

Top 5 Problem Solving Tools

Paul Newton

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Preface

This eBook outlines five problem-solving tools that can each be used to look at a particular problem from a different perspective. This can help you to find solutions that that might not be immediately obvious and to compare possible solutions before choosing the best one.

The five problem-solving tools described in this eBook are:

- Six-Step Problem Solving Model
- The Drill Down Technique
- The Four Frame Model
- Eight Disciplines of Problem Solving
- The Cynefin Framework

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Introduction

Most people take an unstructured approach to problem solving and although this can be successful, the solution they come up with may not always be the best one. A major disadvantage of an unstructured approach is that it is easy to hit a roadblock and convince yourself that the problem cannot be solved or that your solution cannot be implemented for practical reasons.

Each of the five problem solving tools in this eBook approaches problem solving in a different way. This can help you to find solutions that that might not be immediately obvious and to compare possible solutions before choosing the best one.

1. Six-Step Problem Solving Model

Problem solving models are used extensively in the workplace and the Six Step method is a simple and reliable way to solve problems. This technique uses an analytical and reliable approach to problem solving. Its process keeps the group assigned to solve a problem on track whilst they carry out their investigation and search for a solution.

2. The Drill Down Technique

In complex organizations problems are inevitable. Successful organizations take the time to identify these complicated problems and plan a practical resolution as soon as possible. The Drill Down Technique is a popular approach to problem solving in complex organizations. As its name suggests you break down a problem into its various components into small practical pieces that enable you to identify a resolution.

3. The Four Frame Model

The Four Frame Model is one of the most popular and in-depth tools that management use to maximize an organization's potential. The model divides up an organization into 'four frames'

– Structural, Human Resource, Political and Symbolic - with the objective of better understanding the organization. Each frame must be looked at in a meaningful way; if one or more is discarded the findings will be incomplete.

4. Eight Disciplines of Problem Solving

This problem-solving tool requires that a practical plan is created at the start of this eight step process. It requires a clear definition of the problem, individuals involved in the solution and the resources. Each of the eight disciplines in this process, are designed to move you a step closer to a successful resolution.

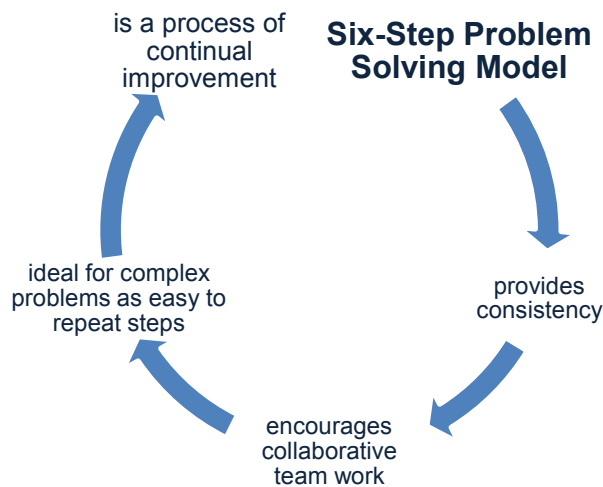
5. The Cynefin Framework

The core of the Cynefin framework is the way that it breaks down problems into one of five contexts. You place your problem into one of these specific contexts and it will then help you decide how best to approach it. This problem-solving tool is a level 'above' others because it requires you to figure out how you should be thinking about a problem in the first place. The framework is often used in conjunction with other problem-solving tools in finding a solution.

Six-Step Problem Solving Model

Problem solving models are used to address the many challenges that arise in the workplace. While many people regularly solve problems, there are a range of different approaches that can be used to find a solution.

Complex challenges for teams, working groups and boards etc., are usually solved more quickly by using a shared, collaborative, and systematic approach to problem solving.



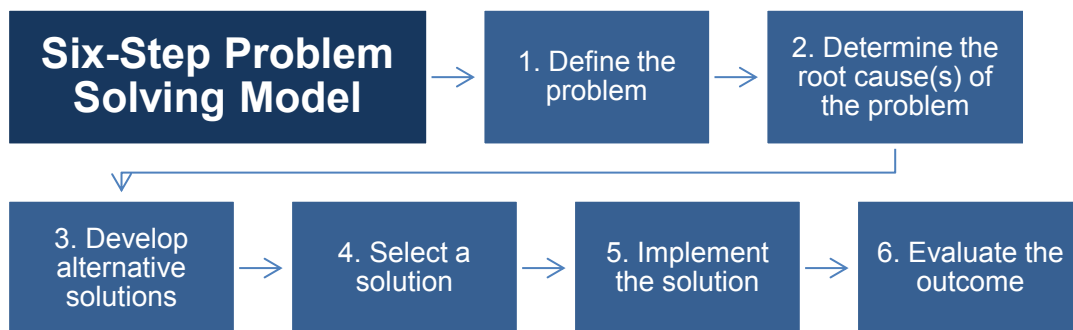
Advantages of Six-Step Problem Solving

The Six-Step method provides a focused procedure for the problem solving (PS) group.

- It ensures consistency, as everyone understands the approach to be used.
- By using data, it helps eliminate bias and preconceptions, leading to greater objectivity.
- It helps to remove divisions and encourages collaborative working.
- It stops PS groups diverging into different problems.
- It also helps PS groups reach consensus

- It eliminates the confusion caused when people use different problem solving techniques on the same issue.
- It makes the decision making process easier.
- It provides a justifiable solution.

All six steps are followed in order – as a cycle, beginning with “1. Identify the Problem.” Each step must be completed before moving on to the next step. The steps are repeatable. At any point the group can return to an earlier step, and proceed from there. For example, once the real problem is identified – using “2. Determine the Root Cause(s) of the Problem”, the group may return to the first step to redefine the problem.



The Six Steps¹

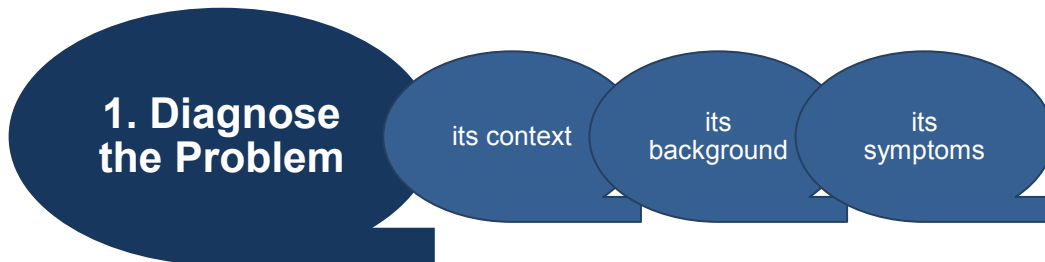
1. Define the Problem
2. Determine the Root Cause(s) of the Problem
3. Develop Alternative Solutions
4. Select a Solution
5. Implement the Solution
6. Evaluate the Outcome

The process is one of continuous improvement. The goal is not to solve but to evolve, adjusting the solution continually as new challenges emerge, through repeating the Six Step Process.

¹ Please note, the six step model does not have standardized titles for each step. The steps above use the naming conventions that provide the clearest indication of the purpose of the step.

Step One: Define the Problem

Step One is about diagnosing the problem - the context, background and symptoms of the issue. Once the group has a clear grasp of what the problem is, they investigate the wider symptoms to discover the implications of the problem, who it affects, and how urgent/important it is to resolve the symptoms.



