



Problem Solving & Decision Making Takeaway Message

Five Steps of Systematic Problem Solving

1. Describe the problem.

Do this as accurately and completely as possible. The better you understand the problem, the more quickly and efficiently you can solve it.

2. Gather information.

Consider **quantitative** information (facts that can be measured) and **qualitative** information (how people feel about the situation).

3. Determine the most important factors that contribute to the problem.

Figure out what is causing the problem. Factors may include timing, personnel, the setting, or a combination of all three.

4. Visualize what success looks like.

Describe how things will be when the problem is solved and everything is working well.

5. Create action steps that will lead to that success.

Action steps close the gap between the current situation and your visualization of success.

Advantages of Systematically Solving Problems

- The problem-solving process is a time-saver. With an organized approach to a problem, issues can be dealt with in an orderly and timely fashion.
- As teams become accustomed to using a systematic approach, they can solve problems more quickly and efficiently.
- A systematic approach increases the odds of success.



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Making Decisions

Brainstorming

Brainstorming allows for the free flow of ideas. As team members bounce thoughts off one another, the combined result can be greater than any of the individual contributions.

1. Encourage everyone to participate. Their ideas are valuable.
2. Think outside the box; that is, consider solutions beyond the obvious. Encourage this kind of input by agreeing at the outset not to be critical of the ideas of others.
3. Piggyback ideas. One person's thoughts can build on the ideas of others.
4. Consider how similar problems have been solved in the past, both by the team and by others. There is no need to reinvent the wheel every time.

Consensus

Consensus occurs when a discussion leads to agreement without resorting to a vote.

1. The team works in an atmosphere of trust and agrees to abide by the group agreement.
2. Possible solutions are assessed and evaluated to see if they fit the vision of what success looks like.
3. If possible, give the consensus decision a trial run before finalizing it. That can reduce anxiety about failure.

Multi-voting

When presented with many options, multi-voting allows team members to cut a list down to a manageable size.

1. Each team member has an equal number of votes.
2. If sorting a list, members rank the items on the list. If reducing it, members cast out the poorest choices.
3. Cast votes and total scores. Repeat, if necessary.

Parking Lot

This is a process of tabling parts of a discussion that are not directly related to finding a solution to the problem at hand. It permits team members to feel that all of their suggestions are being considered, even if at a future date. It also helps a team hold onto fresh ideas whose time has not yet arrived.

1. Acknowledge that an issue is not immediately relevant.
2. Write a brief description of the issue so that it can be brought up for discussion at a later time.