

SESSION 6

ANALYZING PROBLEMS

PLANNING SOLUTIONS

Purposes

- To examine the importance of informational interviews from Field Assignment #5.
- To introduce three problem-analysis tools.
- To apply one problem-analysis tool to a case study.
- To introduce a simple planning framework for implementing solutions.
- To have members use materials from this session to analyze a problem drawn from their service.

Session at a Glance

Min		Activities	Materials
25	1	Welcome, Discuss Field Assignment #5	Binders
25	2	Understanding the Nature of Problems	Handout A
45	3	Analyzing Problems	Handout B, blank wall charts, prepared wall chart, markers
15	4	Planning Solutions	Handout C
10	5	Field Assignment #6, The Learning Store	Handouts D, E, F

Preparation for the Session

1. Remind members to bring their binders to the session.
2. Prepare three wall charts:
 - a) Purposes of the session.
 - b) The two tasks in Activity #1, Field Assignment #5, Step 1.
 - c) Completed Problem Tree as shown in Activity #3.
3. Obtain several blank wall charts and markers for small group activity in Activity #3.
4. Copy and punch Handouts A-F.

Activity # 1

Welcome and Discuss Field Assignment #5 – Informational Interviews

25 minutes

STEPS

1. Welcome members and review the purposes of the session using the prepared wall chart.
2. Ask members to open their binders to page 11 and read Training Objective #6.
3. Call for and respond to any questions about the purpose of the session or Training Objective #6.

Field Assignment #5 – Informational Interviews

STEPS

1. Ask members to turn to a neighbor and take ten minutes to:

Facilitator Note: Point to wall charts with these two tasks written on it.

- a) Describe their informational interview. (Who? What? Where?)
 - b) Describe the most important thing they learned by doing the interview.
2. In the large group, ask members to share the most important things they learned by conducting the informational interviews.
 3. Summarize the main points of the discussion and thank members for their responses.

Talking points:

- Choosing a career, in either the public or the private sector, can be difficult, but it is important to continue talking to people, understanding options, and comparing these options to what the members have learned about their personalities.
- The AmeriCorps workbook, ***Life after AmeriCorps: Next Steps***, is an excellent resource for exploring options after service. Explain where it can be obtained if members do not already have it.
- Thank members for their participation. Make the transition to the next activity by telling them that now you will be focusing on a skill that is applicable in all areas of their lives – from the personal to the professional-- a way of approaching problems and planning solutions.

Activity #2

Understanding the Nature of Problems

25 minutes

STEPS

1. Introduce the activity and break into small groups of four to five members.
2. Pass out Handout A, page 119. Ask members to read it and discuss the questions for 15 minutes.
3. In the large group, ask for responses to question 4: "What are five key words or phrases you would use in giving advice to a friend who has a problem?" Write the answers on a wall chart.
4. Thank members for their responses, summarize any striking points and common themes. Inform them that the next activity makes a transition from giving advice to using a method for analyzing problems.

Activity #3

Analyzing Problems

45 minutes

Facilitator's Note: Divide the members into their same small groups. Introduce the next activity by relating that Maria's problem needs to be addressed. This activity introduces a problem-analysis tool, the Problem Tree¹, which they will learn and apply to Maria's problem.

STEPS

1. Pass out blank wall charts and markers to each small group.
2. Pass out Handout B, page 121. Give members 15-20 minutes to read and finish Maria's problem tree on a wall chart.
3. Have the groups post their wall charts on a front wall. Post your prepared Problem Tree wall chart next to the group charts (*Not as a right answer, but in the spirit of learning together.*)
4. Give members a few minutes to read through and understand the wall charts. Field any questions about wall chart content.
5. Ask: "What were you thinking or feeling as you worked through the problem tree in your small groups?" *Discuss for five minutes at most.*
6. Ask: "Can you envision yourself using this problem-analysis approach in your life? Please describe how."

¹ Idea from *Non Formal Education Manual*, by Helen Fox, Peace Corps Information , Collection and Exchange, Washington, D.C. 1989.

Problem Tree Insert

Activity #4

Planning Solutions

15 minutes

STEPS

1. Ask the members to work with the person next to them.
2. Pass out Handout C, page 123. Ask the members to read it and share ideas for how Maria might use this planning framework.
3. In the large group, ask for answers.
4. Ask: "What are the strengths you see in using this planning framework?"
5. Ask: "Do you see any weaknesses or difficulties in using this planning framework? How could these problems be corrected?"

Activity #5

Field Assignment #6 and The Learning Store

10 minutes

STEPS

1. Pass out Handout D, page 124. It describes two more problem-analysis tools. Explain that it is background reading for the next Field Assignment.
2. Pass out Handout E, page 127 Field Assignment #6. Ask members to read it. Answer any questions.
3. Pass back previous Learning Stores and Handout F, page 128, for this session.

