



EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP
IN ACTION

BLACKMORE FOUR

PROBLEM-SOLVING: A MASTERCLASS FOR LEADERS

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES



Why is problem solving critical?



The modern-day world of work, and how it demands effective problem solving.



How to create an environment conducive to problem solving.

WHY IS PROBLEM SOLVING CRITICAL?



The World Economic Forum 'Future of Job Report' lists complex problem solving as the skill in highest demand across industry sectors and overall.

Problem solving is the core skill for the 21st century

Dominic Barton

Former Global Managing Partner of McKinsey



WHAT IS PROBLEM SOLVING?

At Blackmore Four, we define problem solving as:

- Decision making when navigating complexity and uncertainty
- There are no obvious answers
- There are consequences that make the effort to find a good answer worthwhile



WORKFORCE TRENDS



- Disruptive power of social media
- Open office layouts
- Remote working policies
- The emphasis of culture as a business advantage
- Flat organisational structures

Source: [Being a Leader Is More Difficult Than Ever Before Thanks to These 5 Workplace Trends | Inc.com](#)

ACCORDING TO RESEARCH...

The emerging trends include:

- Increasing intensity, complexity and pace of work
- Hiring and retention = more challenging
- Team sizes growing
- Managers having to do more with less
- Working relationships becoming more interdependent

Source: [The-Undermanagement-Epidemic-2019.pdf \(rainmakerthinking.com\)](#)



FLAT ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES – ADVANTAGES

- Reduces the number of levels between staff and executive employees
- Increases agility
- Less obstacles for communication
- Shortens decision-making processes



FLAT ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES – DISADVANTAGES

- Concerns of role confusion
- Subsequent burn out
- Extra burden for leaders as they take on larger and more complex teams



THEREFORE...

- Problem-solving skills are critical, now more than ever.
- Leadership is a team sport.
- A leader is charged with creating an environment conducive to appropriate problem solving.



Source: [The-Undermanagement-Epidemic-2019.pdf \(rainmakerthinking.com\)](#)



WHEN WILL PROBLEM SOLVING BE REQUIRED?

- Choosing a strategy.
- Making or stress testing recommendations amid complexity and time pressure.
- Working in teams.
- Challenging our assumptions.
- Helpful when operating outside our area of expertise and comfort.



ACTIVITY:

**LET'S PUT YOUR PROBLEM-SOLVING
SKILLS INTO PRACTICE!**

HOW DID YOU APPROACH PROBLEM SOLVING?

- Did you choose a strategy? How did you choose one? Did you change it?
- Did you make recommendations amid complexity and time pressure?
- How did you work in your team?
- Did you make assumptions? If yes – did you challenge your assumptions?
- What part of this activity pushed you outside of your area of comfort?
- What part was ambiguous?

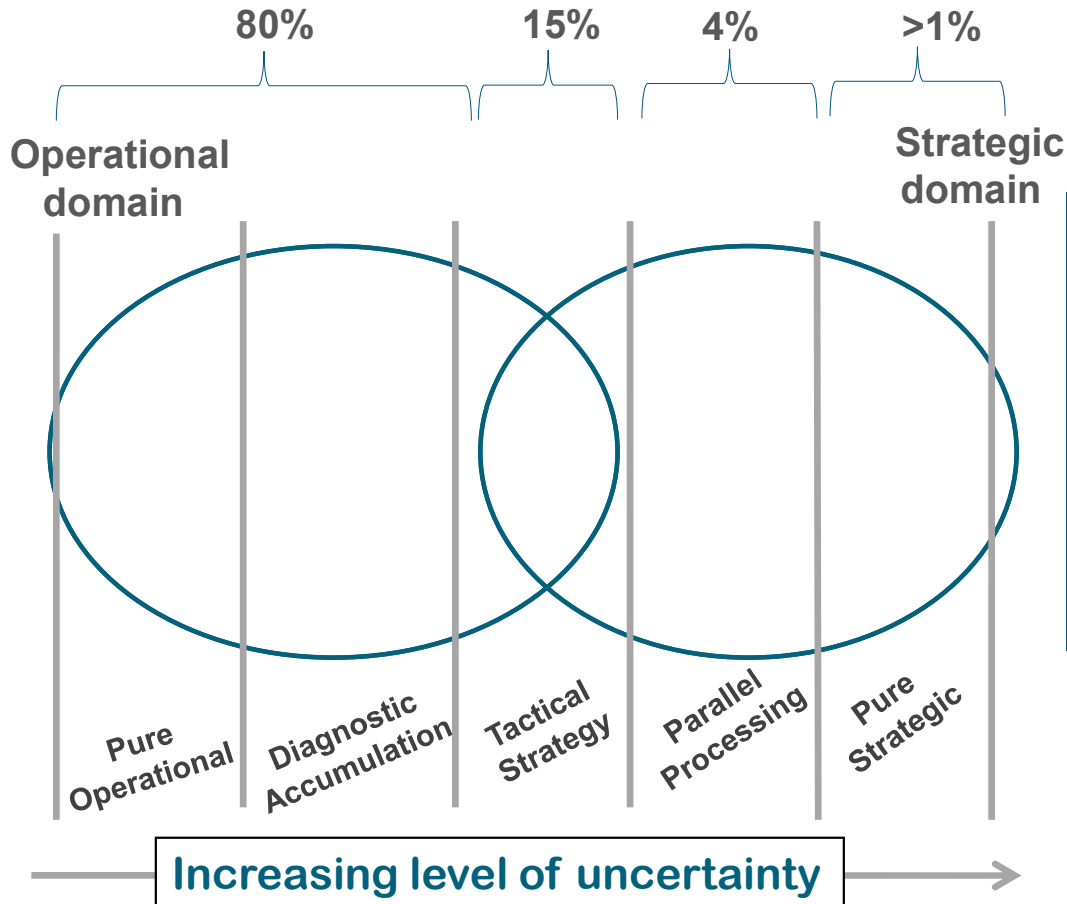


WHAT ARE COMMON BLOCKS TO PROBLEM SOLVING?