At this stage groups will use techniques such as:

- Brainstorming
- Interviewing
- Questionnaires

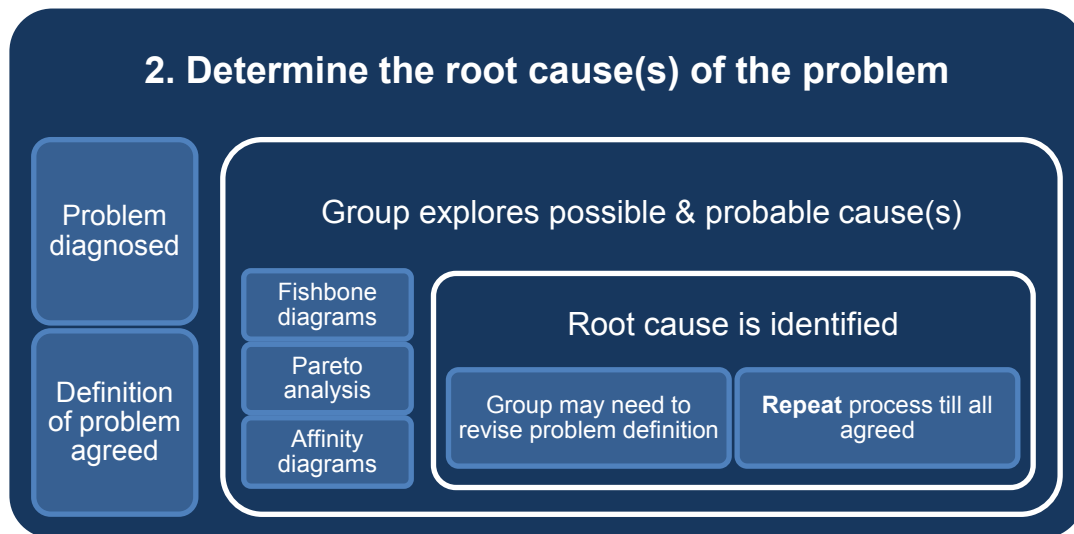
As this step continues, the PS group will constantly revise the definition of the problem. As more symptoms are found, it clarifies what the real problem is.

Step Two: Determine the Root Cause(s) of the Problem

Once all the symptoms are found and the problem diagnosed and an initial definition agreed, the PS group begins to explore what has caused the problem. In this step the problem solving team will use tools such as:

- Fishbone diagrams
- Pareto analysis
- Affinity diagrams

These techniques help collate the information in a structured way, and focus in on the underlying causes of the problem. This is called the root cause.



At this stage, the group may return to step one to revise the definition of the problem. What is the difference between diagnosing the problem and the problems root cause?

If a person has problems breathing, and pains in their chest (the symptoms)

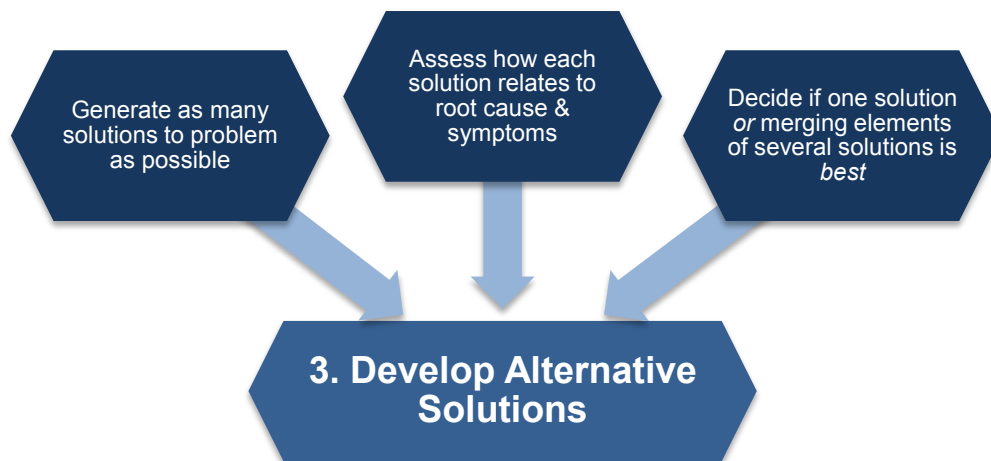
A doctor may diagnose a heart condition (define the problem)

He or she may then determine that the cause is obesity and smoking (root cause).

Step Three: Develop Alternative Solutions

Analytical, creative problem solving is about creating a variety of solutions, not just one. Often the most obvious answer is not the most effective solution to the problem. The PS group focuses on:

- Finding as many solutions to the problem, no matter how outlandish they may seem.
- Looking at how each solution relates to the root cause and symptoms of the problem.
- Deciding if different solutions can be merged to give a better answer to the problem.



At this stage it is not about finding one solution, but eliminating the options that will prove less effective at dealing with both the symptoms and the root cause. Techniques include:

- Force field analysis
- SWOT
- Porters five forces

What is our doctor doing? To return to the medical analogy, at this stage a doctor is:

Investigating various treatment options – like medication, surgery, lifestyle changes etc.

Step Four: Select a Solution

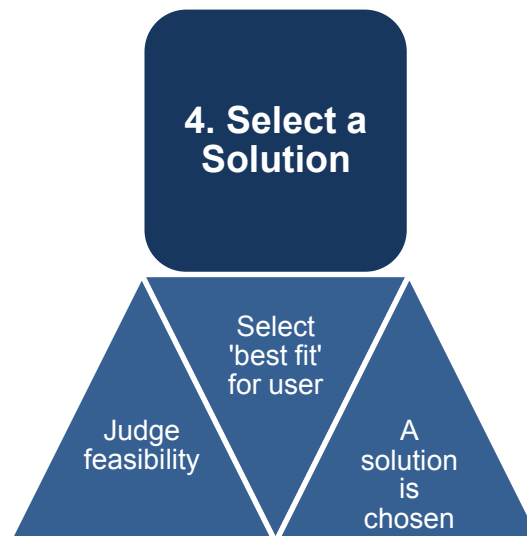
In the fourth step, groups evaluate all the selected, potential solutions, and narrow it down to one. This step applies two key questions.

- Which solution is most feasible?
- Which solution is favoured by those who will implement and use it?

Feasibility is ascertained by deciding if a solution:

- Can be implemented within an acceptable timeframe?
- Is cost effective, reliable and realistic?
- Will make resource usage more effective?
- Can adapt to conditions as they evolve and change?

- Its risks are manageable?
- Will benefit the organization?



Which solution is favoured?

Acceptance by the people who will use and implement the solution is key to success.

This is where the previous steps come into play. To users and implementers, a solution may seem too radical, complex or unrealistic. The previous two steps help justify the choices made by the PS group, and offer a series of different, viable solutions for users and implementers to discuss and select from.

What does this mean for our doctor? At this stage, our doctor is looking at:

Which treatment option would best suit the patient (feasibility), often referring the patient to a consultant(s).

The patient is provided with different treatment options (selection).

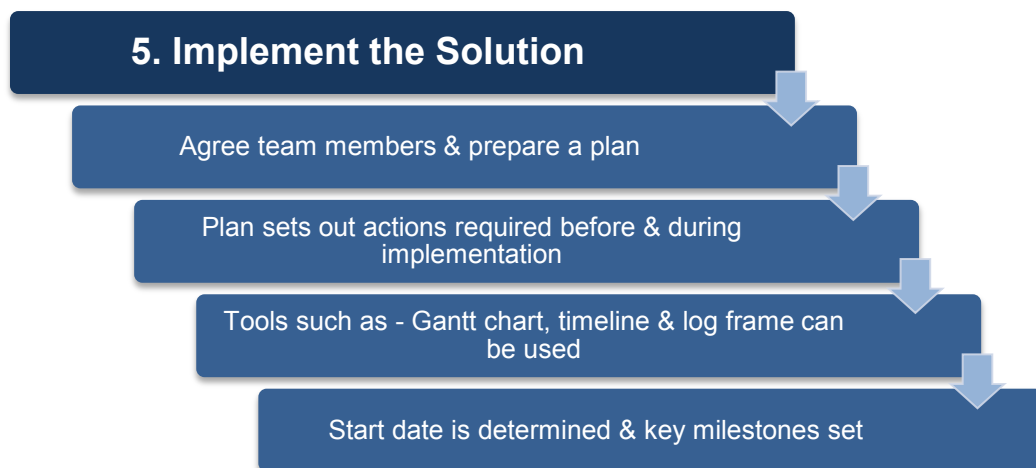
Finally, based on the evidence, a course of treatment is recommended (solution).

