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Authors: Joseph A. De Feo

16.4. Phase 1: Define and Identify the Problem

It has been said that a problem well defined is half solved. The clear identification and definition of problems to be addressed in the RCCA project is an early key to success. In practice, a well-constructed control plan with effective feedback loops will identify problems to be addressed by RCCA nearly in real time. For further discussion of control activities, see the section "Phase 4: Control to Hold the Gains."

16.4.1. Select the Problem

Select the problem to be addressed. Once the data and information about potential problems to address have been gathered, tools must be applied to select the most important problems to address. Data collection and Juran's Pareto analysis are most often used to identify the vital few problems to address.

Once the problem for action has been selected, the nature of the problem must be stated clearly and concisely. A good problem statement should have the following characteristics, summarized by the acronym MOMS:

- *Measureable*. The problem must be stated in terms that can be measured, either by using an existing measurement system or creating a new one. Although the problem may not have been measured to date, the problem-solving team must be able to conceptualize how it could be measured in quantifiable terms.
- *Observable*. The problem must be seen and evidenced by its symptoms. Symptoms are the outward evidence that the problem exists.
- *Manageable*. The problem statement must be narrow enough in scope that the team can solve it with a reasonable application of resources over a reasonable period of time. "Boil the ocean" projects should be avoided.
- *Specific*. The problem statement should focus on specific products, services, or information; specific parts of the organization; or specific aspects of a larger problem.

In addition to the MOMS guidelines, problem statements should never include implications of a cause, blame for the problem occurring, or suggested solutions.