

## **PROBLEM SOLVING AND JUDGEMENT**

Problem Solving and Judgement is the ability to analyze problems systematically, organize information, identify key factors, identify underlying causes and generate solutions.

<i>This Means...</i>	<i>This Doesn't Mean...</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• resolving a problem in a systematic, step-by-step way</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• attempting to solve a problem by quickly trying whatever comes to mind, responding to the urgency of the situation</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prioritizing required information to help you determine when you can make a sufficiently informed decision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• waiting for all the information to clear before evaluating options</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• breaking down complex problems to identify root cause(s)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• addressing only the surface issue, ignoring other possible deeper causes</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• when problems occur, thinking about the chain of events that led to it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explaining problems in a vague, general way, e.g., "that department never knows what they want"</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• forecasting cause and effect to predict longer term issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• doing work as it comes without thinking through the longer term impact</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• thinking through the problem before offering a solution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• jumping to a conclusion without thinking through the facts</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identifying causes and resolving a problem that is not obvious to others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• attempting to resolve a problem with whatever comes to mind</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• integrating and applying different ideas and approaches to accomplish a goal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• trying to force-fit standard approaches in order to maintain consistency</li> </ul>

**Developmental  
Activities**

**Level 1-2 Activities**

**Play games that require Problem Solving and Judgement.**

- The card game “bridge” is good for developing Problem Solving and Judgement.
- The computer game “Lemmings” is a simple game that requires increasingly higher levels of Problem Solving and Judgement.

**Keep a log of situations at work for which you did not have a solution.**

- Write down in detail the nature of the situation and your thoughts about it.
- Review the log, consider what you thought at the time, and what you think now as you reconsider the situation. What are the similarities, differences in your thought pattern?
- Write down alternative courses of action that could have benefited the situation.
- Make use of these actions in similar circumstances.

**Reflection Tip:**

- \* Are there any commonalities to the types of situations that you've described? If so, ask for input from someone who handles these types of situations well.

**Ask for feedback.**

- Ask your peers to identify specific times where you either showed or did not show effective Problem Solving and Judgement skills.
- Ask them to specify what it was about your behaviour which made a particular impression on them.
- Ask them to talk through how they would have tackled the issue.
- Take note of these suggestions and try to apply them in future circumstances.

**Reflection Tip:**

- \* Is there a pattern to situations where you avoid using analytical skills?

**Incorporate several perspectives into your problem-solving approach.**

- Identify individuals who are most affected by a current problem.
- Ask them for information about the nature of the problem and for suggestions about possible solutions.
- Imagine that you have no constraints to solve this issue or problem – what would you do? Why would you do it? What prevents you from acting on the thoughts you have?
- Talk to people who are not familiar with the issue you are grappling with. This may include those from totally different areas of expertise or disciplines than you are used to – what kinds of things do people come up with?

- Try to picture what you are trying to achieve. What does it look like? Is there anything you would like to change? What one thing would you like to change in that picture? Will the courses of action that you have generated allow you to achieve your goals?
- Take the results of these approaches and try to come up with some novel solutions to your problem.
- Share your ideas with, and gather input from trusted colleagues and the individuals affected.
- Try to learn from and incorporate the comments you have collected. Make some notes to yourself regarding some of the things that have helped you to more effectively problem solve.

**Reflection Tip:**

- \* Understanding the background to a persistent problem is often critical to effectively resolving it. Be sure to gather enough information that you understand the background to the problem.

**Identify objectives.**

- Look ahead over the next three months. Considering each of the projects you are working on or plan to work on, with which project do you anticipate encountering the most difficulties? Why?
- Make a list of the major obstacles that you believe you will encounter that will deter you from achieving your goals.
- Analyze the root cause of each obstacle and identify what actions you can take to lessen or overcome the problem before you encounter it.

**Reflection Tips:**

- \* Discuss with your peers how they identify obstacles. Remember to keep a proactive approach rather than a reactive one.
- \* Have you encountered any of these obstacles before? If so, review the methods you used before, and the resulting outcome.

**Have someone model their decision-making process for you.**

- Be sure to explore and question the factors they consider in this type of a decision.
- For this particular type of decision, what particular areas of knowledge and resources do they generally use?

**Reflection Tip:**

- \* Ask others what they think about this person's decision-making. What are their weak areas? What are their strengths? How did they accrue this knowledge?