Step Five: Implement the Solution

Once the solution has been chosen, initial project planning begins and establishes:

- The project manager.

- Who else needs to be involved to implement the solution.
- When the project will start.
- The key milestones
- What actions need to be taken before implementing the solution
- What actions need to be taken during the implementing the solution
- Why are these actions necessary?



The group may use tools, such as a Gantt chart, timeline or log frame. What happens to the patient now? At this point the patient and the doctor (project manager) would begin to:

Prepare and plan for the recommended course of treatment.

An appointment for surgery is booked, and the surgeon assigned (actions before implementing the solution).

The patient will be informed of what will happen during the surgery and afterwards (actions to be taken during the implementation).

Key milestones are set for recovery, check-ups booked and so forth.

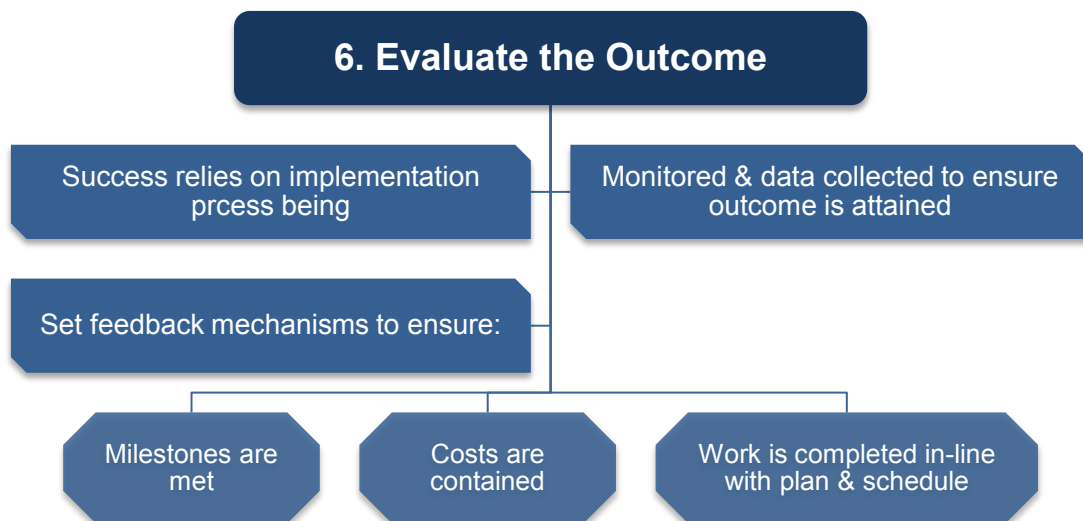
Between Steps Five and during Step Six the operational/technical implementation of the chosen solution takes place.

Step Six: Evaluate the Outcome

The project implementation now needs to be monitored by the group to ensure their recommendations are followed. Monitoring includes checking:

- Milestones are met
- Costs are contained
- Necessary work is completed

Many working groups skip Step Six as they believe that the project itself will cover the issues above, but this often results in the desired outcome not being achieved.



Effective groups designate feedback mechanisms to detect if the project is going off course. They also ensure the project is not introducing new problems. This step relies on:

- The collection of data
- Accurate, defined reporting mechanisms
- Regular updates from the Project Manager
- Challenging progress and actions when necessary

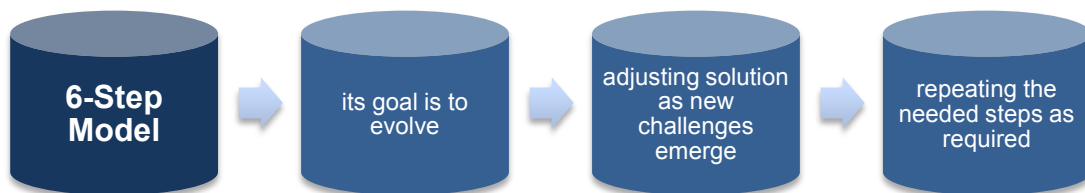
In Step Six, as the results of the project emerge, evaluation helps the group decide if they need to return to a previous step or continue with the implementation. Once the solution goes live, the PS group should continue to monitor the solutions progress, and be prepared to re-initiate the Six Step process when it is required. What does this mean for our patient?

The surgery is performed (key milestone met).

Following the operation the patient would be monitored to ensure that the surgery has worked – symptom reduction and lack of side effects etc. (results).

Long-term checks would be made to ensure that the treatment continues to be effective, and if further treatment is necessary (outcomes).

Overall, the Six Step method is a simple and reliable way to solve a problem.



Using a creative, analytical approach to problem solving is an intuitive and reliable process. It helps keep groups on track, and enables a thorough investigation of the problem and solution search. It involves implementers and users, and finds a justifiable, monitorable solution based on data.

Key Points

- The Six Step Problem Solving Model provides a shared, collaborative, and systematic approach to problem solving.
- Each step must be completed before moving on to the next step. However, the steps are repeatable. At any point the group can return to an earlier step, and proceed from there.
- The goal is not to solve but to evolve, adjusting the solution continually as new challenges emerge, through repeating the Six Step Process.

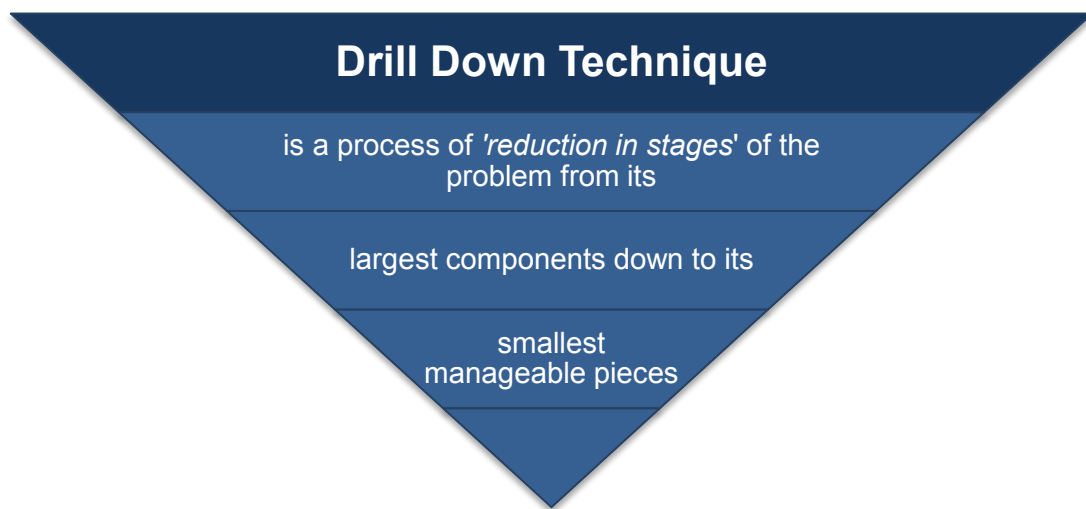
Key Points cont.