SESSION 6

MATERIALS

Handout A, Problems with the Fair - Part I	- 2 pages
Handout B, Problems with the Fair - Part II	- 2 pages
Handout C, Planning Solutions	- 1 page
Handout D, Analyzing Problems	- 3 pages
Handout E, Field Assignment #6	- 1 page
Handout F, The Learning Store	- 1 page

Handout A

Problems with the Fair - Part I

It was the day after Maria's meeting with the community volunteers and she felt completely overwhelmed. She wanted to crawl into bed and forget that she'd ever agreed to be chairperson of the Fun Fair.

The meeting had actually started off quite well. Everyone seemed friendly, and Maria was excited by the positive energy of the group. She had opened the meeting by putting up a wall chart and asking people to brainstorm ideas for improving the Fair. One person would throw out an idea, then another person would add to it. They filled two entire wall charts with new ideas for the Fair, each one better and more elaborate than the next. Everyone left the meeting enthusiastic about the Fair.

Then it happened. Cleaning up by herself after the meeting, Maria suddenly felt utterly besieged by what she had gotten herself into. She had initially thought that including more people in the planning of the Fair would make her workload lighter and more manageable. However in the meeting, the opposite had happened. Her workload had quadrupled. Thinking back on all of the good events they had last year and now looking at the long list of the new things they were going to add, she felt paralyzed. She didn't even know where to start.

The problem was time. It took so much time to get the group of community volunteers together. This first meeting took two nights of calling. First she'd call one person and set a day and time. Then, the arrangements wouldn't work for the next person she'd call, so they would set a new date and time. Of course then she'd have to call the first person back and verify the new arrangements. The phone calls went back and forth for two solid evenings before a day and time was acceptable to everyone. Maria had too little time. She had to go to work and then come home to clean, cook, and spend time with her family. Her husband and son offered to help, but she preferred to do everything herself. If she had more time, she could be the chairperson, but right now it wasn't possible.

There was no way she could handle it. The problem was that the community group simply had too much enthusiasm and too many ideas. The Fair had just gotten too big for her to handle and her stomach hurt just thinking about it.

Handout A continued

Maria spent the next three days convinced that **she** was the problem. She figured that she wasn't smart enough or organized enough to run the Fair. The only solution was for her to quit although she knew that there was no one else to run it. She finally called her cousin and asked if they could spend Saturday afternoon together. She didn't know how to quit, and she really needed to talk to someone to help bolster her courage.

That Saturday, she told her cousin her woes. She described the problems with the Fair: the group's enthusiasm, the number of ideas, and the problems with time. She knew the solution was to quit now while it was still possible for the PTO to find someone else to run it.

After listening to the problems, Maria's cousin reminded her of how much she had enjoyed the Fair in the past years and how excited she had been about the challenge of the job as chairperson. Maria conceded that she really did not want to quit, but it was the only solution she could think of. The problem of organizing the Fair was just too big for her to handle.

Discussion Questions for small groups:

1. Describe what you think is happening to Maria. What do you think is the main problem?
2. What are the advantages and the disadvantages of Maria's solution to quit as a chairperson?
3. Do situations similar to Maria's happen in real life? Why or why not?
4. If a friend called you for advice with a problem, what would be five key words or phrases you would use in your advice to him or her? Write your responses to share with the large group.

Handout B

Problems with the Fair - Part II

Maria's cousin was very sympathetic to Maria's problems, and her first reaction was to help out by offering to make phone calls or take her out to lunch so she'd feel better. But somehow this didn't seem like the type of help Maria needed right now. Then, she remembered a problem-analysis tool she had learned in a management course at work. It was called "the problem tree," and she explained it to Maria.

This problem-analysis tool uses a tree as a metaphor for problems. If we look more deeply into the problem, we will see smaller problems that twist and branch like roots. Only by untangling these roots can we come to the causes of the problem. To use this tool, you draw the tree by starting at the top with the main problem and ask, "Why did that happen?" This process continues until you cannot break down the problem any further or ask any more questions. Only at this point do you look for solutions.

On the next page is the start of a problem tree that Maria and her cousin drew. Copy this on a wall chart and then complete the tree.

[JP: A half completed picture of Maria's problem tree needs to be inserted here.]

Handout C

Planning Solutions

Maria felt much better after talking to her cousin and making the problem tree. She decided it couldn't hurt if she tried being the chairperson of the Fair for another month. She realized that she needed to delegate more tasks, but she was unclear about how to go about it. Again, her cousin had a suggestion.

In her office they use the following simple planning framework:

Who?

