

Root Cause Analysis Resource Handout

Purpose

The root cause analysis (RCA) process is a continuous quality improvement strategy designed to help you create sustainable solutions to programmatic challenges. This resource is for use with the animated RCA tool designed to demonstrate how to conduct an RCA for challenges that emerge in your RETAIN program. This handout includes

- Steps and content aligned with the RCA example that is depicted in the animated resource and
- A worksheet with a second RCA example and guiding questions for your RETAIN team to consider as you conduct an RCA.



Root Cause Analysis Scenario 1

STEP 1: Identify what happened

Getting to a solution requires a clearly defined problem. First define the problem and describe what has occurred. Then collect information about it, including the frequency, duration, and its effect on your program. For this step, your RETAIN team should gather information from multiple sources because the different perspectives will provide broader insights about the nature of the problem. To illustrate the RCA, let's consider the following scenario.

Scenario

A RETAIN team is scaling up its program. As part of the program's quality improvement process, the team collects information from satisfaction surveys completed by participants. At the last staff meeting, it was revealed that patient satisfaction ratings have declined during the past 3 months, with more participants indicating they would *not* refer an injured or ill colleague to RETAIN.

To help pinpoint the reasons for the decrease in satisfaction, the team analyzed the survey data and gathered additional data through

- A review of all open-ended responses;
- A review of case management notes to identify strengths and challenges of the programmatic approach;
- Meetings with Return-To-Work (RTW) Coordinators to discuss their experiences; and
- Follow-up with individual participants to learn more about their concerns.

After the information was gathered and reviewed, an overarching theme emerged:

Inconsistent case management. More specifically, as the program expanded during the past 3 months, RTW Coordinators were not engaging with participants in a meaningful way. As a result, recent enrollees do not see the benefits of participating in the program.

Contributing factors

The team determined several key factors that contributed to this problem:

1. Sporadic contact between RTW Coordinators and participants,
2. Participants who worked with at least two RTW Coordinators during their time with RETAIN felt as if they were “starting over” each time they transitioned to a new coordinator,
3. High staff turnover, and
4. A significant increase in referrals as a result of high interest in RETAIN.

Now that the team has a clear understanding of the problem, it moves on to Step 2.

STEP 2: Determine and specify what should have happened

This step involves identifying or describing what should have happened under ideal circumstances. It may be helpful to create a flowchart that displays the ideal process and related steps. You can make notes on the flowchart to indicate where deviations occur.

For this step, the team reviewed its case management protocol and compared it to what actually happened when participants enrolled in RETAIN.

Case Management Protocol				
A new RTW Coordinator is assigned to a Lead RTW Coordinator. The Lead RTW Coordinator serves as a coach and supports the new RTW Coordinator through his or her first few cases.	As RTW Coordinators are fully trained on RETAIN, their caseloads expand gradually. RTW Coordinators with longer tenure will generally have more cases than new RTW Coordinators, but RTW Coordinators are not expected to have more than 25 cases at a time.	The RTW Coordinator is expected to <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Meet with the participant within 1 week of enrollment to develop an RTW plan and 2. Follow up weekly or biweekly, depending on the nature of the injury or illness and on the specifics of the plan. 	RTW Coordinators are expected to respond to participants' questions and concerns within 48 business hours.	RTW Coordinators work with the same participant for the duration of his or her enrollment in RETAIN.

Again, these are the actions that ideally should have taken place.

