McKinsey & Company

Problem Solving Overview

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Course Description

The ability to solve problems and make sound decisions is central to every professional's effectiveness on the job. But chances are you've never been taught how to solve problems in a structured way. What you know, you have figured out on your own and by watching others.

Problem Solving will help you reflect on your own experience and give you the tools, techniques, and expert advice you need to sharpen your problem-solving skills. McKinsey faculty Marc Metakis and Emily Yueh will take you through the foundations of problem solving and tools and techniques to apply in your day-to-day work.

Section 1: Introduction

Introduces problem solving, including how we define problem solving and how using a structured approach can improve your effectiveness at addressing problems on the job in the face of risk and uncertainty.

- Define problem solving as the process by which you make decisions or by which you help inform decisions that other people are making
- Identify situations in which you engage in problem solving on the job
- Articulate some potential pitfalls of unstructured problem solving
- Recognize the personal benefits of more effective problem solving

Section 2: A structured approach to problem solving

Introduces five structured problem-solving approaches and deep dives on the hypothesis-led approach to problem solving.

- Recall five problem-solving approaches designed to address a wide range of problems facing organizations today.
- Explain the primary goal of each step of the hypothesis-led approach to problem solving
- Review examples of how the hypothesis-led approach can be applied to different situations and types of problems

Section 3: Define the problem

Provides an introduction to, and practice with, the first step of the hypothesis-led approach to problem solving: defining the problem.

- Recognize the unique challenges of problem definition
- Use mindsets and tools from the Define problem step of the hypothesis-led problem-solving approach to improve outcomes including the SMART framework and the Problem Statement Worksheet
- Recognize situations that can benefit from some advanced problem solving techniques to de-bias

Section 4: Structure the problem

Introduces tools and techniques to help structure a problem and prioritize issues.

- Disaggregate a complex problem into smaller, more manageable pieces
- Define and communicate issues that are MECE (mutually exclusive, collectively exhaustive)
- Recognize situations that can benefit from advanced idea generation techniques and begin to apply them (e.g., point-of-view analysis, assumption reversal, constraint release)
- Outline criteria that can be used to prioritize issues and / or hypotheses (e.g., impact, ease of implementation)

Section 5: Arrive at a recommendation

Explore the final four steps of the seven-step, hypothesis-led approach: plan analyses & work, conduct analyses, synthesize findings, and develop recommendations.

- Develop meaningful work plans for problem-solving projects
- Set up, plan, and structure appropriate analyses over the course of a project
- Synthesize the important aspects of the work to be communicated to stakeholders (i.e., what are the "so whats"?)
- Review criteria that can be used to make a high-impact recommendation (e.g., actionable, feasible)
- Describe how the influence model can be used to help effect change

Section 6: Wrap up and reflection

- Recap the key themes of the course
- Reflect on the evolution of your problem-solving approach

Throughout the course, you'll:

- Be introduced to problem solving tools and techniques you can try right away
- Practice applying concepts, tools and techniques in a series of case studies

- Hear insights and practical advice from McKinsey faculty and other problem-solving practitioners

- Be provided quick, targeted "Try it Now" and "Take it to Your Team" activities, to help you immediately apply what you've learned to your work, and to share what you are learning with colleagues