

Student name: _____ Date: _____

Developing problem-solving skills in the workplace.

Objectives:

- A. Identify the five components for problem solving.
- B. Describe ways to solve a problem at work.

MODULE 4J: INFORMATION SHEET

TO THE STUDENT: Read and study the following information sheet and then complete the student activities at the end of this module.

Introduction

In this module you will identify the five components used in problem solving strategies used in the workplace. The information provided is not all-inclusive; it is intended to serve as a guide for basic problem-solving skills used in the workplace.

Problem-solving skills

Employers, managers and employees are faced with problems every day. Having problems to deal with seems to be a fact of life. We cannot always prevent problems from occurring, but we have control over how we handle problems and how we cope with problems. Being willing to recognize problems is a start to finding effective solutions. There are no guarantees that the decisions we make will always be the right decisions. People who are willing to work through problems, though, are less likely to make snap judgments or generate more problems for themselves. They are more likely to be problem-solvers.

As new technologies make old job skills obsolete the nature and character of work changes. Business leaders stress that to be successful, today's workers must be able to solve problems in a variety of settings and adapt to this changing environment. These leaders are quick to point out that they need people who can analyze problems, gather and synthesize information, and present ideas clearly.

The environment in which it occurs shapes problem solving. Most shops or companies have procedures and guidelines that outline how many problems are investigated and how recommendations are to be made.

Trial and error and an extended, systematic approach are two ways of dealing with problems. Trial and error is a key strategy for problems that do not involve risk to people, equipment, or large sums of money. Trial and error is simply trying different solutions to see if they work; it is trying out a reasonable guess.

Extended systematic problem solving occurs when workers break a problem into parts and gather evidence before acting on a solution. Extended problem solving is a key approach for large problems involving many departments or offices or when people, equipment, and capital are at risk.

Problem solving is a skill that can be learned. There are many ways to solve problems. There is no one right way. However, using a problem-solving procedure may help find the best response to the situation.

Problem-solving procedure

There are five steps in a problem-solving procedure:

1. Identify the problem.
2. Gather information about the situation.
3. List possible solutions to the problem.
4. Evaluate possible results of each solution.
5. Decide on the best solution.

1. Identify the problem.

It is important to correctly identify the problem. Control your emotions so that you can talk about the problem. STOP. Many students have a problem with that word. They continue with the service but fail to realize by continuing they may be making it worse.

2. Gather information about the situation.

You need to know all the facts so you can make a good decision. RE-TRACE THE STEP-BY-STEP PROCEDURE. By allowing yourself to re-trace what you have done up until this point this sometimes allows you to see something that you might have overlooked.

3. List possible solutions to the problem.

Think of all the ideas you have that may solve the problem. Be creative. Discuss the problem with others.

4. Evaluate possible results of each solution.

Think through the problem enough to know what might result from you decision.

5. Decide on the best solution.

After you have given the problem some thought, gone through the problem-solving process and discussed the problem with someone you trust, be ready to make the decision you feel is best for the situation.

MODULE 4J: STUDENT ACTIVITIES

TO THE STUDENT: After reading and studying the information sheet, complete the following questions.

Activity 1: Rate Yourself as a Problem Solver

How systematic are you when you must solve a problem? Use this checklist or a copy of it to rate your problem-solving skills. Read each sentence. Put a check in the column that best describes how often you do what each sentence says. Circle the number of the items that you have checked “never” or “unsure.” The circled items are skills you need to learn and use.

Rate Yourself as a Problem Solver

Problem-Solving Skills	Always	Some- times	Rarely	Never	Unsure
1. I try to find out as much as I can about a problem before trying to solve it.					
2. To get information, I talk to others who may be familiar with a problem.					
3. I consult printed or visual resources such as trade journals and troubleshooting guides when trying to solve a problem.					
4. I list possible solutions to a problem before choosing one.					
5. I try to judge how well a solution is suited to a problem before trying it.					
6. I consider safety precautions and warnings when solving a problem.					
7. I conduct a test or dry-run of a solution before carrying it out.					
8. When recommending a solution, I describe the problem, a solution, and its advantages and disadvantages.					

Activity 2: Write the step-by-step procedure used in problem-solving.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

MODULE 4J: STANDARDS ADDRESSED IN THIS MODULE

Pennsylvania’s Academic Standards for Career Education and Work

13.3.11. Career Retention and Advancement

- C. Evaluate conflict resolution skills as they relate to the workplace.
 - Constructive criticism
 - Group dynamics
 - Managing/leadership
 - Mediation
 - Negotiation
 - Problem solving

Pennsylvania’s Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening (RWSL)

1.1.11. Learning to Read Independently

- E. Establish a reading vocabulary by identifying and correctly using new words acquired through the study of their relationships to other words. Use a dictionary or related reference.

1.6.11 Speaking and Listening

- D. Contribute to discussions.
 - Ask relevant, clarifying questions.
 - Respond with relevant information or opinions to questions asked.
 - Listen to and acknowledge the contributions of others.
 - Adjust tone and involvement to encourage equitable participation.
 - Facilitate total group participation.
 - Introduce relevant, facilitating information, ideas and opinions to enrich the discussion.
 - Paraphrase and summarize as needed.