Does What?

By When?

With What Resources?

For Discussion:

- How might Maria use this planning framework?
- What are the strengths you see for using this planning framework?
- Do you see any weaknesses or difficulties with using this planning framework? If so, how could these problems be corrected?

Handout D

Analyzing Problems

"A problem well stated is a problem half solved." – *Charles F. Kettering*

The first step in solving any problem is to define it clearly. While this may seem obvious, problem definition is a step most people and groups ignore: they simply assume that everyone has the same understanding and move on to developing solutions. The result can be an unhealthy level of tension and conflict due to an unrecognized lack of agreement on the exact nature of the problem. Only after wrestling with the difficult task of specifically defining a problem should a person or group move toward solutions.

It is important to know the difference between problems and solutions. Be sure you are defining a problem, not articulating a solution. For example, a group of people may decide that there ought to be increased security in their local schools. However, this is not a problem; it's a solution. The problem in this case is likely to be the incidence of violence in schools. Once this is made clear, there may be a variety of potential solutions besides increased security, for example, teaching conflict-resolution strategies or providing more student counseling.

Problem-Analysis Tools

Problem analysis is not a mystery. It is something we do daily and mostly automatically. However, it is easy to go around in circles describing problems but not analyzing them.

Problem-analysis tools can be extremely helpful in moving us from problem description to problem solving. These tools help us see the root causes of problems and lead us to strategies to deal with them. However we should always remember the limitations of problem-analysis tools. Reality is always far more complex and richer than any model can analyze.

We have already introduced the Problem Tree to analyze Maria's problems with the Fun Fair. Here are two other problem-analysis tools you might like to try.

Handout D continued

The "But-Why?" Method²

One tool, the "But-Why?" method, is useful for quick problem analysis. Here's an example:

- "My boss was mean today."
- "But why?"
- "Well, a lot of things seemed to go wrong."
- "But why?"
- "There were a lot of people in the store today."
- "But why is this a problem?"
- "The lines got long and I couldn't keep up."
- "But why couldn't you keep up?"
- "I guess I was tired."
- "But why were you tired?" etc.

This line of questioning can lead you to an area of the problem that you have control over. For example, you cannot solve the larger problem of how your boss handles people or the workload at the store. But, you may have control over (and solutions for) the aspect of the problem that you aren't getting enough sleep.

The Force Field Analysis

Another tool, the Force Field Analysis³, designed by psychologist Kurt Lewin, is a visual tool that helps you assess the forces that bear upon a problem.

Force Field Analysis is an extremely useful technique because it says to us, " Hey, don't try to solve a problem before you know what forces underlie it. A good doctor diagnoses an illness before prescribing treatment. So diagnose carefully the forces that are favorable to your desired goal and those which are unfavorable."

In the diagram, the center line represents a goal, objective, or task while the arrows on either side represent the forces helping and hindering the attainment of what needs to be accomplished. After diagramming the forces, it may be possible to see where one can increase the favorable forces and decrease the unfavorable forces.

² Developed by David Werner, author of *Where There is No Doctor*, The Hesperian Foundation, Palto Alto, CA. 1992.

³ From *The Winning Trainer*, by Julius Eittington.

JP: Diagram of a Force Field Problem analysis tool

Handout E

Field Assignment #6- Problem Analysis

1. Read through Handout D on analyzing problems.
2. Take any problem associated with your service and analyze it using either the problem tree or a problem-analysis tool from Handout D. Break down the problem and suggest one solution that addresses an aspect of the problem. Be prepared to share your problem analysis at the next session.
3. Using the planning framework of "Who?" "Does what?" "By when?" "With what resources?" (Handout C), chart out a plan to solve all or part of your problem.

If necessary, ask another person to help you with the task.

4. Keep the following points in mind when choosing a problem: .
 - a. It should be a problem with which you want help – a problem you would like to see more clearly.
 - b. It should be an important problem, but not so large that it cannot be helpfully discussed.
 - c. It should be something that you believe can be changed.
 - d. It should not be a strictly personal or family problem. However, it needs to be related to other people or an organization in some way.

(Some examples of problems related to service are: Kids misbehave in your tutoring class; your service-assignment work load is too heavy.)

Handout F

The Learning Store, Session 6

In order to help us better serve your learning needs, and to help you reinforce your own learning, please take a few minutes and thoughtfully answer the following questions about today's session. Please give this completed form to your facilitator. Thanks very much for your input.

Name:

1. Please list at least three things you learned or relearned today that you think will come in handy.
2. What did you find the most useful in the Field Assignment?
3. Was there anything you found less useful in today's session? If so, what was it?
4. What did you especially like about today's session?
5. What aspect(s) of this session could be changed to make it better in the future?