

SEN-SRN Conversion Course
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Study Skills Module

Problem Solving



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Lecture Overview

 Problems

 Problem Solving Process/Cycle

 Eight Stage Approach to Problem Solving

What is a “Problem”?

Definition:

“Problems” are the unintended and unsatisfactory situations – something going wrong, some deviation from the expected standard – that prevent the achievement of objectives. Consequently problems are things that go wrong or fail to go right.

- All of us who work in or for the health services, however senior or junior, are very well aware that we have to face problems.

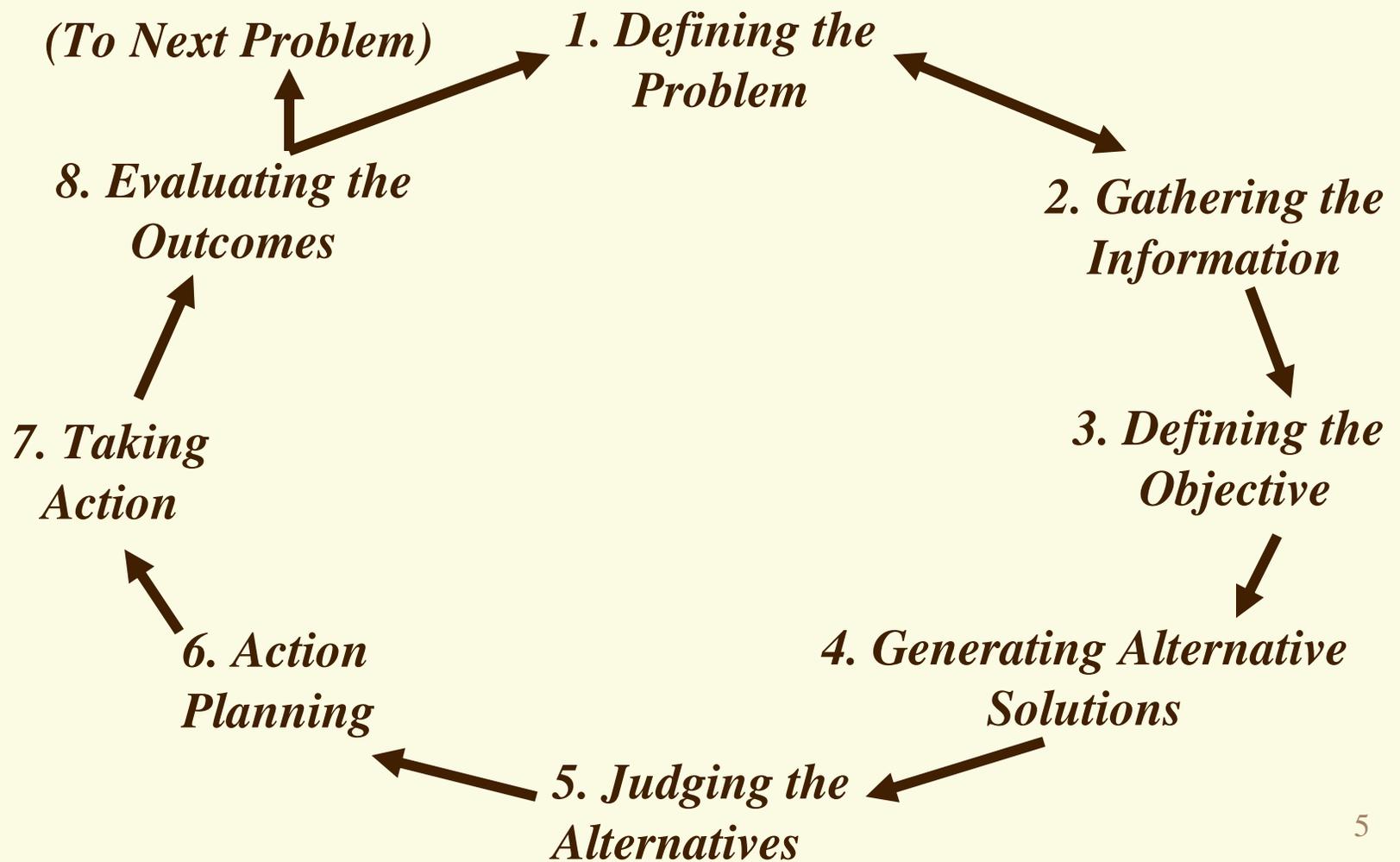
Problem Solving

Definition:

Problem Solving can be defined as the systematic and logical process by which the best solution(s) to a problem can be found and successfully implemented. This process is sometimes referred to as “*The Problem Solving Cycle*”.

 Problem solving by itself is not enough. Our first obligation is to try and prevent problems arising if possible, and to ease or reduce their consequences if they cannot be adequately solved.

The Problem Solving Cycle



The Problem Solving Cycle is a ..

- ☞ ***Creative process***, especially at stage 4 (generating alternative solutions) where the generation of options for solving the problem requires wide-ranging imaginative thinking.
- ☞ ***Decision-making process***, which is the process of choosing between alternative courses of action especially at stage 5 (judging the alternatives).
- ☞ ***Management of change process***, especially at stages 6 and 7 (action planning, taking action), when the preferred solution has to be successfully implemented in practice.

Problem Solving Cycle - Stage 1 & 2

1. *Defining the problem:* what exactly is the problem?
2. *Gathering the information:* what essential information do we require?

☞ These two stages are interdependent (and are therefore shown as linked by two-way arrows) because the attempt to define the problem requires certain information that, by starting to clarify the essential nature of the problem, frequently shows what further and more precise information is needed.

Problem Solving Cycle - Stage 3

3. *Defining the object:* so what precisely are we aiming to achieve? Objectives should be quite clear, basically:

- To restore performance to the required standard
- To reduce the likelihood of the problem recurring

☞ This stage deals with **WHAT** is to be achieved and not **HOW** this is achieved as **HOW** is dealt with in stages 4, 5 and 6.

☞ **Objectives have to be SMART:**

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Related
- Time bound

Problem Solving Cycle - Stage 4

4. *Generating alternative solutions:* how many different ways are there to solve the problem? During this stage the group shall generate (produce, devise) many different ways and ideas of solving that defined problem by achieving that defined objective.

 **Brainstorming** is one well-tested creative method for a group to produce an unusually wide range of ideas. Its rules are:

- Participants are there to generate ideas, not to assess them.
- A time limit is set beforehand, someone is appointed to write on larger paper what is called out.
- A chairman is useful to define the problem, and co-ordinate ⁹

Problem Solving Cycle - Stage 5 & 6

5. *Judging the Alternatives:* which is the best option for solving the problem? The task starts by reducing the numerous options (generated during the brainstorming session) into a smaller number which have a sufficient merit to justify further work because they might include, or contribute to, the solution or solutions eventually chosen.

6. *Action planning:* how can this solution be achieved? This stage emphasizes the need for thoughtful planning and careful preparation for the action to be taken. In this process it is possible that **potential** problems will be identified.

Problem Solving Cycle - Stage 7 & 8

- 7. *Taking action:*** implementing the solution. The action plan and the changes required will have to be implemented. The person responsible to implement the changes required must be readily available throughout the actual change, in order to give decisions and support. His place is at the scene of action, not in a remote office.
- 8. *Evaluating the outcomes:*** how far does the action solve the problem? What next? If the problem is partially solved – take remedial action where necessary, if the problem is solved – move on to the next problem.