

Problem



Solution!



Problem-Solving & Decision-Making

Course Manual



STATECIVILSERVICE
COMPREHENSIVE PUBLIC TRAINING PROGRAM

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PROBLEM SOLVING & DECISION MAKING

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Each day is filled with decisions to be made and problems to be addressed. Developing the skills to address these actions can not only increase one's effectiveness, but also reduce stress and reactive behaviors. This course will guide participants through the process of identifying root causes of problems, generating solutions to problems, establishing decision-making criteria, and using those criteria to select the best alternative solution to problems. Practice scenarios will be used to help participants learn how to apply the problem solving and decision making processes to their own work situations.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the workshop, attendees will be able to:

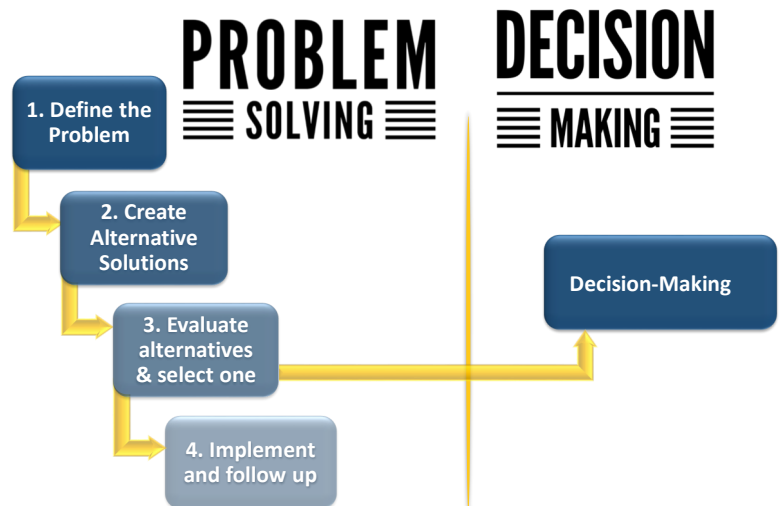
- Apply a four step process to identify, analyze, and address workplace challenges.
- Use a systematic approach to ensure the best possible decision is made.
- Use tools and techniques to generate potential solutions to challenges.
- Create action plans for implementation and follow up of decisions.

COURSE OVERVIEW

PROBLEM SOLVING vs DECISION MAKING

- **Problem Solving** involves defining the problem *and* creating solutions for it.
- A 4-step process that always involves Decision Making

- **Decision Making** is analyzing info data to make the best decision
- Not all **Decision Making** involves solving a problem.



PROBLEM SOLVING & DECISION MAKING SELF-ASSESSMENT

Circle the number that most closely represents your agreement with the following statements.

1—Never 2—Rarely 3— Sometimes 4— Often 5— Almost Always

PROBLEM SOLVING	
1. I try to uncover the root problem before I work toward solutions.	1 2 3 4 5
2. I solicit ideas from others before I consider possible solutions.	1 2 3 4 5
3. I keep an open mind toward options I had not considered.	1 2 3 4 5
4. I use a systematic and effective method for solving problems.	1 2 3 4 5
5. I remain calm in difficult situations.	1 2 3 4 5
	Total
DECISION MAKING	
6. I make decisions in a timely manner.	1 2 3 4 5
7. I get input from all those involved before I make a final decision.	1 2 3 4 5
8. I try not to make rushed decisions.	1 2 3 4 5
9. I use a standard system for decision making.	1 2 3 4 5
10. I achieve positive outcomes from my decisions.	1 2 3 4 5
	Total
ATTITUDE	
11. I view problems as an opportunity to improve and grow.	1 2 3 4 5
12. I welcome ideas and suggestions for improvement from others in the organization.	1 2 3 4 5
13. I appreciate the different ideas and viewpoints that are represented on my team.	1 2 3 4 5
14. I understand my personal biases and put them aside to think objectively about the situation at hand.	1 2 3 4 5
15. I work to ensure that others are not hesitant to approach me for help with challenges and issues.	1 2 3 4 5
	Total
OPPORTUNITIES	
16. I view every challenge as an opportunity for improvement.	1 2 3 4 5
17. I consider organizational values, ethics, and long-term goals when I address decisions and problems.	1 2 3 4 5
18. I recognize the benefits of diverse thinking for my team.	1 2 3 4 5
19. I solicit input on processes and improvements, even when no problems exist.	1 2 3 4 5
20. I take the time to review and document lessons learned from challenges and apply them to future situations.	1 2 3 4 5
	Total

DEFINE THE PROBLEM

Ask yourself and others, the following questions:

What is the problem?

