

CJ 500 Problem-Solving Strategies and Sample

Problem solving is used to address many disciplines, often with different strategies or perspectives. It is a mental process in the area of criminology. Problems are often either well defined or ill defined. What appropriate solutions can be determined is based on the definition of the problem. Ill-defined problems do not have clear goals, solutions, or a path to a solution. Well-defined problems have specific goals and a distinctive path to a solution. In selecting an issue, make sure that the issue or problem is well defined. These problems also allow for more initial planning than ill-defined problems. The ability to comprehend the problem and understanding the issue are paramount. This will be the key to solving your issue or problem. Sometimes the problem requires some outside-the-box thinking to come up with a creative and unique solution to the issue.

In determining whether an issue is well defined or ill defined, look to see whether significant research, data, analysis, or published articles have been written on the topic. Consider the source of this research when selecting your topic. If the issue appears in your textbook or has been covered in the modules, it has been published and studied. Select your issue based upon the information that can be gathered, paying mind to whether the issue is well defined. For example, the use of drug courts across the country is an issue that has been addressed significantly over the past few years, both in research and in publication. The use of drug courts is a fundamental shift from punishment to rehabilitation. This shift has also sparked much controversy in the public. When researching this topic, students will find data analysis, research, journal articles, and statistics on recidivism rates on drug offenders. This would be a great example of a well-defined problem.

The following article is a great resource in understanding how problem solving has been incorporated into the conventional court system: [Breaking With Tradition: Introducing Problem Solving in Conventional Courts](#).

Brainstorming Strategies

Brainstorming is a relaxed and informal approach to solving a problem. It requires you to think creatively and outside the box. Brainstorming memorializes and crystallizes initial ideas into original or creative solutions to the issue you are trying to solve. Brainstorming can also spark more ideas to the problem you are attempting to solve. This can help implement a light-bulb moment when you are seeking a solution to your problem, because during brainstorming there is no censorship of ideas. You are trying to open up possibilities and break down wrong assumptions about the limits of the problem by thinking outside the box. Ideas should only be evaluated at the end of the brainstorming session, after your thoughts have been memorialized on paper, in order to tackle a more conventional approach. Review the following steps in the problem-solving process as well as the problem-solving sample below.

Steps in the Problem-Solving Process

Define the Issue of the Well-Defined Problem

- What has led you to think of this issue as a problem? Understand the problem and how it came to be; this is a huge first step. It is needed before moving on to other steps.
- What has the problem done to cause it to need to be addressed and fixed?

- Who are the stakeholders that will solve this problem? Assemble the stakeholders and begin the next phase.

Brainstorm the Solutions

- Do not discard ideas at this point. Every idea may have usable information contained somewhere within it.
- When it comes time to select a solution, you may need to use bits and pieces of other suggestions in order to come up with a viable one.
- What are some possible solutions? When soliciting solutions, ask yourself these questions: How will this help solve the solution? Will this have any adverse effects if executed? Could this solution create other problems if executed?

Select a Solution

- This step may be repeated several times, requiring you to analyze the execution of the solution and modify it along the way. Each time you modify the solution, always go back to the beginning and work it through the process again from beginning to end. Each time you modify the solution, you change the path of it. Analyze it completely through each time, to ensure you are ending up at the point you need to be at in order to solve the problem.
- Is this solution the best one?
- Is this the most efficient way to solve this problem?

Implement the Solution (Both Immediate and Long-Term Actions)

- Where does the solution need to begin in the chain of events?
- How does the solution need to be executed?
- Does the solution require explanation, or a foundation of explanation, in order for it to take off? Who is going to implement the solution, and where this occur?
- Is there a chance the solution will be misunderstood and create another problem?

Gather Feedback

- What is needed to accurately assess success of the solution?
- Is the problem solved? Who should you seek feedback from? What should you ask in order to solicit the correct answer?
- What type of surveys or information can be gathered to assess whether your solution has been successful? Consider the use of gathering statistics. Review, for example, the [Key Statistics](#) page on the [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#) website. Also view the [Crime Statistics](#) page on the [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) website.

Problem-Solving Sample

Defining the Issue

At a certain bus stop in Anytown, USA, between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m., there are many people congregating at the bus stop. The sidewalk pedestrian traffic is blocked, causing people on the sidewalk to walk around the people waiting for the buses. They walk in the street to go around them. Vehicle traffic slows to a crawl, backing up for miles. People's safety is jeopardized when this happens. So what is the issue? Is the bus stop too small for the number of people riding? Is it that the businesses in the area are letting their employees off work at the same time? Depending on how you look at this,

you could come up with many problems. Who are the stakeholders in this situation? Who can contribute to the solution? The police, bus company, businesses in the immediate area, and the pedestrian traffic would be a good place to start.

Brainstorm the Solutions, Select a Solution

Coming up with a solution for this simple scenario would be easy in a perfect world; the bus company needs to increase bus service to this route by four buses. But what happens when the bus company only has one or two extra buses? The point is that it is impractical to think that a solution is a one-person, or in this case a one-company, responsibility. It becomes the responsibility of each stakeholder to fix the problem, because each stakeholder has a vested interest in resolving the problem. The bus company wants more revenue. The police want to reduce traffic jams and make the roads safer for everyone. The pedestrians would like to get home quicker.

The solution here may involve a little bit of effort or change from each stakeholder. For example, say the bus company was able to add one additional bus during this rush hour, which reduced the crowd a little. The local businesses in the immediate area that employed large numbers of employees agreed to start staggering their quitting times. Rather than everyone getting off work at the same time, they agreed to stagger their quitting times between the affected hours, reducing the bus crowd a little bit more. Another recommended solution was made by the police. They agreed to reroute opposing traffic and open up the entire street to one-way traffic, expediting the vehicular traffic out of the city. The pedestrian traffic (the people) suggested that they could line up at the bus stop in a single-file fashion, allowing other pedestrians a clear path on the sidewalk to walk by. This would eliminate pedestrians walking out into the street, causing traffic to slow down and putting other people at risk. These are all great plans. Which one do you select? You could select one, or you could select them all. You could implement them all at once, or you could implement them one at a time, allowing each solution time to see if it reduces the problem to an acceptable level.

Implement the Solution

In the example above, all of the suggestions were implemented. The solutions suggested that involved little to no money or resources were implemented first, and the rest were implemented from the least costly to the most. The changes were implemented over a four-week period. By the end of the fourth week, all solutions were implemented.

Feedback

After all solutions were implemented, each stakeholder sent a representative out to the street corner to observe the plan. Vehicle traffic was moving at a normal speed. No pedestrians were walking in the road. Standing and waiting for the bus was reduced to the point where there was nearly no wait. This was due to the fact that the buses were able to get to the bus stop faster, because the traffic speed moved at a normal pace, coupled with the extra bus that were added during peak times.

Who benefitted here? Everyone did. The types of information collected to see whether this was a successful solution showed that the police now had more time to spend on more important duties, and that pedestrians got home quicker, which made them happier employees. Work production increased due to happier employees. Profits for the bus company improved because, with this solution, they quadrupled the number of passengers in the same amount of time. Businesses sold more items because it was easier to move around from store to store. Plus—the most important thing—no one was placed in harm's way anymore.

The following methods were used to collect information to assess the success of the solution:

- Surveys to the police officers, pedestrians, and employers
- Data that showed what police officers were able to accomplish in the time period when they used to be monitoring traffic
- The profit data from the bus company and the businesses in the area
- Analysis of the past and present incident reports from the area