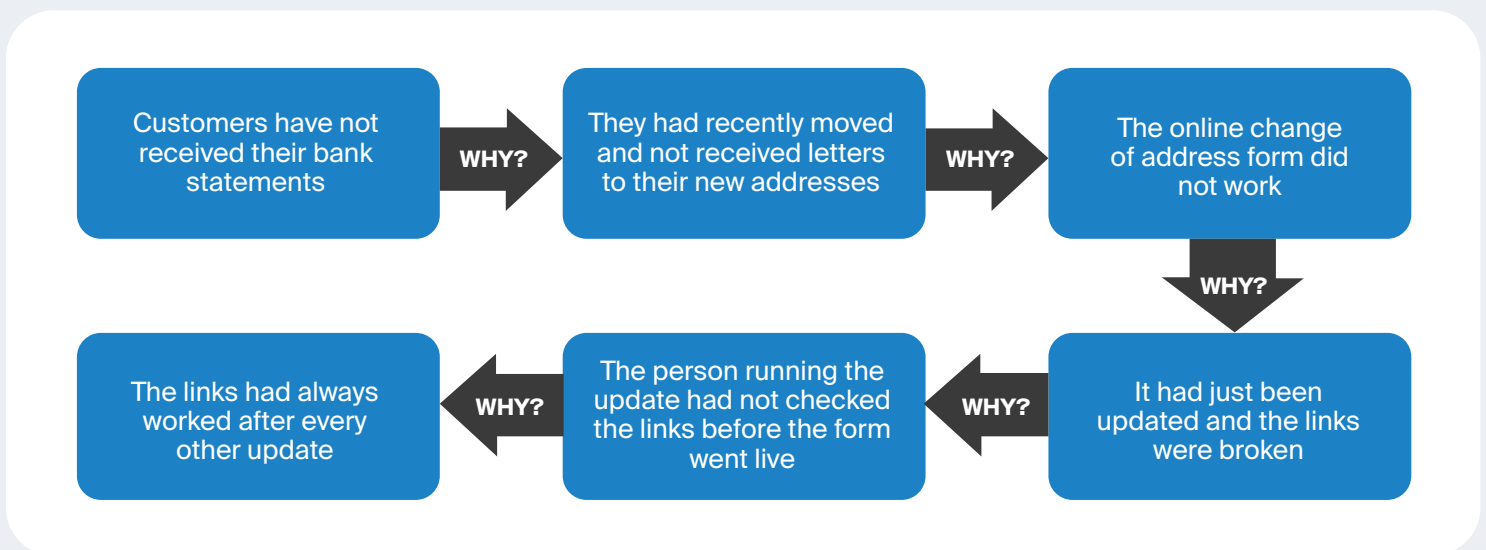
The Five Whys principle developed by Sakichi Toyoda can aid in identifying the root cause of a problem. When a problem does occur, asking “why” five times encourages you to dig deep enough to find the true source of the problem, helping you to develop a solution to prevent the problem from recurring.

As with any tool or technique, it can be misapplied and shouldn’t be automatically applied in every situation. It’s possible to ask a “why” that leads down the wrong path, in fact, there are opportunities to branch into different lines of investigation throughout the process. Sometimes several of these branches can lead to improvements; often, many of the branches lead to something outside of your control.

When using The Five Whys technique, it’s important to assess all the branches of investigation, in particular if you choose a path of investigation that leads you to things that cannot be changed.

Once the relevant investigation has been identified, questions need to be asked to get to the root cause. This process should result in the seven aforementioned aims being met.

As a simple example, we’ll take a complaint of customers not receiving their bank statements



Customers have not received their bank statements WHY? They had recently moved and not received letters to their new addresses WHY? The online change of address form did not work WHY? It had just been updated and the links were broken WHY? The person running the update had not checked the links before the form went live WHY? The links had always worked after every other update.

In this instance, the root cause of the problem was that the links to the online form had not been checked after an update due to an assumption that they would work. By properly identifying the root cause, a change in process can be initiated. For example, maybe a quality check is added to the process or an error message pops up during testing.

The Process of Root Cause Analysis

Before root causes can be investigated and The Five Whys asked, there needs to be a system in place to capture initial information and manage complaints. If details of a complaint are not correctly or efficiently recorded at first point of contact, then any root cause analysis will be unsuccessful.

Equipping front line staff with the necessary technology to quickly and easily capture important information when speaking directly with a customer makes the process of root cause analysis easier further down the line. When it comes to categorising complaints, consistency across the board makes it easier to spot trends across products and services.

A process-driven workflow ensures additional information is consistently captured at the appropriate stage of the case investigation. The end product is a complete picture from which the organisation can make fact-based decisions. With this, you can then follow a structured approach to analysing the information captured, identifying the kind of complaint, implementing corrective action and tracking the progress of new initiatives.

Acting on the Cause

Root cause analysis doesn't end when a root cause has been identified. In the example above, the root cause is that the links on the change of address form had not been properly checked before going live. Corrective procedures must now be put in place, including fixing the link to minimise the effect the error has on customers, and communicating with those who have been affected.