When does it happen?

With whom is it happening?

What is the impact of this problem?

How is it happening? Step by step, what happens before this situation occurs?

Use the answers to these questions to draft a problem statement. Options to create this statement include:

The problem that I am trying to solve is

The following should be happening, but isn't:

The following is happening:

Defining complex problems:

If the problem still seems overwhelming, break it down by repeating the series of questions until you have descriptions of several related problems. If you discover that you are looking at several related problems, then prioritize which ones you will need to address first.

THE “FIVE WHYS”

HOW TO USE THE “FIVE WHYS”:

1. Form your team.
2. Develop a problem statement.
3. Ask “Why?” the problem occurs.
4. Keep asking “Why?” until you get to the root of the problem.
5. Develop and implement a countermeasure or solution.

STEPS	QUESTIONS	ANSWERS
Develop a Problem Statement		
Why?		
Why?		
Why?		
Why?		
Why?		
Why?		
Root Cause		
Immediate Countermeasure		
Long-Term Solution		

CREATE ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

IDEAS

BRAINSTORMING

- ⇒ No judging is allowed
- ⇒ Piggybacking is encouraged
- ⇒ Quantity, not quality
- ⇒ No negatives

EVALUATE ALTERNATIVES & SELECT ONE

- ⇒ Will it solve the problem?
- ⇒ Is it a long-term solution?
- ⇒ Will those involved accept this alternative?
- ⇒ Does it seem realistic that the alternative will be implemented?
- ⇒ Does the alternative conform to policies and procedures?
- ⇒ Do we have the resources to implement this suggested solution? Do we have the time?
- ⇒ What is the risk associated with each alternative?

IDEAS	NOTES

IMPLEMENT AND FOLLOW UP

ACTION PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTATION				
ACTION STEP	WHO	WHEN	RESOURCES	CRITERIA
Break down into the smallest possible steps	Who is responsible for this task?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Start date• Deadlines• End Date	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Methods• People• Documents• Finances	How to assess success?

PRACTICE ACTIVITY

STEPS	NOTES
Define the Problem	
Create Alternative Solutions	
Evaluate Alternatives & Select One	
Implement and Follow Up	

DECISION MAKING



DECIDE Formula

- Define the Situation
- Establish the Criteria
- Consider Alternatives
- Identify Best Alternative
- Develop and Implement Plan
- Evaluate and Follow Up

STEPS	POINTS TO REMEMBER	NOTES
Define the Situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose • Perspectives • Data • Sources of Information 	
Evaluate the Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do we look for? • Where do we get this information? • What are limits criteria and desirables? 	
Consider Alternatives	<p>BRAINSTORMING</p> <p>Alternate formats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Round Robin Emails • Online Shared Documents • Conference Calls • Messaging/Texts 	
Identify the Best Alternative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best of Two • Dot System • Show of Hands • Matrix Systems 	
Develop and Implement Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breakdown into the smallest possible steps • Who is responsible for task? • When will the task start/end? Deadline? • What resources do we have? • How to access success? 	
Evaluate & Follow Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we seeing what we would expect from the indicators? • Is the plan progressing according to schedule? • Does the plan need adjustment? • What changes should be made to avoid this type of problem in the future? • What did we learn from this problem solving? 	

DECISION MATRIX SYSTEMS

DECISION MATRIX

		Options selected in Step 3		
		OPTION 1	OPTION 2	OPTION 3
Criteria established in Step 2	CRITERIA A			
	CRITERIA B			
	CRITERIA C			
	TOTAL			

RATINGS MATRIX

		1 =Poor 2 =Fair 3 =Good 4 =Excellent (Higher is better)		
		Lucy	Fred	Ethel
Criteria	Typing Skills	4	3	3
	Time Management	2	3	3
	People Skills	3	2	1
	TOTAL			

WEIGHTED MATRIX

		1 =Poor 2 =Fair 3 =Good 4 =Excellent (Higher is better)				
		Weight	Lucy	Fred	Ethel	
Criteria	Typing Skills	2	4	3	3	
	Time Management	3	2	3	3	
	People Skills	4	3	2	1	
	TOTAL					