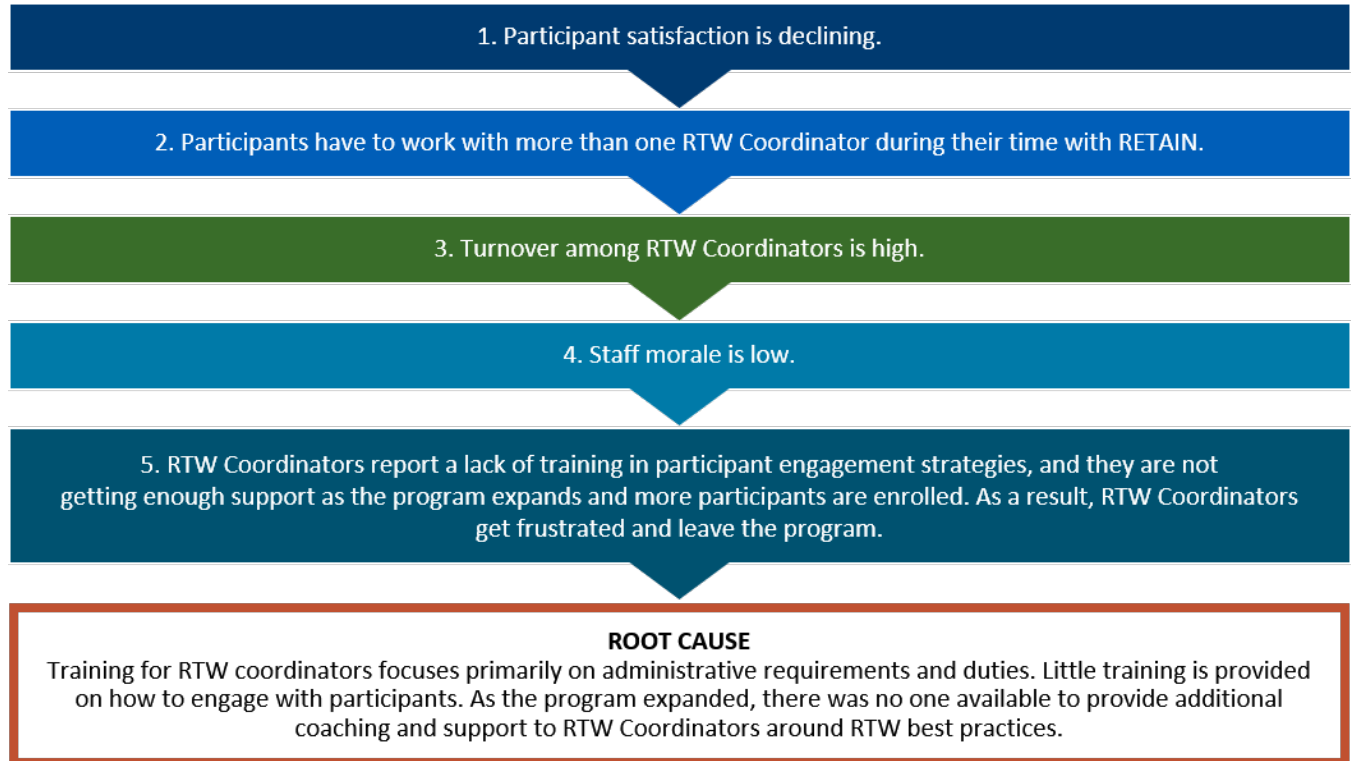
Based on the data gathered by the team, it was clear that these processes were not occurring systematically. **The team now knows that participant satisfaction with RETAIN is declining because the case management protocol is not being implemented as planned. This brings us to Step 3.**

STEP 3: Determine the causes—The 5 Whys technique

In this step, we will apply the 5 Whys technique to better understand deviations in the case management protocol. Let's take a closer look.

Why is this happening? For the first why, we can start with one of the contributing factors identified in Step 2: several new participants had to work with two different coordinators during their time in RETAIN. These participants felt as if they were “starting over” each time they transitioned to a new coordinator.

5 Whys Technique: Example #1



Solutions:

- *Expand the training modules for RTW Coordinators to include best practices for engaging with injured or ill workers.*
- *Identify Lead RTW Coordinators for each demographic area. This person would directly support and mentor new RTW Coordinators and respond to questions and issues that arise.*
- *By working closely with new RTW Coordinators, Lead RTW Coordinators would be aware of the strengths and areas of expertise of the RTW Coordinators and could assign cases accordingly.*

5 Whys Technique: Example #2

Let's try another example. Again, we start with the initial problem, which is that participant satisfaction is declining because of inconsistent case management.

1. Participant satisfaction is declining.

2. RTW Coordinators engage with participants sporadically and do not follow case management protocols.

3. RTW Coordinators do not have enough time to meet with participants in the manner outlined in the case management protocol.

4. The expansion of the program has resulted in increased referrals, and RTW coordinators spend a significant amount of time on the intake and enrollment process with new participants, leaving limited time to engage with existing participants.

5. One person is not responsible for the overall administrative tasks needed for the intake and enrollment process. These tasks fall on the RTW Coordinators in addition to their participant engagement responsibilities.

ROOT CAUSE

The number of staff is insufficient. The team was unaware of the staffing need because enrollment numbers were manageable during the pilot. RTW Coordinators could handle intake and enrollment responsibilities, as well as their other duties, during the pilot.

