

Solving Customer Related Problems

- Problem Solving and Decision-Making Techniques -

Problem Analysis

Problem Analysis Definition

A Systematic Process for Finding the Cause of a Problem

Describe Problem

Specify Problem	What is the evidence of the problem?
State Outcomes	What are the consequences of the problem?

IS

IS NOT

WHAT

What specific object(s) evidence the problem?	What similar object(s) might also evidence the problem but do not?
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WHERE

Where is the problem observed (geographically)? Where is the problem evidenced on the object?	Where else could the problem be observed, but is not? Where else could the problem be evidenced on the object, but is not?
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WHEN

When was the problem first observed (in clock/calendar time)? How many times has the problem been observed? Any pattern? How long has it existed?	When else could the problem have been first observed, but was not? How often could the problem have been observed, but was not? Any pattern? How long could it have existed but it has not?
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EXTENT

How many objects have the problem?	How many objects could have the problem, but do not?
What is the size and nature of a single defect?	What other size and nature could the defect be, but is not?
How many defects are on each object?	How many defects could there be on each object, but are not?
What has been the trend?	What other trends could have been expected but were not observed?

Innovative Problem Solving Skills

All problem solving processes follow largely the same pattern. An example is the six step process below.

STEP 1	ANALYSE YOUR CURRENT SITUATION
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the current situation? - What are the problems/outcomes associated with it? - What is the consequence of the problems/outcomes?
STEP 2	DEFINE YOUR FUTURE PREFERRED SITUATION
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the future preferred situation? - What does it look like? - How will you know that it has been achieved? - What are the benefits of achieving it?
STEP 3	IDENTIFY THE OBSTACLES TO SUCCESS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the obstacles to success? - What is the history of the obstacle? - What is the current shape, size and dimension of each obstacle?
STEP 4	GENERATE IDEAS TO DELIVER THE IMPROVEMENT
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create ideas; be creative and innovative. - Aim high. - Do not evaluate; focus on quantity versus quality of ideas. - Group ideas together.
STEP 5	SELECT, FINE TUNE IDEAS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fine tune ideas. - Select the best idea(s). - Shape the ideas into final ideas.
STEP 6	ACTION PLANNING
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decide a plan of action to implement the final ideas.

What makes innovative problem-solving different to linear or logical problem-solving?

The answer lies in the use of innovative and creative thinking in Step 4 and Step 5.

Stage 2 - Generate as many ideas as possible.

Create a team of six or seven people from different backgrounds and with very different talents.

People should have varying levels of experience of the issue(s) you are addressing, should be keen to be involved, and should be team players. They should also be open-minded and non-evaluative in their thinking processes.

Run a creative idea generating session or series of sessions. Follow these tips:

- Appoint a facilitator/leader to encourage and praise participation.
- Use post-it notes to collect ideas on a white-board or similar surface.
- Run the sessions in 30 minute bursts.
- Run at least 4 sessions.
- Get as many different ideas as possible.
- Encourage people to think 'outside of the box'. There should be no limitations to their thinking.
- Don't evaluate or criticise ideas as they are being posted. Any ideas are acceptable.
- Keep going when you think everyone has dried up.
- Go for the greatest volume of ideas not quality.

A Six Step Problem Solving Process

STRIPE PROCESS

A way to analyse a problem in order to solve it is to use the STRIPE process.

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| S | (SITUATION NOW) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear on the situation as it is now, describe it stating why this is a problem or opportunity. |
| T | (TARGET) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the future, desired situation and what needs to be achieved i.e. what would it look like if the problem was solved/ opportunity realised. |
| R | (RESTRAINTS) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine the obstacles, problems and restraints that stand in the way of the 'situation now' and the target. |
| I | (IMPORTANT ISSUES) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify from all of the above restraints, the important issues that need addressing to remove them or reduce them. |
| P | (PLAN ACTIONS) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set out in a logical sequence the order of events that need to take place and the specific, concrete actions that need to happen to deliver the future desired situation. |
| E | (EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly identify the evidence that would indicate that the problem has been solved or the opportunity seized. |

Use the next pages to analyse and solve a problem using the STRIPE process.

Using The 'Stripe' Process

STEP	ACTION
Important Issues	Given the restraints what important issues will you need to address?
Plan Actions	What is your action plan to address the key issues and deliver the future/preferred situation?
Evidence of Success	How will you know if you have succeeded in solving the problem and making the change?

4. Highlight key restraints.
 - Which of the restraining forces are the most significant and reducible?
 - Which ones are closest to the sources of the issue?
 - What needs to happen that is inhibited by these forces?
 - What can be done about these things?

5. Decide what to do.

Commitment at this stage from all involved is critical.

 - What do we agree to do/agree not to do?
 - What do we need to have others do/agree to do?
 - What is our plan of action? Who will do what? By when?

6. How will success be monitored?
 - What are the key success criteria?
 - How will success be evidenced? To whom?
 - Who is responsible and accountable for this success?
 - How long will it be before we know we have achieved it?
 - How will others know we have achieved it?
 - How will we celebrate it?