- Failing to fully understand the problem before seeking solutions
- Seeing what you expect to see, not what is actually there
- Not isolating the problem from insignificant surroundings
- Not seeing the whole context
- Fear of thinking the “unthinkable” or taking a risk
- Judging rather than generating ideas
- Too much haste – wanting to find a quick solution
- Tradition



WORLD OF WORK



Key work related processing dimensions

- Less structure, increasing chaos
- Less pragmatic, more ideas orientation/possibilities
- Less detail complexity, more dynamic complexity
- Less short term consequences, more long term impact

STRATIFIED SYSTEMS THEORY BY ELLIOT JACQUES



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Source: [The Development of Intellectual Capability: A Discussion of Stratified Systems Theory - Elliott Jaques, 1986 \(sagepub.com\)](https://www.sagepub.com)

HOW DO WE CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT CONDUCTIVE TO PROBLEM SOLVING?

STEP 1

Encourage your team to **define the problem clearly**



People often try to solve a problem immediately, before they understand it fully.

Problems are usually exacerbated by “half-baked” solutions.

Clarity of the obstacle will always accelerate the process to overcome it.



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STEP 2

Accept there are some issues over which one has no control



These aren't problems; they are merely facts.

Accept that there are certain non-negotiable obstacles that you need to work around.



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STEP 3

Be careful of accepting (or rejecting) one definition for any problem



The more definitions a problem has, the more likely it is that you will find the best solution.

For example, a problem like low sales may mean strong competitors, ineffective advertising, or a poor sales process.



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STEP 4

Encourage the curiosity around the origin of a problem



You need to identify the root cause, as opposed to treating a symptom. If you don't solve the underlying issue, the problem is likely to happen again, possibly with different symptoms.

Don't waste time re-solving a previous problem.



HOW DO WE CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT CONDUCIVE TO PROBLEM SOLVING?

STEP 5

Encourage the team to bring forward as many potential solutions as possible



The more viable solutions you find, the more likely it is that you will identify the most effective one.



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STEP 6

Prioritise everyone's contribution of **possible** solutions



A good solution that can be easily and quickly applied is better than an excellent solution that is complex, expensive, or requires more time.

Every large problem was once a small problem that could have been solved easily at that time.



HOW DO WE CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT CONDUCTIVE TO PROBLEM SOLVING?

STEP 7

Make a decision and stick to it



Once you have chosen the best solution, decide on a course of action. The longer you wait to decide on what to do, the higher the cost.

Your goal should be to start solving 80% of all problems immediately. Setting deadlines for decisions ensures that you minimise potential costs.



HOW DO WE CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT CONDUCTIVE TO PROBLEM SOLVING?

STEP 8

Delegate tasks and responsibility



Decide who would most effectively deal with elements of the issue or the whole issue.

By delegating tasks, you ensure that each aspect of a solution is properly implemented. Accept others' limits, and subsequent capabilities.



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STEP 9

Assess the effectiveness of the solution after it has been implemented



By doing this, you will know whether and when the problem was actually solved.

“Problem solutions” often have unintended and unanticipated side effects which can exacerbate the original problem.



BLACKMORE FOUR

Closing by Matthew Emerson

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APPENDIX

Level	Pure operational	Diagnostic Accumulation	Alternative Paths (Tactical Strategy)	Parallel Processes	Pure Strategic
Structure	Rules; Policies	Parameters; Frameworks; Boundaries	Fuzzy guidelines; Big picture	3-5 year hypothesis; Future scenarios	5 – 10 year vision for long-term viability
Focus	Task	Person/case/situation/problem	The whole system	Future possibilities; Outside the paradigm	The macro-environment
Time	1 – 3 months	3 months to 1 year	1 to 3 years	3 to 5 years	10 years; Long-term viability
Key Capability	Sensory orientation (Touch, feel, sight, etc.)	Accumulation of information; Understanding needs	Making connections	Modelling (creating a model of the future); Scenario planning	Weaving
Process / Operation	Reactive; Step-by-step; Overcoming one obstacle at a time	Analysing and generating solutions; Customising to needs	Understanding & translating strategy into effective, efficient outcomes through refining processes, restructuring, considering tangible & intangible variables; Continuous improvement; Restructuring Best Practice	Aligning the current system with future possibilities; Working across silos	Long-term viability across macro contexts; Considering the interplay of dynamics within/across macro contexts
Excellence	Accuracy; Precision; Minimising cost/waste; Quality; Getting it right	Pre-empting potential obstacles; Service orientation	Optimising systems; Continuous improvement; System efficiency	Ability to see underlying patterns & dynamics; To suspend knowledge & be open to possibilities	Aware of emerging patterns; Industry strategy
Output	Can be completely specified	Cannot be precisely specified	Understanding company's strategy & making it work/practical	Aligning current systems with future possibilities; Business strategy	Adapting to different; systems/environments
Examples	Clerical work; Manual labour; Hands-on operations Working with tools & routine operations	First level of technical specialist or professional teaching, training, direct sales, rule-based technical work/programming; First line supervisor	Department/unit manager, i.e. middle & snr management level; Manage direct operating systems, i.e. middle manager, divisional manager, principal specialist; First level of organisational improvement; Individual technical specialists; Professionals & scientists operating	General Management level; Senior management, chief specialist & professional roles in the organisation; New product developers; Research Scientists; Senior professional partners	CEO of a subsidiary company within a large corporation; Chair of a multi-national corporation; Individual researchers & philosophers, developing the frontiers of knowledge