## Level 3-4 Activities

### Identify a persistent problem that has resisted solution.

- Set aside sufficient time so that you can really focus on the problem. If the problem is truly difficult, it will not be resolved in a couple of minutes between meetings.
- Work on a plan that goes to the root of the problem.
  - ⇒ Consider the background to the problem.
  - ⇒ Try breaking the problem down into pieces, and examining each separately.
  - ⇒ Consider similar problems from the past. Is any information that you've gathered previously relevant in this situation?
- Carefully think through the consequences of your plan. Why will it succeed when the others have failed?
- Fine tune your plan until you are confident that you have addressed the fundamental issues causing the problem.

#### Reflection Tips:

- \* Gather information about how your peers break down problems.
- \* Use diagrams to show the relationships of each of the pieces within the problem.

### Shadow a decision with someone whose Problem Solving and Judgement you value.

- After generally discussing the decision to be made, take some time on your own to consider the factors involved in the decision.
- Determine whether there are any causal links or relationships between factors.
- Develop your own response to the decision, addressing all the factors you've just identified.
- Present your response to the individual. Be prepared to explain all elements of your response.
- Discuss what the differences are between your approach and the approach the individual took. What are the similarities?

#### Reflection Tip:

- \* Ask the individual about the things you came up with that he/she didn't. Ask why they would/ wouldn't use these additional techniques.

**When you are faced by new, difficult or expansive problems, think through the chain of events leading to the problem.**

- The next time an important problem occurs, stop yourself from jumping to a conclusion as to what caused the problem. Instead, decide to spend some time analyzing the problem.
- Write down the chain of events leading to the problem (e.g., "A" occurred because of "B", "B" occurred because of "C"). It is important to actually write it down or draw a diagram. Most people cannot keep all the details of a complex situation in their heads.
- Consider each of the components, and think about what could have been done to address them at the time, and what can be done now.
- Work together with your peers to implement the solution in a feasible manner.

**Reflection Tip:**

- \* Have you or your peers come up against this problem before? If so, what aspects of it have changed?

**Analyze customer issues.**

- During the next two weeks make a list of unexpected customer/client problems or issues that come up.
- Examine the list and ask yourself the following questions:
  - ⇒ What may be the root cause of the problem?
  - ⇒ Is there anything that could have prevented the problem from occurring? If yes, what action could have prevented it?
  - ⇒ What are the short, medium and longer term repercussions of not solving the problem?
  - ⇒ Is there anything you could have done to have hastened your understanding of the problem?
- Consider multiple actions that could be taken to address the issues:
  - ⇒ What would the impact of each action be?
  - ⇒ Would the impact be different if multiple action were taken?

**Reflection Tip:**

- \* Take a moment to think "bigger picture". Do these themes have any impact on, or relationship to broader business unit, or organizational issues?

**Talk to others to get their ideas on issues, situations, problems, and potential opportunities.**

- Choose a current organizational issue.

- Discuss the issue with several peers.
- Take some time to reflect on your peer's input to the issue. Using this input, break the issue down into key components.
- Discuss the key components you have identified with several other peers. Do they agree with your analysis? Have you missed any components? Would they have broken the issue down differently? Are there any components that you have identified that they feel aren't important?
- Take some time to reflect on the input you have just gathered. Is it necessary to revise your analysis?
- Use this analysis as a starting point to developing an action plan.

**Reflection Tips:**

- \* Why might you have missed some of the details that your peers are bringing up?
- \* Do your peers have a different perspective regarding the issue than you do? What can you learn from this perspective?

**Develop alternative ways of looking at an issue.**

- Select a business issue within your area that you are genuinely interested in understanding or resolving. The problem should be reasonable in scope and you should be familiar with its past history (i.e., what has led up to the problems and previous attempts, if any, at resolving it).
- Describe the problem in a brief statement.
  - ⇒ For example, you might state the problem as "The staff turnover in my particular business unit has steadily increased over the past two years."
- Identify the key factors in the problem from your perspective.
- Now, shift your focus, and pretend you are going to tell someone a story about the problem. What are the three or four key characteristics or details that define the issue that you would want to convey?
- Identify the key factors in the problem from the perspective of others. Ask yourself the following questions:
  - ⇒ How would management in other areas view this problem? What factors would they see from their perspective?
  - ⇒ How would customers view this problem? What factors would they see?
- Prepare a summary of your findings. Identify any immediate steps you could take on your own to help resolve the problem. Take the first steps.

**Reflection Tip:**

- \* Check with others to ensure that you have identified all key factors. Which ones might you have missed? Why?