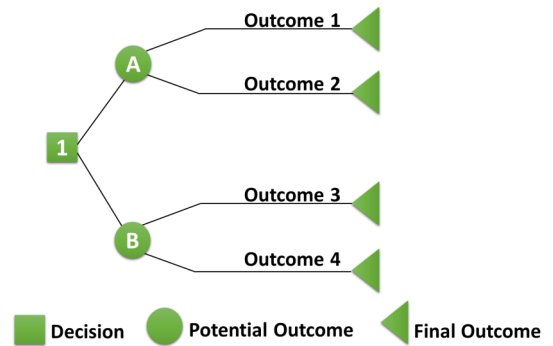
RANKING MATRIX

		Rank 1,2,3... (Lower is better)		
		Lucy	Fred	Ethel
Criteria	Typing Skills	1	2	3
	Time Management	2	1	3
	People Skills	1	2	3
	TOTAL			

9 Block Grid

		Difficulty Level Rating		
		EASY	MEDIUM	HARD
Impact Rating	HIGH	1	2	5
	MEDIUM	3	4	7
	LOW	6	8	9

DECISION TREE



PRACTICE ACTIVITY

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

1. **DEFINE THE PROBLEM:** You'll start by analyzing to get to the root problem.
2. **CREATE ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS:** You'll brainstorm for solutions.
3. **EVALUATE ALTERNATIVES AND SELECT ONE:** Then you'll use any of the tools we've presented today to identify the best alternative to address the issue.
4. **IMPLEMENT AND FOLLOW UP:** For this step, all we ask from you today is to present your decision to the rest of us and be ready to explain why you chose that option.

STEPS	NOTES
Define the Problem	
Create Alternative Solutions	
Evaluate Alternatives & Select One	
Implement and Follow Up	

ACTIVITY: PROBLEM SOLVING

SCENARIOS

- A. You have dealt with this customer before and he's difficult. He has missed a deadline for submitting a form by one day. You have the flexibility to accept it today, but you don't want him to start expecting those kinds of exceptions in the future. On the other hand, it will affect his entire family's health care for the coming year if you don't accept it.
- B. The information on the form you've received is incorrect. You see that the problem is simply a typographical error and you can fix it easily. You cannot reach the person to get permission to make the correction and the form is due in one hour.
- C. This customer cannot explain her situation due to a problem she has communicating. You need the information in order to complete her application. She seems to understand the information, but she cannot speak clearly and you are having trouble getting all the information you need.
- D. This customer has had multiple problems in the past with your department and is on your phone with another one. You can tell he has a negative attitude because of his past experiences and you want to give him a positive experience this time, but as you hear his request, you realize it is impossible.
- E. Your customer does not speak English well and you have a lot of information you need to get before his application can be considered. You have been working with him for an hour and both of you are frustrated and exhausted. You only have a third of the form completed.
- F. You see that someone else made an incorrect decision on this person's application. She is calling in to find out why it was rejected and you see that it should have been approved. You will have to start the process over again to get approval and it will take some time. Additionally, you don't want to put blame on anyone for the rejection.
- G. You are being pressured for a fast decision on an issue that you know needs additional research and consideration. The pressure is coming from someone in a higher position who does not understand the entire process. You see the need for quick action, but you know that any decision you make today may not be the best decision in the long run.
- H. You have made a decision on an issue and held a meeting, stating the decision to all involved. One hour later you find out new information that affects the decision you made and changes what you think should happen in this situation.
- I. You receive a decision from a higher level manager that you realize will have a negative outcome. You have not been asked for your input, but you know that you have information that will affect how the manager sees the situation. The manager has already communicated the decision to the department.

REFERENCES

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Problem Solving And Decision Making	Pearson Education Company. (2002) <i>Every Manager's Desk Reference</i> . Indianapolis. Pages 921-947.
Who Decides Wins	Hook, Rob. (September 7, 2010). <i>Who Decides Wins</i> . adapted from model by Paul Mohapel. Retrieved from: http://businesscopilot.blogspot.com/2010/09/5-ds-of-decision-making.html
	<i>Other materials in this course were excerpted from the CPTP web-based related courses.</i>

RESOURCES

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