

Problem Solving Skills

Introduction

- Everybody can benefit from having good problem solving skills as we all encounter problems on a daily basis. Some of these problems are obviously more **severe or complex** than others.
- It would be wonderful to have the ability to solve all problems efficiently and in a timely fashion without difficulty, unfortunately though there is no one way in which all problems can be solved.
- However well prepared we are for problem solving, there is always an element of the unknown. Although **planning and structuring** will help make the problem solving process more likely to be successful, good judgement and an element of good luck will ultimately determine whether problem solving was a success.

Introduction

- Interpersonal relationships fail and businesses fail because of poor problem solving.
- This is often due to either **problems not being recognised** or being recognised but **not being dealt** with appropriately.
- **Problem solving skills** are highly sought after by employers as many companies rely on their employees to identify and solve problems.

Dealing with a customer complaint may be seen as a problem that needs to be solved, and it's almost certainly a good idea to do so. The employee dealing with the complaint should be asking what has caused the customer to complain in the first place, if the **cause of the complaint** can be eliminated then the **problem is solved**.

Key Skills

1. Problem Solving Skills
2. Research Skills
3. Team Working
4. Emotional Intelligence
5. Risk Management
6. Decision Making

Key Skills(Problem Solving)

Creativity

- Problems are usually solved either intuitively(Not enough attention) or systematically(fixed plan)
- Intuition is used when no new knowledge is needed - you know enough to be able to make a quick decision and solve the problem, or you use common sense or experience to solve the problem.
- More complex problems or problems that you have not experienced before will likely require a more systematic and logical approach to solve, and for these you will need to use creative thinking.



Researching Skills

- Defining and solving problems often requires you to do some research: this may be a simple Google search or a more rigorous research project.
- Innovative ideas on how to conduct effective research.



Team Working

- Many problems are best defined and solved with the input of other people. **Team working** may sound like a 'work thing' but it is just as important at home and school as well as in the workplace.
- Better outcomes.
- likely to take calculated risks that **lead to innovation**
- Working in a team encourages **personal growth, increases job satisfaction, and reduces stress**



Emotional Intelligence

- It is worth considering the impact that a problem and/or its solution has on you and other people.
- Emotional intelligence, the ability to recognise the emotions of yourself and others, will help guide you to an appropriate solution.
- A leader could be the most **intelligent person** in the room, but **without a high EI score**, this leader may **fail to motivate employees**. The presence of **positive mood** in leaders at work creates more effective and **broader thought processes** in certain types of decision-making abilities (George, 2000). Conversely, negative moods foster improved systematic information processing.



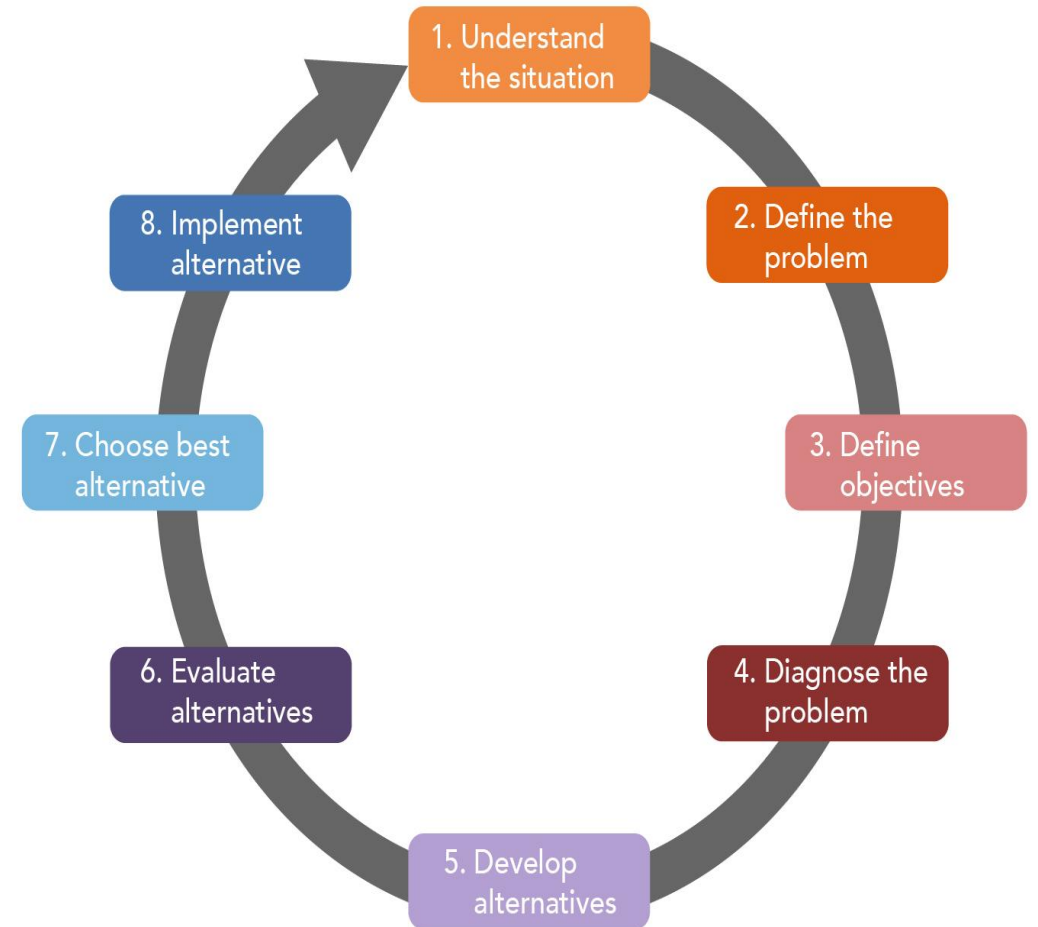
Risk Management

- Solving a problem involves a certain amount of risk - this risk needs to be weighed up against not solving the problem.
- The process of identifying, assessing and controlling financial, legal, strategic and security risks to an organization's capital and earnings.
- Example: To avoid potential damage from a data breach, a company could choose to avoid storing sensitive data on their computer systems. To control or mitigate a cyber attack, a company could increase its technical controls and network oversight.



