

## WORKING MATERIAL 3.11 · CHAPTER 3 — THE INTERNAL AUDITOR'S LENS

# Root Cause Analysis Beyond the First Answer

Source: Francesco Dore, *The Helm and the Lens*, Volume 1b — ISO 14001:2026, subchapter 3.11

## GUIDING QUESTION

*You established why it happened. Have you established why nobody noticed for eleven months?*

## 1 · Verification Pact

*Copied from the book. The third column is for your property: what holds here, and how you know.*

| Market claim                                                       | What actually holds                                                                                                                   | In our property |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| "The standard requires a five whys analysis."                      | No method is prescribed; the requirement is that causes be determined, by whatever means does so.                                     |                 |
| "Every nonconformity has one root cause."                          | The requirement refers to causes in the plural and does not assume a single origin.                                                   |                 |
| "Root cause analysis is only required for major nonconformities."  | The obligation attaches to nonconformity; grading is the organisation's own scheme and does not modify the requirement.               |                 |
| "Human error is an acceptable root cause if training is provided." | Nothing endorses it; the test the requirement implies is whether the action eliminates the cause so the nonconformity does not recur. |                 |
| "Corrective action is complete once the action is implemented."    | The requirement explicitly includes reviewing the effectiveness of any corrective action taken.                                       |                 |

## 2 · Common mistakes — a self-check

*Tick each mistake you recognise in your own property. The consequence is the book's.*

- ☐ **Accepting a person as the cause** — Retraining as the correction, and the same finding next year with a new name.
- ☐ **Analysing occurrence and not detection** — Ever better ways of doing the task, and no way of knowing whether it was done.
- ☐ **Assuming a single root cause** — The analysis stops at the first plausible branch and the others go unexamined.
- ☐ **Extending the chain past the organisation's control** — A correct diagnosis nobody can act on, and a finding that sits open.
- ☐ **Skipping the where else question** — One instance corrected while the same weakness operates elsewhere unexamined.
- ☐ **Treating implementation as completion** — No review of effectiveness, so recurrence is discovered by the next audit rather than by the property.
- ☐ **Relying on a control whose only output is an alert** — Silent failure is indistinguishable from success for as long as it lasts.

### 3 · What an auditor would ask to see

*Questions drawn from the subchapter's reading of the standard and its practical application. They are questions to test your own evidence, not additional requirements.*

| Question                                                                                                                 | Where the evidence lives  | Seen? |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------|
| Which causes were determined for each nonconformity, and was more than one considered where several conditions combined? | Corrective action records |       |
| Does the analysis explain why the failure went undetected, as well as why it occurred?                                   | Cause analysis records    |       |
| Was it determined whether the same weakness exists elsewhere in the property, and what was found?                        | Corrective action records |       |
| Is each cause something the property can change, rather than a person or an industry-wide condition?                     | Cause analysis records    |       |
| Where the reach question revealed a larger problem, was it raised as a separate finding with its own owner?              | Finding log               |       |

### 4 · From the Operative Synthesis to action

*Concrete actions taken from the subchapter's Operative Synthesis. Fill in the owner and the date in your property.*

| Action                                                                                                                                 | Owner | Due date |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|----------|
| 1. For each open nonconformity, write the occurrence chain: why it happened.                                                           |       |          |
| 2. Write the detection chain: why nobody knew.                                                                                         |       |          |
| 3. Test each proposed cause: if it changed, would recurrence be prevented? A person and an industry-wide condition both fail the test. |       |          |
| 4. Stop the analysis where it reaches what the property actually controls, and not before.                                             |       |          |

*What this sheet is not: ISO 14001 does not prescribe this form. It is a working aid drawn from the book; the standard and, in Chapter 4, the certification body's own rules and contract govern the real case.*