MODULE OVERVIEW

Team problem solving: Find the cause before the fix

Adaptive module | ~20 min

A well-defined problem is half solved, yet the classic trap is to rush to solutions before stating the problem in one factual, shared sentence. This module structures team problem solving in six steps, with four proven tools (Toyota's Five Whys, the Ishikawa diagram, A3 Thinking, and the After-Action Review) and three clear roles, from the manager as facilitator to the sponsor who keeps the solution from fading.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

01 State a problem in one factual, shared sentence, without confusing it with its symptom.

02 Work back to root causes with the Five Whys and the Ishikawa diagram.

03 Generate many options, then choose an immediate solution and a long-term solution, backed by an action plan.

04 Track progress with the After-Action Review and fill three roles: facilitator, jointly responsible team, and sponsor.

WHO IT'S FOR

Managers and teams who want to solve recurring problems, with the people who face them every day.

- **Prerequisite:** none

HOW THE MODULE WORKS

Self-paced, with practice tailored to each learner.

1 **Self-assessment**: on 9 dimensions, to gauge current habits and guide the practice.

2 **Expert video**: 10 minutes, with 3 pauses for reflection.

3 **Practice scenarios**: the first 2 chosen from the self-assessment, then 16 optional ones. Every answer gets feedback: what it leads to, and one way to improve.

4 **Dated commitment**: one action to try, written by the learner or picked from the suggestions.

5 **Memo to download**: key takeaways, questions, commitment, personal notes and checklists.

ASSESSMENT AND COMPLETION

Pass mark: 80%

The score takes into account your answers to the practice scenarios, your commitment and, where relevant, any additional learning activities. Passing requires a commitment and a score of at least 80%.

METHODS & MODELS

- The Five Whys – Sakichi Toyoda (founder of Toyota), later popularized by Taiichi Ohno
- Team problem solving in 6 steps – Afthonios method, based on recognized frameworks
- Ishikawa diagram / fishbone diagram / 6Ms – Kaoru Ishikawa
- After-Action Review – US Army

SOURCES & REFERENCES

- Tannenbaum & Cerasoli, meta-analysis, Human Factors (2013) – 31 studies: debriefing improves performance by about 25% compared with a control group
- Sakichi Toyoda (founder of Toyota) – credited with the "Five Whys" technique, popularized by Taiichi Ohno (Toyota Production System)
- After-Action Review (AAR) – popularized by the US Army, now widely adopted in business
- A3 Thinking and the Ishikawa diagram (fishbone, 6Ms) – recognized tools of Japanese Lean and quality management

Module created by Afthonios.com.

Content reviewed on 27 October 2026