

Creative Problem Solving & Decision Making

Introduction

Making decisions and solving problems are key skills needed by any one in business. Some of the questions that confront staff include:

- What is the real problem that I'm dealing with here?
- Am I looking at symptoms or causes?
- Do I have enough information to make an informed decision?
- What are the options?
- Should I take a logical or a creative approach?
- How can I unblock my thinking?

This interactive and practical course will equip the participants with the skills and knowledge to help them make and implement timely and effective decisions and to find solutions for problems and issues that may arise.

We will cover methods of assessing and resolving problems and understanding the role of inferences and assumption in problem solving and decision making. Participants will gain confidence in asking the right questions and overcoming the stress of making complex decisions.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, participants will be able to:

- Identify what a problem is and be able to define a process for problem definition
- Describe and use a range of problem solving and decision-making tools and techniques
- Select the most appropriate problem-solving tool for the given situation
- Describe the decisions for which they should take responsibility and those which they should refer to others
- Apply creative problem-solving techniques to everyday situations
- Plan effective communication of those decisions
- Plan the effective implementation of decisions
- Plan to manage and mitigate risk
- Explain how to ask questions that get the answers they need
- Apply creative problem-solving techniques to everyday situations
- Decrease stress related to making critical decisions and solving workplace problems
- Strengthen their ability to influence and persuade others

Content

A sample of what is covered includes:

Foundation tools for problem solving and decision making

- Mind mapping exercise
- Brainstorming exercise
- Yes and
- AAA

Learning Styles

- Analysis of the delegates' preferred styles - self profile
- How to use this information in relation to problem solving and decision making

Thinking Skills

- An introduction to Unconscious Bias - How we sometimes making incredibly quick judgments and assessments of people, problems and situations without realising what has driven the thinking process behind the decision
- 6 Hat Thinking - A fun and practical exercise to introduce the 6 Thinking Hats and how we can use them to improve the way we solve problems and make decisions
- Critical Thinking - Some top tips on how to improve our critical thinking skills and make better decisions, particularly under pressure
- Lateral thinking - brain stretching in teams and individual exercises

Being creative

- The Human Brain and its two halves - what are they for?
- Why it is vital in both problem solving and decision making
- Creativity exercises - lots of quickfire exercises testing both sides of the brain

SLOT analysis

- Strengths, Limitations, Opportunities, Threats - what it means
- Exercise SLOT analysis

What is a Decision?

What are Problems?

- Problems and Decisions- Group discussion where participants are asked to differentiate between the two and to see whether they sometimes cause more problems by not making decisions.

Problem Solving Process

- Problem Solving 4 Step Model - Now the group knows what a problem looks like they can now discover the skills of problem solving. A short activity looks at the 4 key steps in solving problems and gets delegates to review their strengths and weaknesses at each step.
- 'The Problem Definition Process' - Using Dwayne Spradlines process published in the 2012 Harvard Business Review this model will give participants 4 steps to better understand complex problems. Participants work in groups to review each of the 4 steps before coming together to present findings.

How Well Do You Problem Solve?

- Self-Assessment - Participants complete a self-assessment to look at their problem-solving skills in a number of situations. The Quiz is based on Min Basadurs *Simplex Problem-Solving Model*
- Means End Analysis - A group exercise using *Means End Analysis* to ensure you are solving the right problems
- Finding problems - Using internal and external *PEST* Analysis

Finding the Causes of Problems

- Root Cause Analysis - A group problem solving exercise that gets the group to use Root Cause Analysis to trace a problem back to its origins.

Group Problem Solving activity - Air Crash Scenario

Types of decision and traps

- Criticality
- Urgency Vs. importance
- Assumptions
- Symptom or cause
- What is the real problem?
- 5 whys

A framework for decision making

1. Define
2. Understand
3. Identify
4. Evaluate,
5. Prioritise
6. Review
7. Take action
8. Monitor

Zin Obelisk - Team Exercise

- A full team Problem to solve - can you work as a team when problem solving?

A Decision-Making Skills Test

- A self-assessment that is based on 6 essential steps in the Decision-Making Process

Improving Decision Making

- 10 Common Decision-Making mistakes - The group is asked to discuss and define the most common decision-making mistakes and compare with the presentation from recent research.
- The Ladder of Inference - A small group exercise that will help participants to avoid jumping to conclusion and make more objective decisions

Useful tools

- 5ws & an h
- Arbitrary aids
- Merits of taking advice
- Heuristics
- Expert systems
- Elimination
- Graphic and tabular aids
- Statistical aids
- Paired and weighted comparison
- Pareto analysis
- Decision trees
- Force field analysis
- PMI

Risk

- Risk matrix
- Cautious or Courageous? - Using several Case studies participants are asked to be

cautious or courageous in the decision making and to justify their decisions.

- Blind Spot Analysis - This technique leads delegates through a systematic audit of their decision making against a list of common blind spots first drawn up by Michael Porter in his 1980 book "Competitive Strategy," and further developed by Gilad, Gordon and Sudit in their recent article "Identifying Gaps and Blindspots in Decision Making."

Influencing & Persuasion

- Live examples of difficult situations that have required high levels of influence and/or Persuasion to be shared.
- Yukl & Tracey's Influencers - Using a DVD delegates are taken through the 11 Influencers and how they can apply them to solve problem more quickly and effectively
- 6 Weapons of Influence - A final group exercise that uses the '6 Weapons of Influence' by Dr Robert Cialdini to learn ways of becoming more persuasive and engaging others to accept our decisions
 - Humorous DVD clip to highlight how we can influence people using these principles

Problem People

- Waldroop and Butlers 6 Problem Behaviours - The group is asked to define types of difficult personality and why and how they cause problems.
- Thomas Kilmann Conflict Resolution - A model for solving people problems using Assertiveness and Cooperativeness. Participants are asked to complete a self-inventory to find their preferred style - Interactive Questionnaire to establish each person's conflict style and how to adapt them
- Brain-writing, Role-storming and Brain-Sailing - 3 types of Brainstorming session the group practice to develop their skills at problem solving and decision making in a group.

Core Communication Skills in Problem Solving

- Transactional analysis - This model is used to show participants how they can better control difficult interpersonal communications through using practical real-life examples.
 - Interactive self-diagnosis questionnaire - are you a Mr Spock?
- 6 Step Communication Process - How these skills, when used in a process, are highly effective in dealing with problem people.
 - **Rapport**
 - **Listen**
 - **Question**
 - **Build**
 - **Direct**
 - **Challenge**
- A role play exercise that challenges participants to use the 6 steps in the Communication process to solve a difficult people related problem
- Our Issues - The group looks at the real issues they face and determine to what degree they can control and influence each issue and how they can start the action process on return to the working environment



Final Group Problem Solving and Decision-Making activity - The Pyramid