To improve customer loyalty, it's important to communicate whatever changes may occur to customers. Complaint consultancy firm, [Huntswood](#), found that 26% of customers expect an acknowledgment within 24 hours, increasing to 56% within two days. If customers are aware that they are heard and the service has improved from their feedback, they will be even more likely to stay within the company.¹

¹[Huntswood Complaints Outlook 2019](#)



Root cause analysis provides a real-time gauge of customer satisfaction levels. It can pinpoint the relationships between the cause and source of complaints and pre-empt any major issues.

These corrective procedures still aren't enough. In order to ensure the issue doesn't occur again, a process needs to be put in place so that each part of the form is checked before going live.

Once the corrective action has taken place, the process needs to be documented. This is essential to provide compliance statements and create management information to drive improvements across all areas of the organisation. In the example above, the seven aims of root cause analysis mentioned earlier are all pinpointed:

1. Meet your regulatory requirements > Customers are listened to and their concerns are acted upon.
2. Identify the issues that caused the complaint > Customers had not been receiving their bank statements.
3. Establish if there is more than one factor causing the complaint > There was only one issue: the online change of address form.
4. Decide the changes required to prevent the recurrence of complaints > Correct the problem with the links and make sure they are working.
5. Find the fastest, most effective and economical route to resolution > Put in place a process to check each part of the form before going live.
6. Assess the wider impact, find out if other customers have been affected and proactively provide resolutions > Issue a statement encouraging those who have been affected to get in touch and actively provide resolutions.
7. Provide compliance statements and event descriptions for management as well as regulatory reports > Reports are generated to provide evidence of corrective action and drive further improvements.

Additional value

It's often thought that root cause analysis is all about the quality of the report produced. Undoubtedly, having a solution that can produce powerful reports with broad and finite reporting capabilities is a key ingredient, but successful root cause analysis starts much earlier. It begins at the case capture stage and doesn't stop simply because a report has been created.



Reports generated from root cause analysis need to show improvements have been made. Including some useful figures to assist in this explanation doesn't hurt. A report showing the result of the investigation and nothing more will have no impact on future improvements, which is something a customer-focused company should always be actively looking into. [Huntswood](#) discovered that ¾ of customers don't feel as if the organisation was genuinely concerned about the issue. Additionally, 61% of customers were dissatisfied with the empathy of the staff with whom they dealt.²

Executive-level input is needed to drive company-wide change, to continually make improvements that result in higher customer satisfaction and increased retention rates, valuing the customers you already have while avoiding the costly process of constantly needing to win new customers. Being able to provide highly detailed management information showing root cause analysis is one way to catch the attention of decision-makers.

Complying with Regulatory Requirements

For some countries, like UK and Australia, regulators are keen to see consistent and repeatable processes in dealing with complaints and how outcomes are achieved. In addition to the actual outcome, the regulators also require supporting evidence. They want to see that best practice is being identified, followed and carried out with consistent and repeatable processes.

When a complaint has been resolved, it is easy to think "out of sight, out of mind", but the complaint's journey does not simply end at the point it has been recorded. Regulators may require you to collect management information relating to the causes of complaints, and it's crucial to investigate the complaint fully, highlighting any trends or issues in order to stop the snowballing and recurrence of problems.

Improve Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty

Root cause analysis provides a real-time gauge of customer satisfaction levels. It can pinpoint the relationships between the cause and source of complaints and pre-empt any major issues. These issues are then avoided due to the pre-set reporting criteria, alerting management teams to emerging trends and behaviour patterns. The solution to the problem highlights areas where urgent review is required, enabling preventative measures to be put in place and avoiding customer service failures.

A customer who has received a positive response to a complaint will be more loyal than a satisfied customer who has no cause to complain. It is vital to listen to customers, harness their feedback and make positive changes.

²[Huntswood Complaints Outlook 2019](#)



To improve customer loyalty, it's important to communicate whatever changes may occur to customers.

There are clear and tangible benefits for organisations that embrace root cause analysis as a process of continual improvement. Successful root cause analysis isn't the sole responsibility of the analyst but starts at the point where feedback is captured within the company. This ensures that the data captured is comprehensive, accurate and consistent. All areas of the business share the responsibility of ensuring that a quality-driven process collects the data to drive future strategic decisions within the organisation.

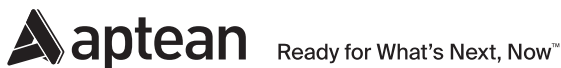
Companies that implement such a strategy, supported by the right technology, will gain valuable insight to drive organisational improvements, resulting in an enhanced service, customer loyalty gains and increased revenues.

Aptean Respond helps many organisations realise the benefits of root cause analysis through supporting the complaints process from start to finish. If you would like to experience these benefits first hand, email us or visit our website.



Is your business ready to take your **complaints process** to the next level?

Contact us today at info@aptean.com or www.aptean.com.



About Aptean

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