# Cause and Effect (Fishbone) Diagram

## What is the Cause and Effect Diagram, and how can it help you?

This diagnostic tool identifies, sorts, and graphically displays all the possible causes of a problem or outcome. Also known as the *Fishbone Diagram*, this tool can help you, together with team members or stakeholders, understand the root causes and relationships between factors affecting a complex problem.

## A Cause and Effect Diagram:

- Explores the primary and secondary root causes of a complex problem
- Shows how different causes are inter-related
- Sparks conversation and builds shared understanding and agreement about the causes of a problem
- Supports quality and systems improvement and integration activities
- Helps develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills

## How to use this tool? *(refer to worksheet on page 3)*

- **Box 1:** State the **main problem** that you and your team wish to solve or improve. In Box 1, record the problem, or outcome, representing the "head" of the fish.
- **Box 2:** Discuss the **potential primary causes of the problem**. Some typical categories of primary causes are People, Processes, Policies/ Environment, Technology/Materials, and Systems. As a team, identify the categories, or primary causes of your problem. In Box 2, record each primary cause, representing the "spines" of the fish.

**KEY**

**1:** Main problem

**2:** Primary root cause

**3** Secondary root cause

**4** Sub-cause of secondary root cause

- **Line 3:** As a team, brainstorm and further discuss each of the primary causes related to the problem. Record these further elaborated causes of the problem, or **secondary causes**, on Line 3 under each primary cause; these are the "bones" of the fish.
- **Line 4:** Continue to explore these secondary causes by asking "Why?" until you have identified a cause that is specific enough to test a change and measure its effect. Record any **additional causes** of the problem on Line 4 under the corresponding secondary cause.
- The output of this tool is a visual representation of the potential root causes affecting your complex problem.
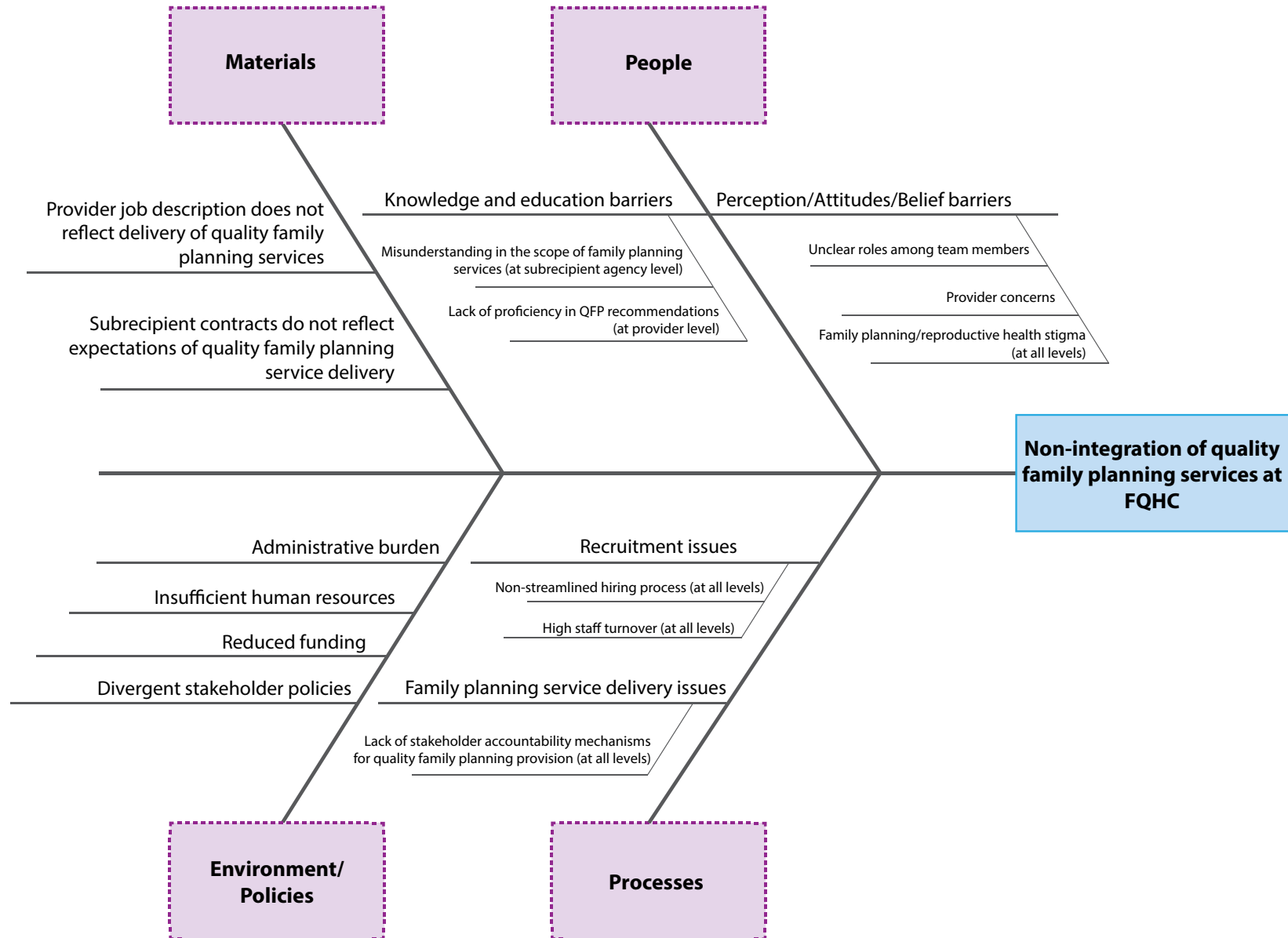
## What are the next steps?

