IMPROVEMENT ESSENTIALS

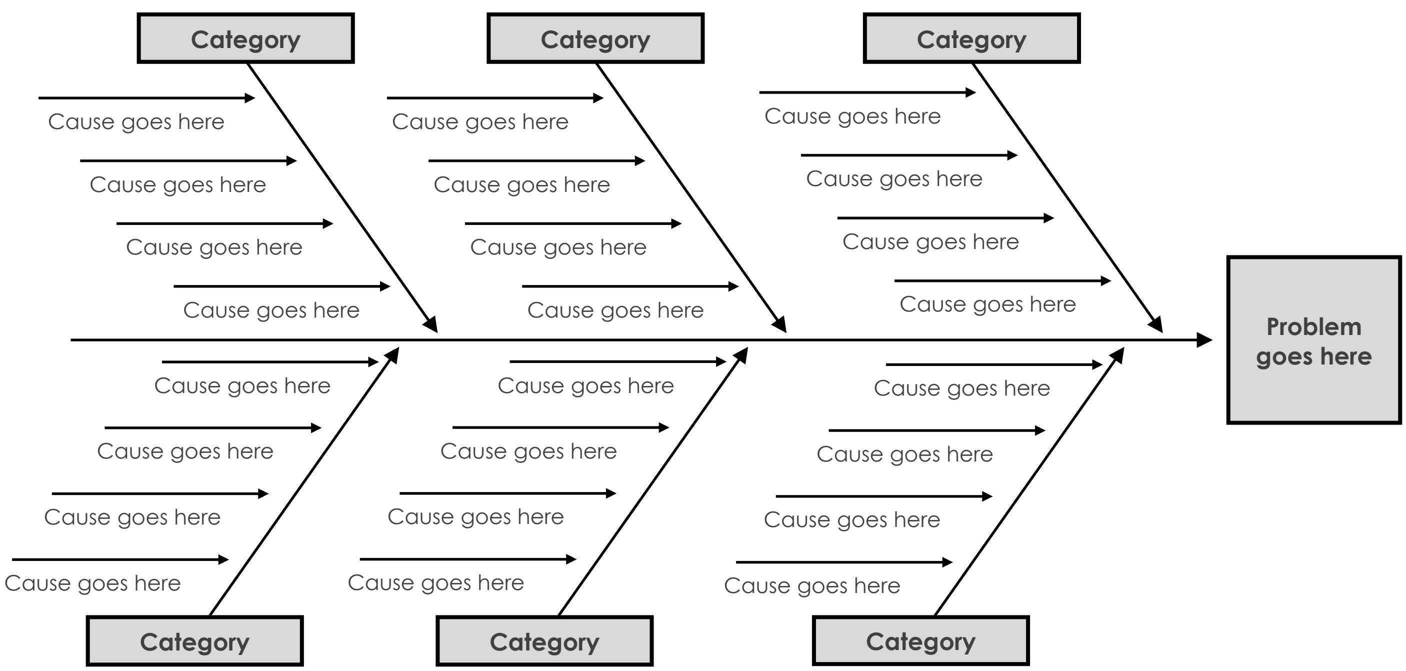
Fishbone Diagram

Fishbone diagram is a tool to organize ideas and theories about what causes a problem or event. Teams work together to brainstorm and identify potential causes and group them into several categories to help highlight potential issues. Frequently used categories include people (or patients/providers/stakeholders), culture, method (or process), technology, equipment, supplies, etc. (customize categories as needed).

FOUR STEPS TO FISHBONE

On a piece of paper, whiteboard or charting program (like PowerPoint or Lucidchart), work as a team to follow the "Four Steps To Fishbone" below.

STEP 1	**Write down the problem you are trying to solve.**
STEP 2	**Identify as many categories (or contributing factors) to the problem you can.** Start with 4-6 main categories and expand as needed.
STEP 3	**Brainstorm possible causes of the problem** and place them under the categories where they fit best.
STEP 4	**Prioritize what causes you should address first.** Select 1-3 causes that will have the highest likelihood to solve the problem by considering feasibility (cost, support, timeframe, etc.) and likelihood to succeed.



Three Tips for Facilitating a Fishbone

A successful fishbone diagram is led by a facilitator—one individual on the team whose job is to remain impartial to the discussion, write down the identified causes on the fishbone diagram, and let the participant discussion flow freely.

Here are the top three tips for leading a successful fishbone:

#1: Help the team focus on identifying causes, not solutions.

It's common for people to brainstorm solutions (how to fix), rather than causes (what to fix). Simply acknowledge any comments by writing them to the side (don't disregard any comments, it's demoralizing) and help everyone remember the difference between the two. For example, if the problem is delays at patient check-in, "add front desk personnel" offers a solution (how to fix). Whereas "front desk is short-staffed" focuses on a potential cause (what to fix).

#2: The cause is more important than the category.

People often get confused or stuck on what category a cause should go into. As a facilitator, remind the participants that listing the cause is more important than where it goes. For example, "front desk is short-staffed" could be placed under the category of People, but also Culture.

Sometimes a main category can become too big. A common one is to start with the "People" category, but by the time 10 causes are identified under that category, you may choose to split it, for example as: "Nurses" and "Doctors."

#3: Keep brainstorming until the ideas run out.

People are often unsure of how many causes to identify. As long as the discussion keeps going, people are still brainstorming. When the silence starts to creep in, you have a clue that perhaps you have enough to get started.

As facilitator, you will write the statements as they come out during the discussion. If you have to paraphrase what was said (because of space requirements, complexity, etc.) confirm with the group that what you wrote was what was said.

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