- Step 1. Define the Problem – Identify problems through problem formulation and questioning. The key is asking the right questions to discover root causes.
- Step 2. Determine the Root Cause – During this process, assumptions are uncovered and underlying problems are further revealed. Also, this is an opportunity to collect and analyze data.
- Step 3. Develop Alternative Solutions – Decisions are made within the group to determine the appropriate solution and process through creative selection.
- Step 4. Select a Solution – Once the group has formed solutions and alternatives to the problem(s), they need to explore the pros and cons of each option through forecasting consequences.
- Step 5. Implement the Solution – Develop an action plan to implement and execute the solution process.
- Step 6. Evaluate the Outcome – This final stage requires an evaluation of the outcomes and results of the solution process. Ask questions such as: Did the option answer the questions we were working on? Did this process address the findings that came out of the assumptions?
- This process helps keep groups on track, and enables a thorough investigation of the problem and solution search.

The Drill Down Technique

As you already know, business can be complicated. In fact, business is complicated in most cases, as successfully positioning yourself in the market in order to make sales and turn a profit is a tremendous challenge. As the saying goes, *'if it were easy, everyone would do it'*.

When running a complex and fast-moving business, problems are sure to come up along the way. With that in mind, you need to have a plan for how you are going to deal with these complicated problems in a way that allows you to get down to a suitable solution as soon as possible. One such approach to problem solving is known as the Drill Down Technique.



You can probably guess from the name of this problem solving method roughly what it involves. The term 'drill down' is frequently used in business to highlight any process that narrows something down from bigger components into smaller pieces. That is exactly what is going to happen within the Drill Down Technique of problem solving. When you are facing a large and complex problem with significant potential ramifications, one of the best things you can do is break that problem down into its various components until you have it solved.

Executing this Technique

To use the drill down method successfully, you are going to need to have a plan. You can choose to work through this process either on your computer

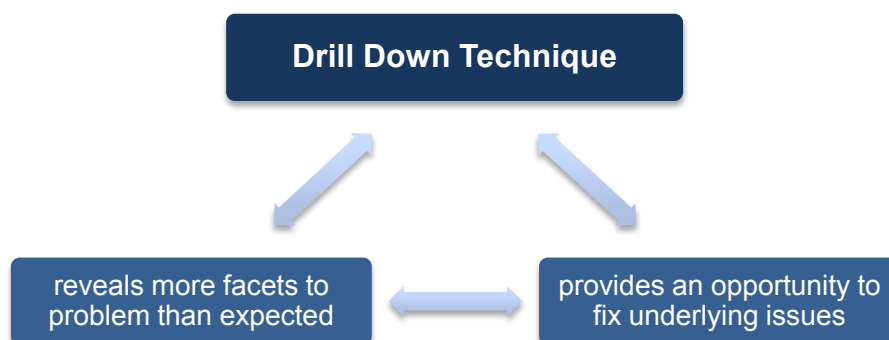
or with a pen on a piece of paper; whatever suits your personal preferences. To start, write down the problem that you are facing in big letters at the top of the page. Try to sum up the problem in just a word or a short phrase, even if it is complicated in nature. This will be your starting point, and the rest of the drill down process will take place from here.

Next, you are going to break down the problem into three to five smaller issues that make up the big problem. These points shouldn't be all the way down to the micro level just yet, but rather they should be just one 'step' below the big problem itself. Once you have those points in place, work your way down another level to highlight a new list of problems that you need to address.

This process will continue until you simply can't drill down any farther. Once you have reached what you consider to be the bottom of your chart, you will be finished and you can begin to look for solutions among what you have created.

Reading Your Chart

Drilling down the big problem that you are facing into a variety of smaller pieces is likely to lead you to some surprising results. For one thing, you are going to see that there is a lot more to this problem than you initially believed.



It is often a surprise to see how many various factors and influences can come together in just one problem, which is exactly why you needed to go through this drill down process in the first place. Taking the time to work through this chart has helped you understand the problem from top to

bottom, meaning you now have a better chance of coming to the correct solution.

Some of the points that you write down on the chart you have created will be straight forward and require no further investigation. In other words, they won't be 'suspects' when it comes to creating this problem that you are trying to fix. However, other points that you uncover are going to need to be looked at more closely.

Those are the points that you may need to address in order to actually solve your problem. The beauty of having multiple levels of points is that you will have the chance to get down to the bottom of the matter before making changes. You don't want to only solve the superficial problem at hand, as that problem will only come back again if you didn't fix the underlying issues.

By using the Drill Down Technique properly, you can get down the heart of the matter and make a fix that is going to last.

Works Nicely with Other Methods

The Drill Down Technique fits in nicely with other forms of problem solving that are often used in business. Specifically, the five whys method matches up with this line of thinking in a number of ways. Both methods are focused on getting to the heart of the problem rather than just fixing the top level issue, and both methods ask you to think about the operation of your business as a whole, instead of just the factors immediately related to the problem in front of you.



These methods don't necessarily offer a shortcut to a solution, but it really isn't a shortcut that you should be looking for – instead, you should be

looking for a meaningful answer to a major problem that is threatening your business. Get to the heart of the problem, and you will get down to what it is that has been plaguing your company.

As is so often the case when doing business, you need to make sure that the entire company is on board and on the 'same page' when it comes to using the drill down technique. This method isn't going to be very useful if only some of your team is using it properly, so take time to train people on how to drill down effectively to get to the heart of an issue.

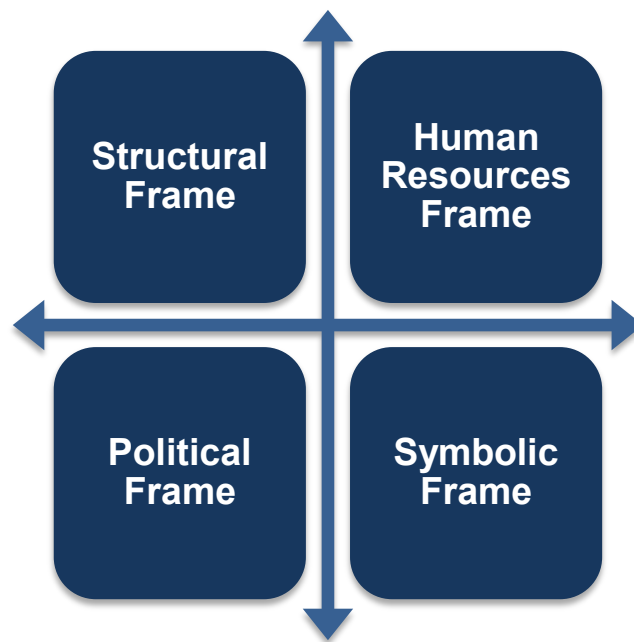
If you integrate this method of problem solving as a tool that is used regularly, you just might be able to avoid having large problems develop – and remain – in your organization. The Drill Down Technique isn't going to solve all of the problems that your business has to fight, but it certainly can help you continue moving forward toward a successful future.

Key Points

- Drill down is a simple technique for breaking complex problems down into progressively smaller parts.
- Start by writing the problem down on the left-hand side of a large sheet of paper.
- On the right of each point, write down the points that make up the next level of detail.
- Repeat this process, for each new point that you identify.
- Keep on drilling down until you have identified all of the factors contributing to the original problem.
- This technique can be used in conjunction with the 5 Why Analysis to ensure that you investigate each aspect of the problem.

The Four Frame Model

The Four Frame Model is a concept that divides up any given organization into 'four frames' – with the goal of understanding these organizations better when they are divided up in this manner. Organizations are extremely complicated entities, with a potentially huge number of personalities, motivations, capabilities, limitations, and more at play.



If you are going to get the most out of your organization, you need to understand it as intricately as possible. While many tools exist for this purpose, the Four Frame Model is one of the most in-depth and one of the most successful.

