From symptom to cause

Find the cause when your training isn't working as hoped

Start from a training problem that relates to you and check it against the seven principles. That way, you tackle the root of the problem instead of treating symptoms.

S M A R T E R

Overview

Who it's for	Goal	Time	Format
Facilitators and learning designers who notice that a training works less well than hoped, because of what happens during the session or how it was designed.	Find out what is getting in the way of learning, in the session or in the design, and tackle it in a targeted way.	30–45 min	Individually or as a team.

In short

A group that goes quiet after the break. Participants who switch off during a long explanation. An exercise that keeps getting bogged down in discussion. An e-learning that participants click through without anything sticking. We often respond with more slides or an extra exercise. But nothing changes.

In this activity, you choose a scenario card or describe your own problem. You check it against the seven principles, look for where the cause lies and choose an approach that gets to the root of it.

Prerequisite

You already know the seven principles. Not yet? Then start with activity 05.

What you need

- 1 SMARTER deck, including the scenario cards (see steps 1 and 3)
- Sticky notes and a marker (see step 2)
- Optional: a smartphone to scan the QR code on the scenario card (see step 5)
- Optional: the "From symptom to cause" worksheet [DOWNLOAD LINK], handy if you're working on your own (see steps 1 to 4)

How it works

1 Choose your scenario

Choose a scenario card you recognise from your own practice. Or describe your own scenario in three sentences: what happens, with whom and at what point in the training?

Tip

Describe behaviour, not a judgement. Not "participants are unmotivated", but "after lunch, half the group stops taking part in the discussion".

2 Symptom or cause?

First note what you see happening: those are the symptoms. Then use the 5 Whys technique: keep asking "Why is this happening?" until you get to the root. Write each answer on a sticky note.

Tip

Ask your participants. They often see a cause that you, as designer or facilitator, overlook.

3 Check the seven principles

Lay out the letter cards in a row so they spell the word SMARTER, with the WHAT card under each letter. For each principle, ask yourself: could a cause lie here? Place your sticky notes next to the principle they fit best.

Working as a team? Give each team member one or two principles and let them argue why the cause could lie there.

Watch out

A problem rarely has just one cause. Sticky notes next to three principles? Choose the principle you have the most influence on.

4 Look for solutions

For the one or two principles with the strongest cause, take out the HOW cards. Which application tackles the root, not just the symptom? Choose one and make it concrete: what will you do, when and with whom?

5 Compare with the expert optional

Stuck? Scan the QR code on the scenario card for the expert's suggestions. Where do you agree? What did you overlook? Add to your approach where needed.

Think first, then scan

If you read the answer straight away, you stop thinking for yourself. Only scan after your own analysis, or when you're really stuck.

Follow-up and next steps

- Try out your approach in the next session and see whether the behaviour you described in step 1 changes.
- Nothing changes? Go back to step 3 and look into the principle with the second strongest cause.
- Keep track of your own scenarios. After a while, you'll have a collection that fits your organisation perfectly.

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