Solutions:

- Create a Lead RTW Coordinator position for each demographic area.
- In addition to coaching, mentoring, and supporting new RTW Coordinators, Lead RTW Coordinators should have a lower participant caseload so that they could also manage the intake and enrollment process.

Summary

The RCA process is a continuous quality improvement strategy designed to help you create sustainable solutions to programmatic challenges. By conducting an RCA, you can avoid such key pitfalls as

1. Making decisions based on opinions instead of facts,
2. Immediately jumping to a solution without clearly understanding the problem, and
3. Addressing the wrong issue or symptom of the problem instead of the underlying cause.

You can repeat the 5 Whys technique as many times as needed to determine whether any other solutions are viable to address the problem. Although the examples use "5" Whys to get to the root cause, this is just a

general guideline for the RCA process. In some cases, you might arrive at the root cause in fewer than five steps, or you may need a few additional “whys” to get to the root of the problem.

In addition, as the example demonstrates, a single problem can have multiple reasons and multiple solutions. Therefore, your team might have to apply the 5 Whys technique to the same problem several times to identify the different factors contributing to the problem and the range of possible solutions. Your team can then review this information to determine which solutions will have the greatest impact or are the most feasible for your RETAIN program.

Finally, the RCA process should be part of your ongoing continuous quality improvement strategy. After a solution is implemented, your team should reassess the situation to determine whether the desired outcomes were achieved or whether further actions are needed.

Root Cause Analysis Worksheet

This worksheet depicts a fictional scenario to help you apply RCA in your RETAIN program. The questions in this handout may also be used with stakeholders and partners as a tool to identify and create solutions to programmatic challenges.

As you work through the RCA process, consider these questions in relation to your RETAIN program:

1. What sequence of events may lead to the problem?
2. What are the conditions under which the problem occurs?
3. How does breaking the problem into smaller detailed parts help you to better understand the picture?
4. How might a cause-and-effect diagram (e.g., fishbone) help you?
5. How do you see the RCA process being beneficial to your RETAIN program?

Scenario

AnyState, USA provides services to only 50% of its targeted number of participants. Pat, the Program Director, is trying to figure out why so few injured and ill workers are enrolling for services in the program. RETAIN AnyState is designed to have participants primarily enrolled by health care providers and employers.

Pat decides to do an RCA to identify the underlying reasons why enrollment numbers are low. As part of this analysis, Pat includes a perspectives from a variety of stakeholders, including staff members and program partners.

What challenges have you identified in your RETAIN program that may benefit from an RCA or similar process?

STEP 1: Identify what happened

To help understand why the team has achieved only 50% of its enrollment goal, Pat and the team analyze the enrollment data by running a report from the program's database. The data reveal that **nearly half of the existing health care providers have not referred any participants.**

What sources have you used to gather information about the problem you identified?

What challenges have you had gathering data?

What stakeholder groups need to be involved to help you identify the problem?

What additional data sources, if any, will help you to identify the problem?

Contributing factors

The team determines several factors that are contributing to the low enrollment numbers:

1. The Health Care Recruitment Specialist is having difficulty setting appointments with health care providers.
2. The Health Care Recruitment Specialist is also having trouble following up and building stronger relationships with existing health care providers in the area because she is focusing on recruiting new health care providers to reach the program goal.
3. Existing health care providers have noted the following challenges: (a) a lack of clarity about the referral process, (b) forgetting that RETAIN is available as an option, (c) running out of outreach materials to give to potential participants, and (d) in some cases, not hearing back from RETAIN after referring a patient to the program.

What factors are contributing to the problem with your RETAIN program?

STEP 2: Determine and specify what should have happened

By this quarter, RETAIN AnyState should have recruited and trained 25 health care providers. The following chart reflects how the process should have occurred.

Stakeholder Recruitment Protocol					
Conduct an environmental scan of the community's health care providers	Implement a RETAIN AnyState awareness campaign	Reach out to individual health care providers via email, phone, or walk-in	Train recruited health care providers in (a) the best practices of stay at work/RTW polices and (b) how to make referrals	Receive referrals	Ensure the Health Care Recruitment Specialist follows up with health care providers on a monthly basis to (a) address questions or concerns and (b) give program updates

What is your ideal situation? What does it look like if practices or processes are done as intended or expected?