Decision Making

- Problem solving and decision making are closely related skills, and making a decision is an important part of the problem solving process as you will often be faced with various options and alternatives.



6 Effective Ways to Enhance Your Problem Solving Skills

- Problems arise in many shapes and forms. They can be mundane, everyday problems, or larger more complex problems:
- *What to have for dinner tonight?*
- *Which route to take to work?*
- *How to fix a project that's running behind schedule?*
- *How to change from an uninspiring job to a career you're really passionate about?*
- Every day, you'll be faced with at least one problem to solve. But it gets easier when you realize that problems are simply choices. There's nothing 'scary' about them other than having to make a decision.
- No matter what job you're in, where you live, who your partner is, how many friends you have, you will be judged on your ability to solve problems. Because problems equal hassles for everyone concerned. And people don't like hassle. So the more problems you can solve, the less hassle all-round, the happier people are with you.

How to Enhance Problem Solving Skills

- **1. Focus on the Solution, Not the Problem**
- Neuroscientists have proven that your brain cannot find solutions if you focus on the problem. This is because when you focus on the problem, you're effectively feeding 'negativity,' which in turn activates negative emotions in the brain. These emotions block potential solutions.
- It's not that you should 'ignore the problem,' instead, try to remain calm. It helps to first, acknowledge the problem; and then, move your focus to a solution-oriented mindset where you keep fixed on what the 'answer' could be, rather than lingering on 'what went wrong' and 'who's fault it is'.

2. Adapt 5 Whys to Clearly Define the Problem

- [5 Whys](#) is a problem solving framework to help you get to the root of a problem.
- By repeatedly asking the question “why” on a problem, you can dig into the root cause of a problem, and that’s how you can find the best solution to tackle the root problem once and for all.
- If the problem is “always late to work” ...
 - **Why am I late to work?**
I always click the snooze button and just want to go on sleeping.
 - **Why do I want to go on sleeping?**
I feel so tired in the morning.
 - **Why do I feel tired in the morning?**
I slept late the night before, that’s why.
 - **Why did I sleep late?**
I wasn’t sleepy after drinking coffee, and I just kept scrolling my Facebook feed and somehow I couldn’t stop.
 - **Why did I drink coffee?**
Because I was too sleepy at work in the afternoon, not having enough sleep the night before.

3. Simplify Things

- As human beings, we have a tendency to make things more complicated than they need to be! Try simplifying your problem by generalizing it. Remove all the details and go back to the basics. Try looking for a really easy, obvious solution – you might be surprised at the results!

4. List out as Many Solutions as Possible

- Try to come up with 'ALL POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS' – even if they seem ridiculous at first. It's important you keep an open mind to boost creative thinking, which can trigger potential solutions.
- Coming from 10 years in the corporate advertising industry, it is drummed into you that 'No idea is a bad idea' and this aids creative thinking in brainstorming and other problem-solving techniques.
- Whatever you do, do not ridicule yourself for coming up with 'stupid solutions' as it's often the crazy ideas that trigger other more viable solutions.

5. Use Language That Creates Possibility

- Lead your thinking with phrases like *'what if...'* and *'imagine if...'* These terms open up our brains to think creatively and encourage solutions.
- Avoid closed, negative language such as *'I don't think...'* or *'But this is not right...'*
- **Problem-solving abilities are essential in virtually any graduate role you can think of. Discover how to develop your problem-solving skills and demonstrate them to eagle-eyed recruiters.**
- **Interviewers will be interested to discover how you'd approach problems that could arise in the workplace.**

Other skills related to problem solving

- analytical skills
- innovative and creative thinking
- a lateral mindset(Imagine to look at problem in fresh way)
- adaptability and flexibility
- level-headedness(calm and able to deal easily with difficult situations)
- initiative
- resilience (ability to recover quickly from difficulties)
- teamworking (if problem solving is a team effort)
- influencing skills (to get colleagues, clients and bosses to adopt your solutions).

Hypothetical interview questions about problem solving

- [How would you deal with conflict in the workplace?](#) (This is especially likely to be asked of trainee managers and graduate HR professionals.)
- What would you do if there is an unexpected delay to one of your projects because of supply chain issues? (This is particularly likely to be asked in construction, logistics or retail interviews).
- [What would you do if a client or customer raised a complaint?](#)
- What would you do if you noticed that a colleague was struggling with their work?
- How would you react if given negative feedback by a manager on an aspect of your performance?
- How would you judge whether you should use your own initiative on a task or ask for help?

How to develop and demonstrate your problem-solving skills

- Sorting out a technical problem with your phone, device or computer.
- Carrying out DIY.
- Serving a demanding customer or resolving a complaint.
- Finding a way round a funding shortfall in order to pay for travel or a gap year.
- Turning around the finances or increasing the membership of a struggling student society.
- Organising a student society's trip overseas, overcoming unforeseen difficulties on the way.
- Acting as a course rep or as a mentor for other students.