To get started understanding this way of thinking about an organization, the first thing you need to understand are the four frames themselves. They are as follows:

- Structural
- Human Resource
- Political
- Symbolic

Each of these frames plays an important role in understanding the whole of an organization. If you were to look at just one or two of these frames on their own, the picture would not be clear and you would not necessarily

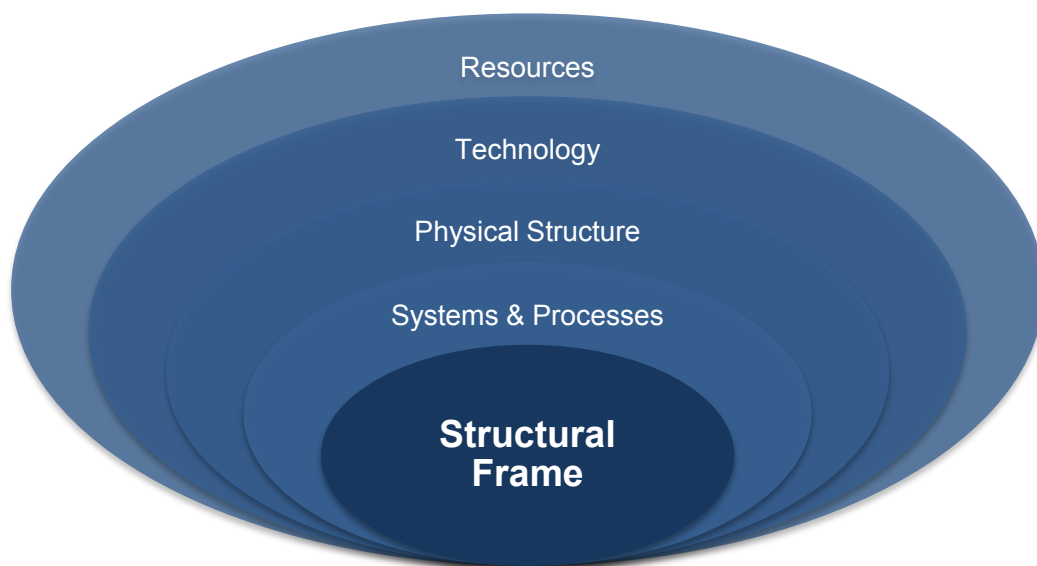
have an accurate image of what the organization is doing today, or what it is capable of doing in the future.

Therefore, if you are going to commit to using this model in the analysis of your own organization, you need to commit to using each of the frames in a meaningful way.

The content below will walk through each of the four frames to gain a better understanding of how each can be used to understand a part of an organization.

Structural Frame

This is the 'nuts and bolts' of the organization. When you think about evaluating your organization and how it works, this is probably what you think of first. How all your systems are organized, how the structure of the business is established, and how your technology works toward reaching goals would all be included in this point.



In many ways, this will be the easiest frame to understand and evaluate, simply because it is so black and white. You can look at the structure of your business objectively and make changes as necessary to achieve better outcomes.

Of course, while this might be the easiest frame to analyze, it also might be the most important – therefore requiring a majority of your time. If the

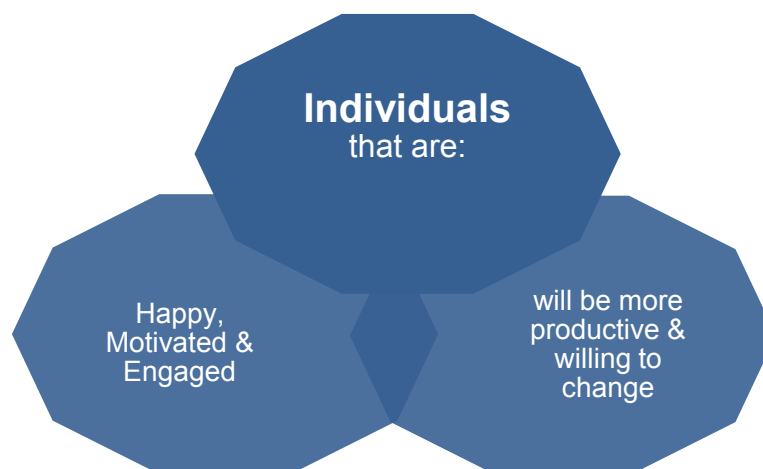
structure of your organization is 'out of whack' for one reason or another, it may not matter what you do within the rest of the frames.

You really need to get this point right, because everything else plays off of an efficient and effective organizational structure. As a business manager or owner, you might not have a more important job than to make sure that the structure of your company makes sense for what you are trying to achieve.

Human Resource Frame

All organizations are made up of individuals. Even if you are in a business that leans heavily on technology, you still have people behind the scenes that make that technology go. Therefore, paying attention to the human side of your organization is essential to short and long-term success.

It tends to be people that are happy and motivated that lead to the best business results, so all companies should take the time and effort necessary to ensure that their people are positive about the work that they do.



Any number of methods can be used to attend to the human side of an organization, from simple team building exercises and employee perks to one-on-one meetings with management to ensure satisfaction and take suggestions. Engaging employees of all levels in the operation of the business is frequently the best way to raise moral and productivity.

Political Frame

It is impossible to escape politics. They exist everywhere you turn, and that is especially true in business. Your organization is full of politics, whether you want to acknowledge their existence or not. So, in order to understand your organization and move it forward successfully, you need to have a clear picture of how the politics in your company are working.

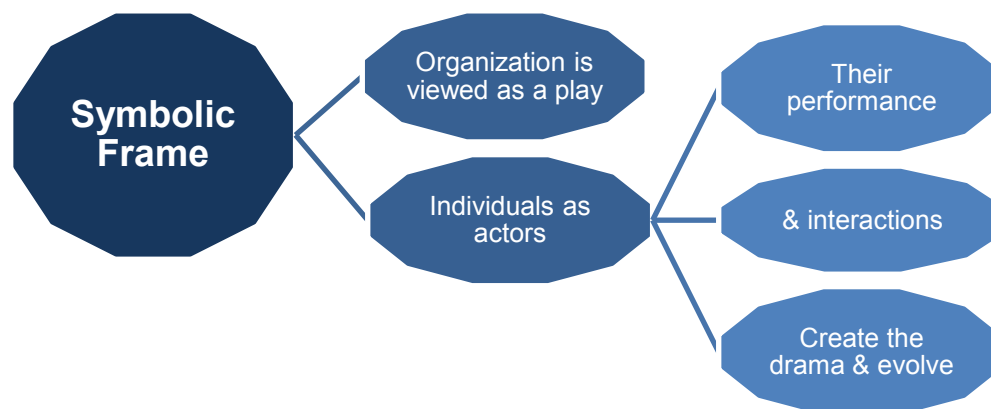
Who are the power players who are driving most of the decision making?

Are there various parties fighting for control and recognition, and how do they intend on getting it?

Politics often have an automatically negative connotation, but it doesn't have to be that way. Some politics can be healthy and productive, especially when there is competition among employees to reach new achievements and accomplish company goals.

Symbolic Frame

This might be the most difficult frame for the average business owner or manager to understand and use, as it requires thinking in a way that is not conventional for a business professional.



In this frame, you are going to look at the organization through the lens of theater or drama, in that the individuals involved in the organization are seen as actors in an ongoing performance.

This line of thinking and framing gives life to the organization, and the meaning behind the actions that are taken matters in many ways more than the results of those actions. It isn't so much about rules in this point as it is about the way the organization moves and evolves together into the future.

The four frames is an effective tool in large part because of how it forces you to look at your company or business from a variety of different angles. Rather than seeing things the same way over and over again – and coming to the same conclusions as a result – you are going to need to see things from a unique angle when you work through the four frames.

It might not be clear at first what you are going to gain when you use each frame, but stick with the process and take the time to deal with each one before moving on to the next. As long as you commit to the method and give it your full attention, you should come away with a far greater understanding of the organization as a whole.

Key Points

- The Four Frame Model is designed to help you understand and approach issues about organizational problems, development, and change.
- It views organizations in four frames representing separate metaphors: structural (factories or machines), human resource (personal relationships), political (jungles or battles for power), and symbolic (theatre or drama).
- Each of these frames can be thought of as a different perspective or way of looking at things, which can help you to see the same situation in a variety of ways.