Create a flowchart or table that displays the ideal situation and related steps.

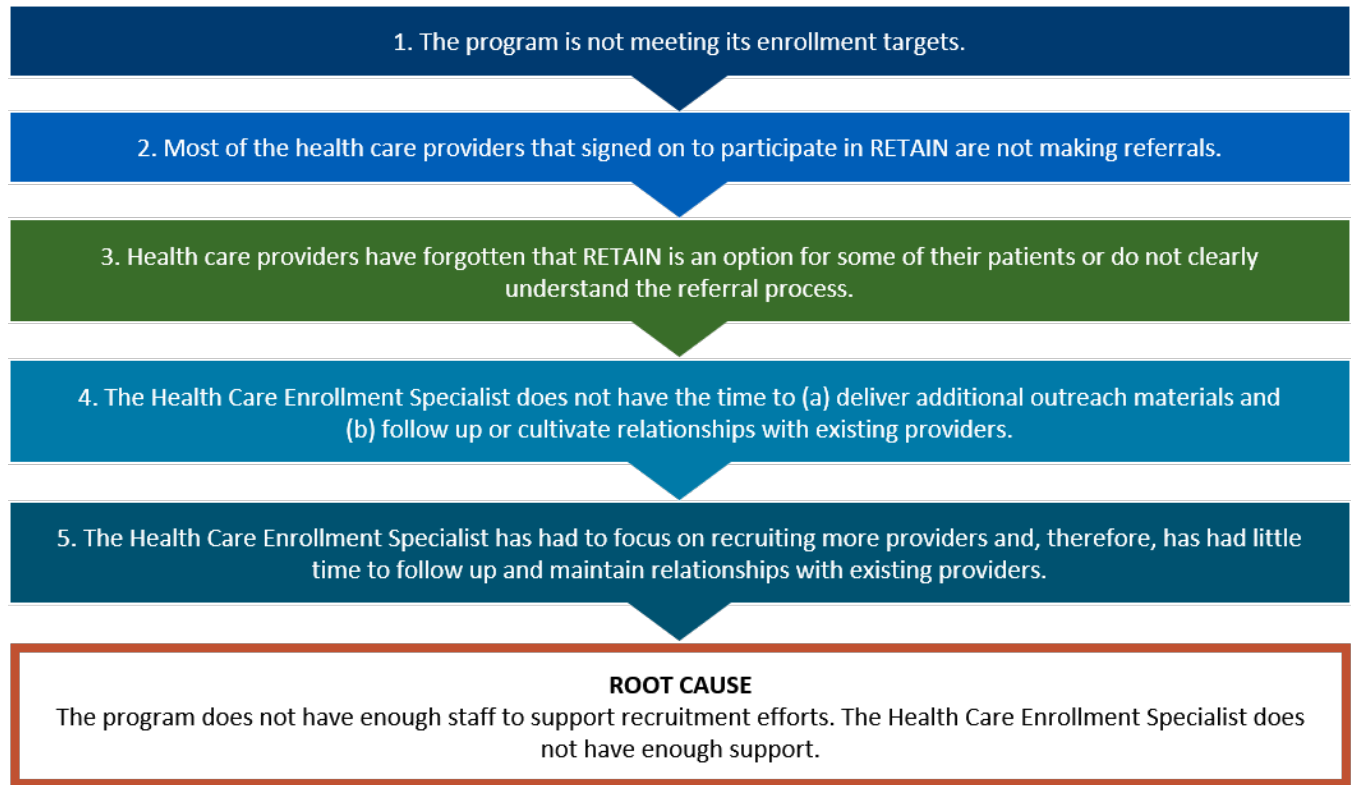
Protocol				

How have you communicated to staff and relevant stakeholders what the ideal situation looks like?

How will you determine if the ideal situation is occurring?

STEP 3: Determine the causes—The 5 Whys technique

For this step, Pat and the team apply the 5 Whys technique to better understand why they are not receiving an adequate number of referrals.



- Solutions:**
- Hire a second Health Care Recruitment Specialist to ease the workload of the existing one.
 - Identify a health care provider partner who can serve as a RETAIN AnyState, USA champion and cultivate relationships with other providers.

Now, use the 5 Whys technique to determine the root cause. Reviewing the sequence of events, assessing the environmental conditions, and drilling down to detailed processes can help you identify the root cause.

