

Tree Diagram/Structure Diagram

What it is:

A tree diagram/structure diagram is a graphical representation of the separation of broad, general information into increasing levels of detail. The tool ensures that action plans remain visibly linked to overall goals, that actions flow logically from identified goals, and that the true level of a project's complexity will be fully understood.

When to use it:

In the quality planning process, the diagram begins with a generalized goal (the tree trunk) and then identifies progressively finer levels of actions (the branches) needed to accomplish the goal. As part of process improvement, it can be used to help identify root causes of trouble. The tool is especially useful both in designing new products/services or for creating an implementation plan to remedy identified process problems. For the diagram to accurately reflect the project, however, it is essential that the team using it have detailed understanding of the tasks required.

How to use it:

Identify the goal statement or primary objective. This should be a clear, action-oriented statement to which the entire team agrees. Such statements may come from the root cause/driver identified in an interrelationship digraph or from the headings of an affinity diagram. Write this goal on the extreme left of the chart.

Subdivide the goal statement into major secondary categories. These branches should represent goals, activities, or events that directly lead to the primary objective or that are directly required to achieve the overall goal. The team should continually ask, "What is required to meet this condition?", "What happens next?", and "What needs to be addressed?" Write the secondary categories to the right of the goal statement. Using sticky notes at this stage makes later changes easier to accomplish.

Break each major heading into greater detail. As you move from left to right in the tree, tasks and activities should become more and more specific. Stop the breakdown of each level when there are assignable tasks. If the team does not have enough knowledge to continue at some point, identify the individuals who can supply the information and continue the breakdown later with those individuals present.

Review the diagram for logic and completeness. Make sure that each subheading and path has a direct cause-and-effect relationship with the one before. Examine the paths to ensure that no obvious steps have been left out. Also ensure that the completion of listed actions will indeed lead to the anticipated results.

Tree Diagram/Structure Diagram Example

