# Problem Solving and Decision Making Techniques

**What is Problem Solving?**

It is a process of transforming one situation into another by removing, overcoming or navigating around obstacles

**The Problem-Solving** **Process**

Problem solving is a complex process and often is not easily broken down into clear stages. However, here are seven steps that will guide you in identifying the real problem and its cause.

**STEP 1: RECOGNIZE THAT A PROBLEM EXISTS**

* **You have received a written or oral complaint from an individual.**
* **You are not satisfied with the standards you have set.**
* **Recent events cause you to question present or future plans and decisions.**
* **You have to seek advice and help from your director or someone else**.

**STEP 2: DEFINE AND DEVELOP A PROBLEM STATEMENT**

* **Is the problem stated objectively?**It should not leave room for interpretation.   
  It should be a simple statement of fact.
* **Is the problem limited in scope?**
* **Does everyone involved have a common understanding of the problem?**

**“The organization of Women’s Ministries has created   
a rift between many women and Dorcas Society.”**

What is the cause (s) implied in this problem statement?

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**“The Women’s Ministry Co-operative needs   
to be revamped and reorganized”**

What is the solution(s) implied in this problem statement?

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**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**

* Is the problem stated objectively and include “just the facts”?

* Is the scope of the problem limited enough for you to handle?
* Will everyone who reads it have the same understanding of the problem?
* Does the problem statement include any “implied causes” or “implied solutions”?

STEP 3: ANALYZE POTENTIAL CAUSES BY GATHERING DATA

“*I keep six honest serving men*

*(They taught me all I know);*

*Their names are What and Why and When*

*And How and Where and Who.”*

Rudyard Kipling

* Identify potential cause(s)
* Determine the most likely cause(s)
* Identify the true root cause(s)
* **Cause and Effect diagram**

1. Condense your problem statement to one key word or phrase.

For example, low baptism rates.

1. Define the major categories of causes of the problem.

Major categories of causes are Methods, People, Materials, and Time.

1. Brainstorm possible causes.

* **Brainstorming**
* **Charts or graphs**

## STEP 4: IDENTIFY POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

**Brainstorming**

Brainstorming is a freethinking technique. These basic ground rules make it effective:

The two most common Brainstorming methods are:

### METHOD THE WAY IT HAPPENS

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**Freewheeling** - Share ideas all at once

- Make a list of the ideas as they are “shouted out”

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**Round Robin** - Everyone takes a turn to offer an idea

- Anyone can pass on any turn

- It continues until everyone has had a chance

- Make a list of all the ideas as they are offered

**Pros: Cons:**

**\*** Allows for creativity. **\***  Time consuming.

**\***  Allows one to “think out loud”. **\*** Tendency to evaluate suggested

**\***  Quantity of ideas allows room ideas too soon, hence discarding

for throwing out some later. them before giving a second thought.

**\*** Helps the mind to stretch creatively. **\*** Solution generating sessions

**\*** More people can participate in giving

input can be dominated by one or two persons.

## STEP 5: DETERMINE THE BEST SOLUTIONS

**A. Develop and assign weights to criteria**

Example, the Women’s Ministries of a union is considering starting a counseling program for the community at the church. They chose 4 criteria that would help them decide if they should run such a program.

**Criteria Weight**

Ease of implementation 20%

Probability of success 20%

Effectiveness of program 50%

Meeting the need of community 10%

#### Total weighing 100%

B. Apply the criteria

Rate each possible solution on your list against the criteria.

WM Building Sample:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Criteria | **Weight** | **Building 1** | **Building 2** | **Building 3** |
| Location | 40% | 40% | 10% | 35% |
| Cost | 30% | 20% | 25% | 25% |
| Size | 20% | 10% | 15% | 20% |
| Design | 10% | 5% | 7% | 10% |
| **Totals** | **100%** | **75%** | **57%** | **90%** |
| **Summary** |  | **Nice location;**  **Small** | **Great house;**  **Poor location** | **Large house;**  **Good price/design** |

C. Choose the best solution(s)

## STEP 6: DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN

The following two sub-steps will help you address these questions and develop your Action Plan.

1. Divide the solution into sequential tasks.
2. Note responsable persons
3. Schedule (target dates) for starting and completing
4. Address more questions regarding implementation
5. Draw out an overall view of your action plan
6. Develop contingency plans.
7. Such plans are helpful in case your plans got stalled, sidetracked, or had to change midstream
8. With a contingency plan on the back burner, you can keep your momentum going.

Questions to Consider:

* Have you considered those who will be affected?
* Have you considered the resources that will be needed?
* Have you considered how information will be shared?

Contingency Plans

Points to Consider:

\* What specific opportunities and threats may occur?

\* How will you deal with those opportunities and threats?

\* What can be done to prevent those potential problems from occurring?

**STEP 7: Implement Solution and Evaluate Progress**

1. Collect data according to the Action Plan.
2. Monitor the specific tasks that are performed
3. Identify milestones and areas that are working
4. Schedule meetings and reviews
5. Implement contingency plans as necessary.
6. As conditions change, implement the contingency plan to continue moving toward the “desired state”
7. Evaluate results
8. Onsite visit, interviews, or checking to see if the solution is working
9. Identify new problems that may arise

**Pitfalls of Problem Solving**

1. Working on problems that are too general, too large, or not well defined.
2. Jumping to a solution before really analyzing the problem
3. Failing to involve critical decision makers or persons affected by the problem when identifying potential solutions
4. Tackling problems that are beyond the control or influence of the individual or group
5. Applying “pet” solutions rather than seeking a creative solution
6. Failing to develop good reasons for choosing a solution
7. Failing to plan adequately how to implement and evaluate the chosen solution.