Challenges:

Why 1:

Why 2:

Why 3:

Why 4:

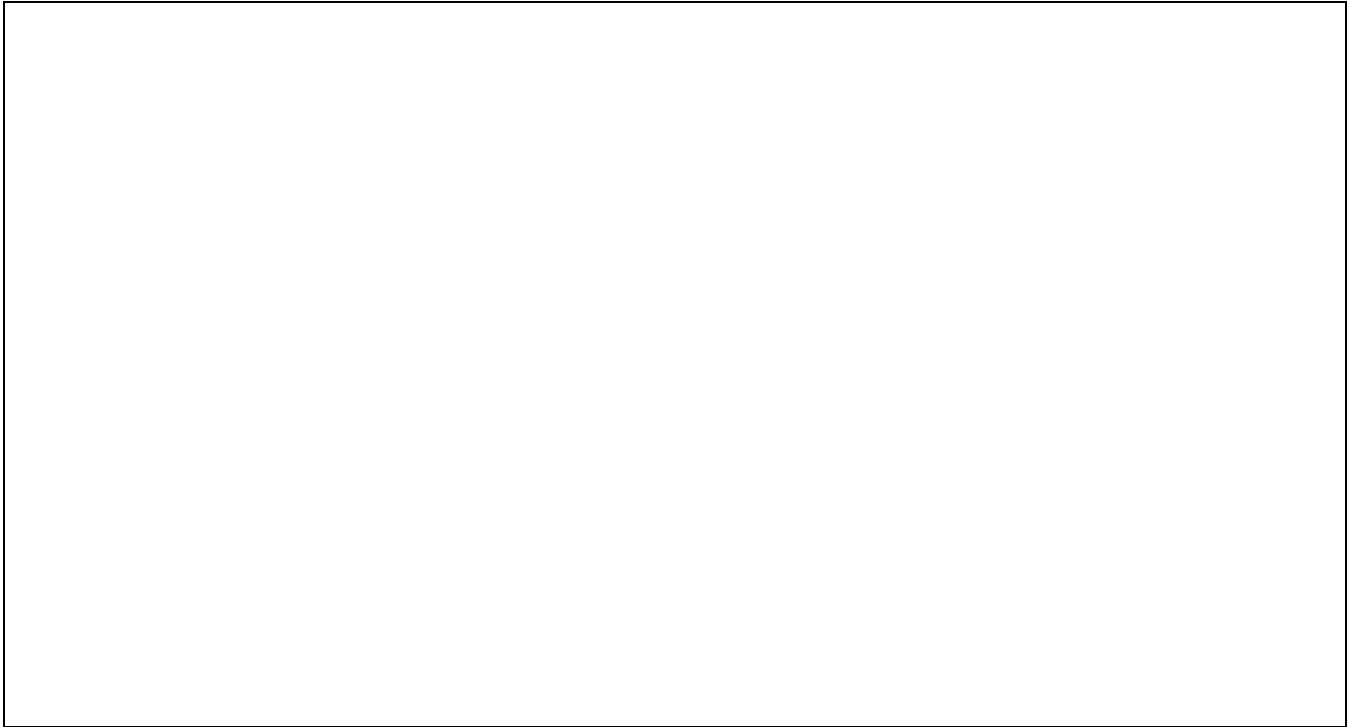
Why 5:

Identify Potential Solutions

After the RETAIN team identified the root cause of its enrollment challenges, the team brainstormed solutions, for example:

- Revise existing outreach materials for health care providers so that there is clear messaging about how to refer patients to RETAIN and how the program improves the health outcomes of patients;
- Attend monthly meetings with health care providers to deliver outreach materials and to remind them about RETAIN services;
- Hire a second Health Care Enrollment Specialist to ease the workload of the existing one;
- Identify health care provider partners to serve as champions of RETAIN AnyState and ask champions to introduce RETAIN AnyState to medical directors of rehabilitation hospitals; and
- Establish a continuous quality improvement strategy to evaluate recruitment processes.

What are possible solutions to the root cause identified by your team?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their solutions to the root cause identified by their team.

For additional examples of how to carry out an RCA, see the *“Continuing Quality Improvement Strategies: RETAIN Resource,”* which is posted on the RETAIN online community (the ROC). If you would like more information about RCA or other continuous quality improvement strategies, or if you have any questions, please contact your RETAIN Technical Assistance liaison.