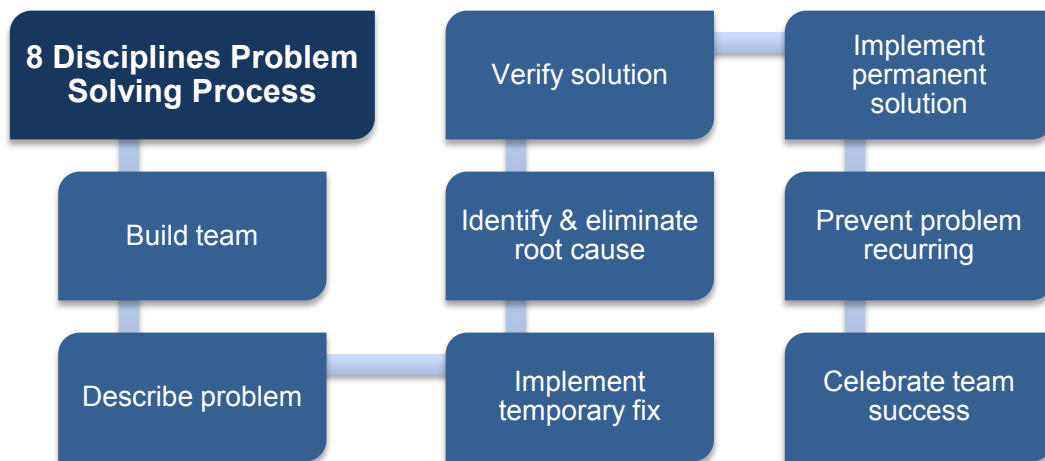
Key Points cont.

- The structural frame focuses on the architecture of the organization. This includes goals, structure, technology, roles and relationships.
- The human resource frame emphasizes individual needs, feelings, fears, prejudices, skills, and development opportunities.
- The political frame emphasizes power and competition, taking into account diverse beliefs, interests, behaviors, and skills.
- The symbolic frame treats organizations as theatre or drama focusing on meaning and faith.
- With each of the four frames, the interested organizational observer can view the same situation in at least four ways.

Eight Disciplines Problem Solving

Anytime a problem solving tool or process has been developed by one of the world's largest companies, it is certainly worthy of a closer look. That is the case here with the Eight Disciplines Problem Solving process, which has been developed and used by Ford.

As you certainly are aware, Ford is among the leading automakers in the world, and this process has played a role in the success that they have enjoyed over the years. Even if you own or manage an organization significantly smaller than Ford, you can still benefit from the proper application of this process.



As the name would indicate, there are eight disciplines included in this process; each designed to help you move a step closer to a successful conclusion. If you would like to solve just about any kind of problem in your organization, you can apply the method within this process and you will likely be on the right path.

Before getting started, it is important to point out that this eight-step process actually has a ninth step, which is planning. A good plan is always important in business, so this initial step should not be overlooked. The basics of the planning stage include figuring out what exactly the problem is that needs to be solved, who is going to be involved in the solution and what other information/resources are going to be required. Once that foundation is laid, you can proceed with the eight steps below.

Build the Team

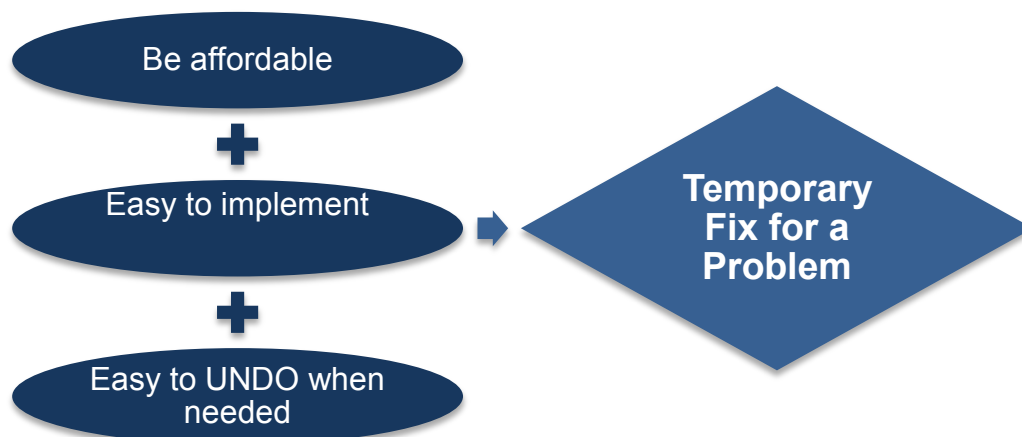
Almost everything in business is better accomplished with the help of a team, and that certainly includes problem solving. Put together a team that has all of the experience and knowledge necessary to get at the heart of the problem. This just might be the most important step of all, as using a good team will make it far easier to reach a satisfactory outcome in this process. Once your team is composed, you will be ready to work your way through the rest of the steps without much trouble.

Describe the Problem

In order to successfully solve any problem, you have to have a good idea of exactly what that problem is. So, at this step in the process, you are going to take the time to carefully highlight the problem in great detail so that each team member is clear as to what needs to be solved. Of course, you are free to use any other organizational methods for identifying problems that you currently use in your business at this stage.

Implement a Temporary Fix

This is one of the most interesting points in the process. Rather than waiting until the end of the process to fix the problem, which is what would happen in most other problem solving methods, eight disciplines approach calls for a temporary fix to be applied early on.



This is a fix that should be affordable, easy to put into action, and easy to undo once the permanent fix has been selected. By putting a temporary fix

into place at this early stage, you can limit the damage that is done to the organization while waiting for the problem to be solved.

Identify and Eliminate the Root Cause

This is where the team will really ‘get down to business’ as far as finding a solution to the problem goes. Now that you have the temporary fix in place, you can take your time in determining exactly what it is that is at the heart of the problem.

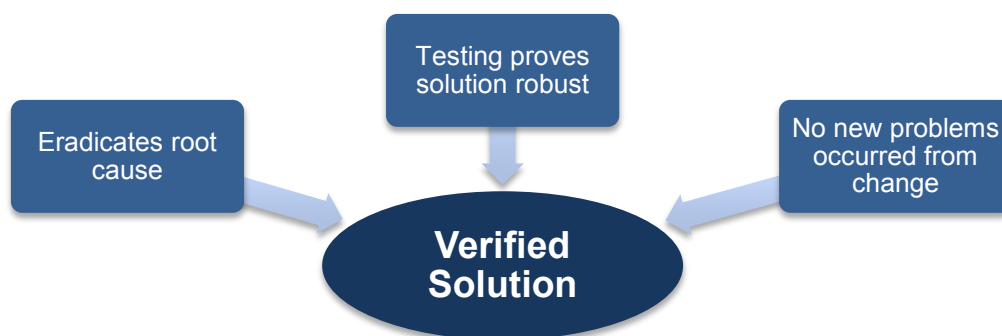
Why does this problem keep coming up?

How many levels do you need to go down until you find the root cause?

Again on this step, there are a number of other business tools that you can fold into the eight disciplines technique in order to successfully track down the root cause.

Verify the Solution

After you have successfully identified the root cause of the problem, you will need to select a solution that you are going to put in place for the long run. Once a solution has been selected by the team, it should be carefully tested before it is implemented on a permanent basis.



