Further readings and templates

# Chapter 14: Problem solving and creativity

## The rational problem-solving process

### 1. Defining the problem

Therefore, the more ways we frame a problem, the more likely we are to come to a good solution. We might think about considering the following:

 **Writing the problem down** – Seeing something written down can help to identify where any ambiguity may be. Writing an objective down gives time for people to think about it, and sometimes, people can find it easier to question something which they see in front of them rather than something they hear.

 **Watch for the nouns and verbs being used** – The phrasing of the problem may include words which limit flexibility or creativity later on. For example, it is tempting to argue that a particular problem ‘is occurring throughout the organisation’ when in reality, there is little evidence to support such a view – and there may be evidence to indicate that this is not the case.

 **Phrase the problem as a question –** Phrasing a problem as a question ensures that we don’t fall into the trap of jumping to conclusions by claiming that a problem is ‘clearly caused by Y, so we need to stop Y immediately!’ Using others’ creativity and ‘framing’ (i.e. stating a problem as being caused by X’) a problem *in as many ways as possible* means that it is more likely to be solved. Wherever possible, the question needs to allow individuals to focus on what the processes causing the problem might be, rather than the goal itself: focussing on the goal is likely to restrict thinking to a less creative approach.

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| BOX - THE UNFORESEEN PROBLEM  Being a good business leader is not only about being able to solve problems that you have now – it is about being able to solve problems which are not problems now, but which will become problems if no action is taken.  We could look at the example of Kodak. Kodak was hugely successful for a very long time as a producer of photographic equipment – camera film, photographic paper, high street photographic services, etc – but it failed to react to the advent of digital photography. It was satisfied with its performance and believed that whilst there were small issues which arose from time to time, there were no major issues which needed to be addressed.  What Kodak didn’t see coming was the popularity with which digital photography would be received and adopted – and that really affected Kodak’s success. The business model – previously based upon the production of professional photographic products – started to fail. Kodak is still a viable company, but has had to focus on a much smaller market.  The same is true of a number of shops we might expect to find on the high street. Book stores in particular have seen their share of the market shrink considerably as 1) Amazon.com and other online book stores have become successful, 2) as reading books on devices such as Amazon’s own ‘Kindle’ have become important and 3) as agreements between book publishers and retailers have broken down.  The skill of the manager is needed not only to address problems which are currently being faced, but to imagine and understand trends so that they can take advantage of forthcoming situations  For you to consider:  What careers do you imagine might be open to you in a few years’ time?  What can you do now to prepare for those new careers? |