

# Business Case Approach information sheet

November 2023

## The '5 whys'



For more information about the Business Case Approach, see the guidance on our website: [Business Case Approach guidance](#)

Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's Business Case Approach (BCA) requires business case developers to seek the root cause of the problem, rather than just addressing the symptoms.

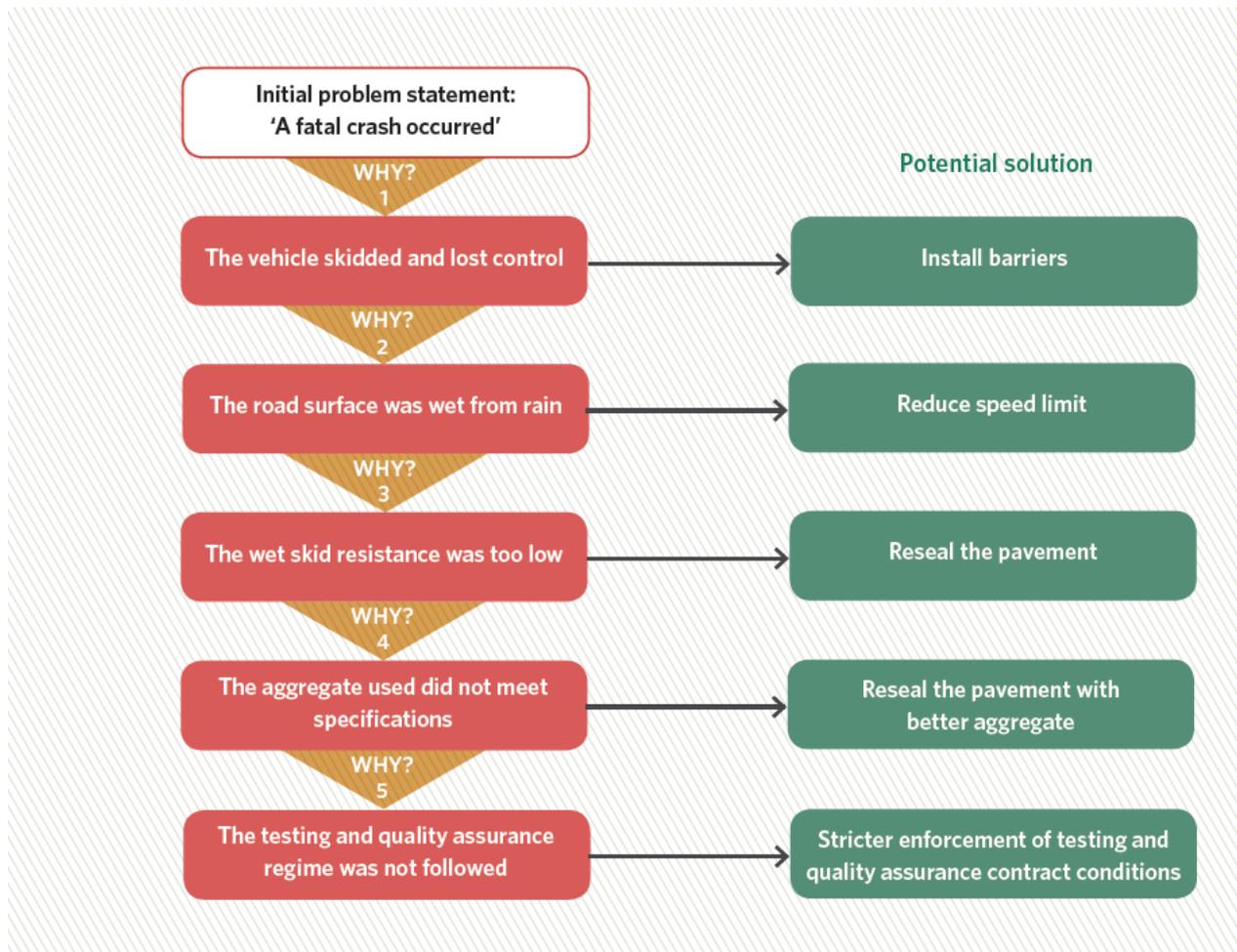
The '5 whys' is one technique you can use to help find the root cause of a problem and define the benefits of addressing it. This deceptively simple, but powerful, technique basically consists of asking the question 'Why?' multiple times, until a root cause can be identified.

Often five iterations are needed before a process level cause is identified, hence the title. However, it is a guide, not an absolute, and in some cases there may be as few as three or as many as seven iterations required to get past obvious symptoms and reveal underlying causes of problems.

The example on the next page shows how the 5 whys technique could look applied to the initial problem of a fatal vehicle crash.

This information sheet supports the online guidance on problem and benefit definition. For more detail, see: [Defining problems and benefits](#).

## Example of the 5 whys



In the example above, if only the more superficial solutions are followed, the initial problem is likely to happen again – another crash. The problem is only truly solved when the final ‘why’ is addressed.

Notice also, however, that even if contract conditions are more strictly enforced, the pavement will still need to be resealed with better aggregate. Even if the underlying cause is addressed, there may still be a need to address the symptoms that have already occurred.

## Further information

For more information about the 5 whys and root cause analysis, read [BCA Practice Notes 3: Root cause analysis in business case development](#).