- After identifying all the potential root causes of the problem, reflect on the overall diagram.
- Share how your understanding of the main problem may have changed by completing the *Fishbone Diagram*.
- Identify solutions that address the root causes. Additional tools, such as the *Agreement and Certainty Matrix* or *Huddle Board*, can be used in conjunction with this diagram to better understand the problems identified or to prioritize and implement solutions for addressing the root causes.
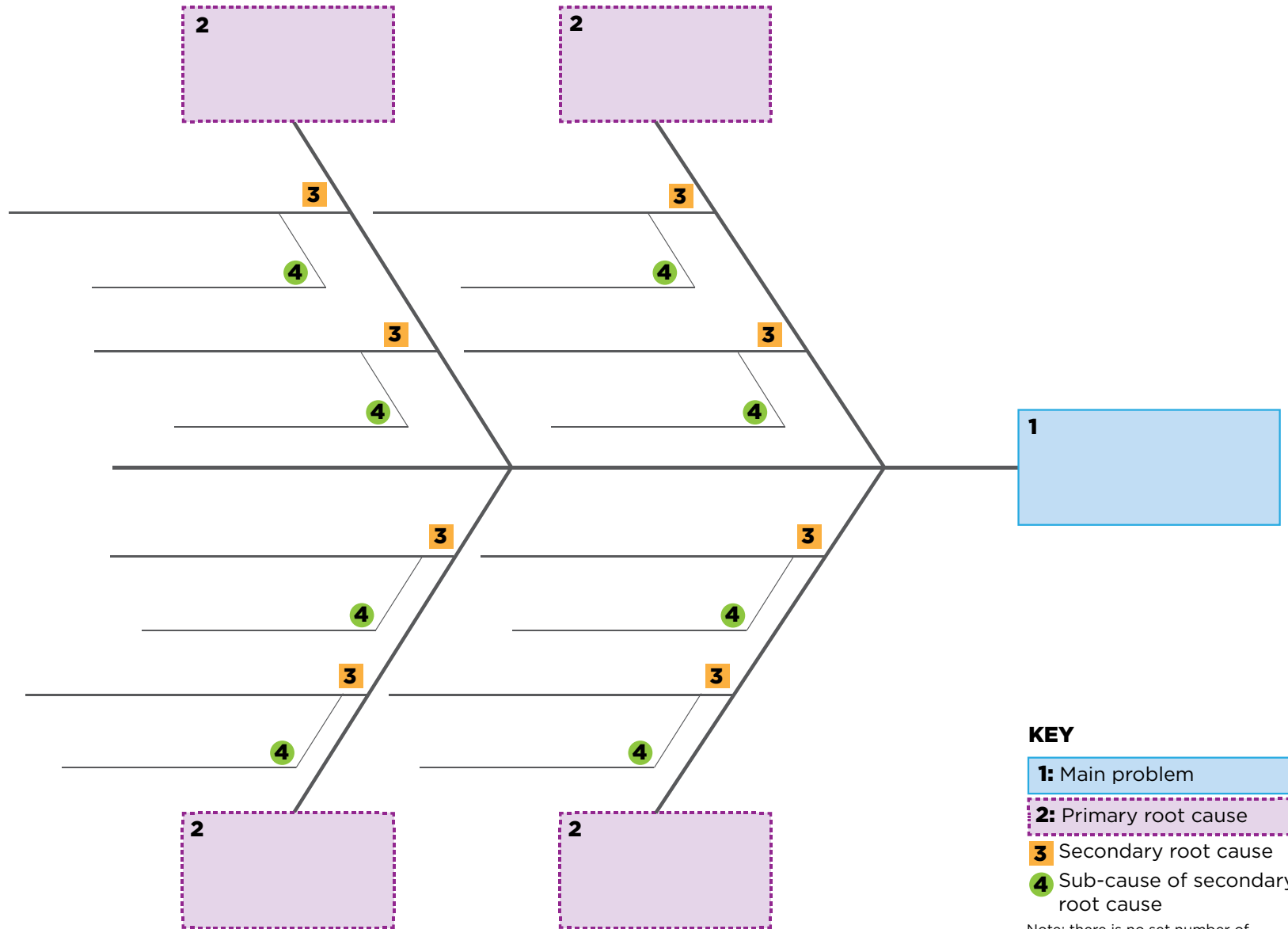
FPNTC
FAMILY PLANNING
NATIONAL TRAINING CENTER

# Cause and Effect Diagram Example

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**Materials**

**People**

Provider job description does not reflect delivery of quality family planning services

Subrecipient contracts do not reflect expectations of quality family planning service delivery

Knowledge and education barriers

Misunderstanding in the scope of family planning services (at subrecipient agency level)

Lack of proficiency in QFP recommendations (at provider level)

Perception/Attitudes/Belief barriers

Unclear roles among team members

Provider concerns

Family planning/reproductive health stigma (at all levels)

**Non-integration of quality family planning services at FQHC**

Administrative burden

Insufficient human resources

Reduced funding

Divergent stakeholder policies

Recruitment issues

Non-streamlined hiring process (at all levels)

High staff turnover (at all levels)

Family planning service delivery issues

Lack of stakeholder accountability mechanisms for quality family planning provision (at all levels)

**Environment/ Policies**

**Processes**

# Cause and Effect Diagram Worksheet

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Note: there is no set number of primary and secondary root causes that should be identified. Please adjust to meet your needs.