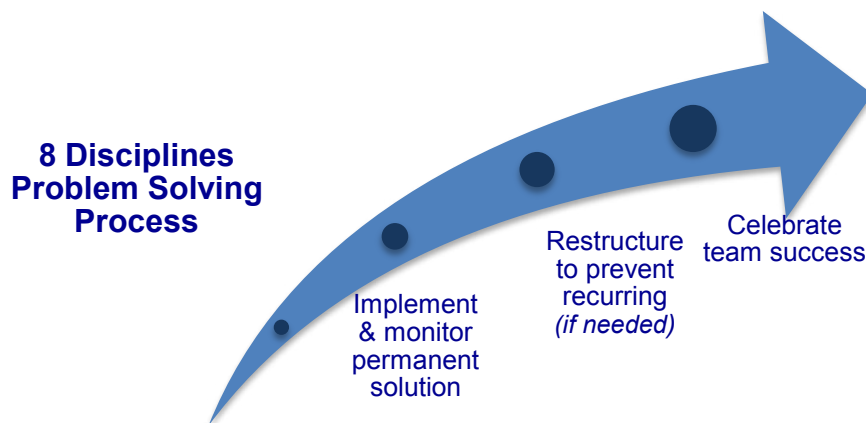
Find ways to test out the solution that has been reached in the short term so that you can observe any other problems that may come up as a result of these changes. Does your solution have unintended side effects, or does it seem to be working as expected? Take your time at this stage to ensure success in the end.

Implement a Permanent Solution

With testing out the way and the solution confirmed, it is time to permanently enact that solution that you have chosen. Of course, even though you have already tested the solution, you will still need to monitor its progress for a period of time before you can be confident that it is working as expected.

Prevent the Problem from Recurring

The best solutions to problems are those that keep the problem from coming back at any point in the future. After the permanent fix for the problem is in place, take a step back and think about how you can structure the organization to make sure this problem is not faced again in the future.



Celebrate Team Success

This last step in the process isn't so much about solving the problem as it is about rewarding the team that has done a great job in coming to a solution. The team members should be rewarded and congratulated formally to ensure that they know how much their hard work is appreciated by the organization. The appropriate type of celebration will depend on how much work went into the process, and what problem was eventually solved.

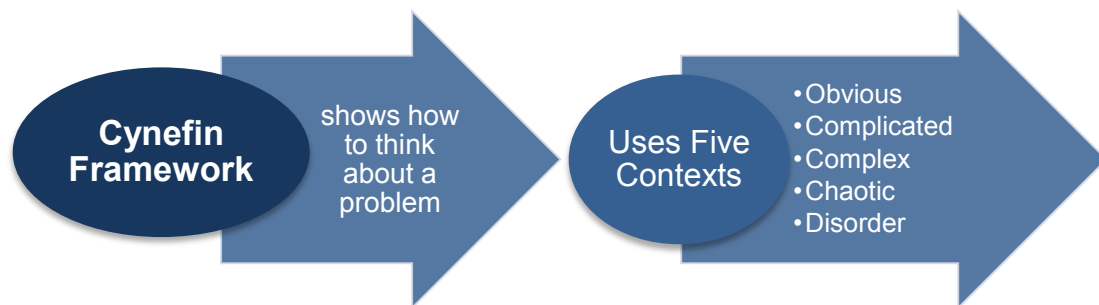
The Eight Disciplines Problem Solving method has been good enough for Ford to put into use for many years, and it deserves consideration in your own organization as well. Once you understand how each of the steps leads into the next, you should have great success using this layout to locate solutions to even your toughest problems.

Key Points

- The Eight Disciplines Problem Solving procedure is focused on product and process improvement, its purpose is to identify, correct, and eliminate recurring problems.
- It aims to establish a permanent corrective action based on fixing the origin of the problem by determining the root cause.
- It is a highly disciplined and effective scientific approach for resolving chronic and recurring problems.
- Once a problem has been recognized, the 8 disciplines used to solve
 - Team Formation, Problem Description, Implementing Interim Containment Actions, Defining Problem Root Causes, Developing Permanent Corrective Actions, Implementing Permanent Corrective Actions, Preventing Reoccurrences, and Recognizing and Congratulating the Team.
- Once the problem has been resolved, the team should publish and release a final report along with lessons learned.

The Cynefin Framework

Are you able to approach every situation that you face in the same manner? Of course not. Some problems require complex solutions, while others can be handled with the most basic of steps. Often, the problems that you face in business will fall somewhere between those two extremes. No matter what the problems look like that you are facing in your organization today, the Cynefin Framework can help you work toward a satisfactory conclusion.



Rather than provide you with a problem-solving plan, as is the case with other tools, the Cynefin Framework instead helps you figure out how you should be thinking about a problem in the first place. In many ways, this framework is a level 'above' other problem solving processes. You could theoretically use the Cynefin Framework to figure out how you should be dealing with a problem, and then you could move into another problem solving method if you so choose to get down to the business of finding a solution.

The core of this framework is the way that it breaks down problems into one of five contexts. The idea is to place the problem that you are facing into one of these specific contexts, which will then help you decide how that problem needs to be approached. These five contexts, along with information related to each, are listed below.

Obvious Context

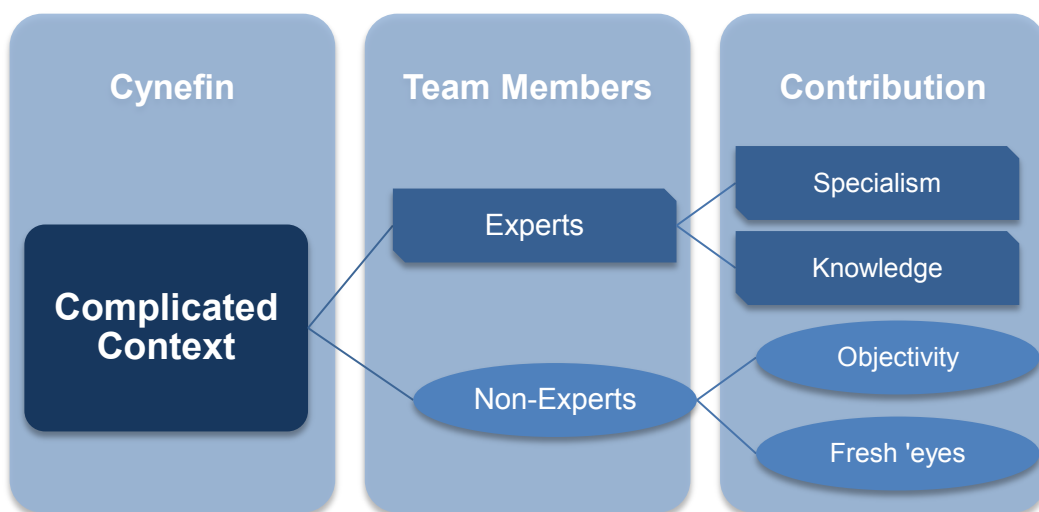
The name speaks for itself in this first context, where the problems are basically self-explanatory and the cause and effect relationships that you need to uncover are right there for you to see. This is the content that most business owners and managers would like to see their problems fall into, as

it is going to take the least amount of work to solve problems in this portion of the framework. Many times, you will have a 'go-to' solution for problems in this category, since you will have likely solved similar problems previously.

One point that needs to be made with regard to the Obvious Context is the fact that you will need to be careful to take these kinds of problems for granted. Since the solution is relatively simple and straightforward, it is easy to get lulled to sleep when this kind of issue comes up. It is still important to carefully analyze what is going on in order to make a smart decision. While these problems might not be complicated or hard to fix, they are still important in the long run.

Complicated Context

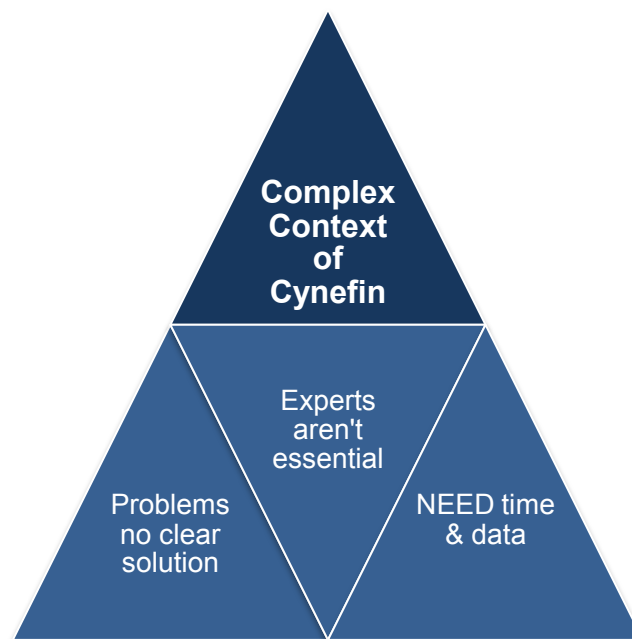
Complicated problems are no stranger to organizations of all shapes and sizes, and these are problems that are usually fixed by experts in the specific field in question. For instance, if you have a technical problem with your website, it is most likely that the solution is going to come from someone within your IT team. Even if you have plenty of experienced managers and decision makers outside of IT, those individuals will not usually have the knowledge of the subject at hand that is necessary to make a smart move.



However, it would be a mistake to totally disregard the rest of your team in favor of leaning on an expert in this situation. Instead, the best approach is frequently to use a team of people – including the experts – who can come together in order to find a solution. When you fold in experts to a team of other problem solvers, you get the best of both worlds. The experts bring the technical knowledge necessary, and the others offer an objective opinion on how the problem should be resolved.

Complex Context

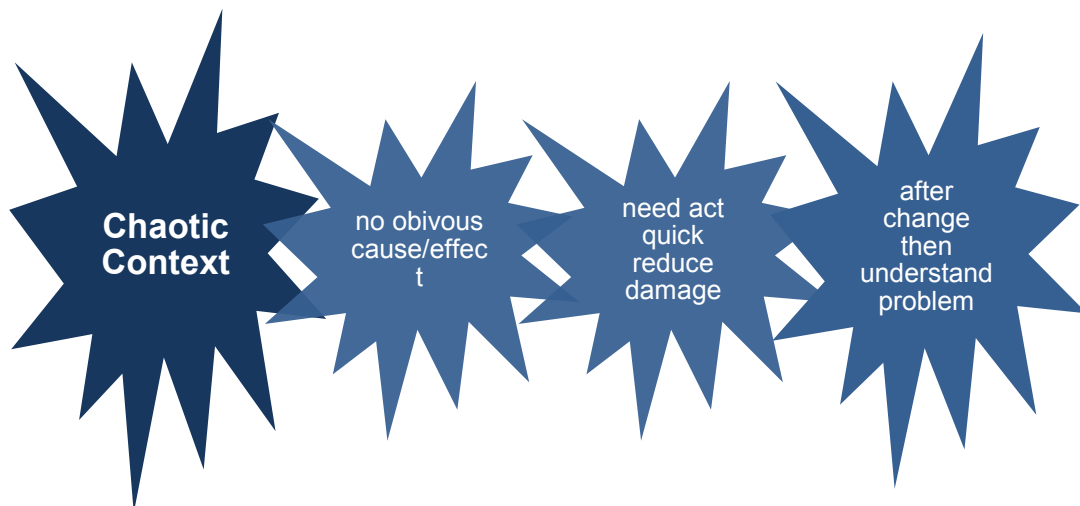
Complex might seem like the same thing as complicated, but these are actually two very different areas. When you move into the Complex Context part of the framework, you are dealing with problems that might not have a clear solution at the present time. You don't necessarily need an expert in order to solve this problem – you may just need more time and information. Often, these problems need to be monitored for a period of time until a decisive course of action can be taken.



Again in this case, assembling a team is going to work to your advantage. With a team of talented people working on the issue, you should be able to address the problem as soon as a solution starts to emerge from the confusion.

Chaotic Context

Speaking of confusion, it is usually confusion that reigns when you are dealing in the Chaotic Context. Problems that find themselves in this part of the framework have no obvious connection between cause and effect, and you might not have time to work through the information thoroughly in order to find a good solution.

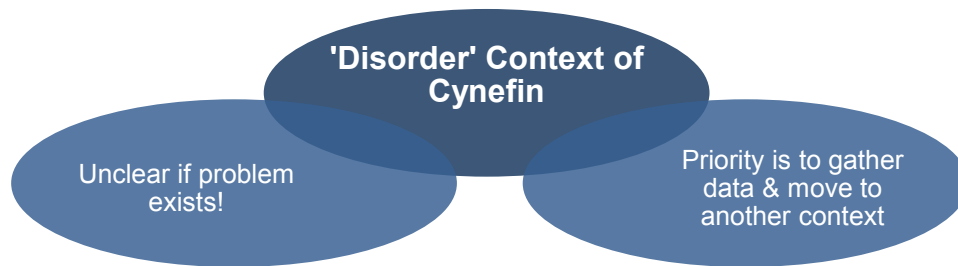


When a chaotic problem arises, you will likely need to take quick action to prevent any further damage from being done. Once action has been taken and the problem has been mitigated as thoroughly as possible, you can then work toward removing the chaos and gaining a better understanding of what is going on.

Disorder

The last category of problems within the Cynefin Framework is referred to 'Disorder'. One of the challenges that is associated with this part of the system is the fact that you might not even know when you are at this point.

It might not even be clear what the problem is, or if there is even a problem in the first place. Therefore, it is the gathering of information that should be prioritized when disorder is taking hold.



Get more information about the problem or problems that you are facing, and you should then be able to move those problems into one of the other four areas of the framework.

Using the Cynefin Framework is often a great way to get started on the process of problem solving. This process isn't going to solve your problems all the way from start to finish – instead, it is going to help you get moving in the right direction. Once you identify where in this framework your problems are found, you can then start to solve them using a variety of other means and methods.

Key Points

- The Cynefin Framework helps you figure out how you should be thinking about a problem rather than providing a method for solving it.
- The core of this framework is the way that it breaks down problems into one of five contexts.
- The idea is to place the problem that you are facing into one of these specific contexts, which will then help you decide how that problem needs to be approached.
- The five contexts are: Obvious, Complicated, Complex, Chaotic and Disorder.
- Obvious: Are self-explanatory and the cause and effect relationships that you need to uncover are right there for you to see.
- Complicated: Are those that are usually best left to experts in the specific field in question.

Key Points

- Complex: Might not have a clear solution at the present time. You don't necessarily need an expert in order to solve this problem; you may just need more time and information.
- Chaotic: There is no obvious connection between cause and effect. Once action has been taken and the problem has been mitigated as thoroughly as possible, you can then work toward removing the chaos and gaining a better understanding of what is going on.
- Disorder: The state of not knowing what type of causality exists, in which state people will revert to their own comfort zone in making a decision.
- Once you identify where in this framework your problems are found, you can then start to solve them using a variety of other means and methods.

Other Free Resources

The Free Management eBooks website offers you over 500 free resources for your own professional development. Our eBooks, Checklists, and Templates are designed to help you with the management issues you face every day. They can be downloaded in PDF, Kindle, ePub, or Doc formats for use on your iPhone, iPad, laptop or desktop.

eBooks – Our free management eBooks cover everything from accounting principles to business strategy. Each one has been written to provide you with the practical skills you need to succeed as a management professional.

Templates – Most of the day-to-day management tasks you need to do have already been done by others many times in the past. Our management templates will save you from wasting your valuable time re-inventing the wheel.

Checklists – When you are working under pressure or doing a task for the first time, it is easy to overlook something or forget to ask a key question. These management checklists will help you to break down complex management tasks into small controllable steps.

FME Newsletter – Subscribe to our free monthly newsletter and stay up to date with the latest professional development resources we add every month.

Social Media - Share our free management resources with your friends and colleagues by following us on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and RSS.

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