



A Problem Solving Approach One size does not fit all.....

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Each day, organizations face challenges to become lean within their shops. Often the focus of these lean activities is not extended to our management practices. Problem-solving methodology is one such management practice where simplicity is sometimes ignored.

Have you ever been asked to complete an 8-D corrective action but found the methodology to be inappropriate for the issue? Does it make sense to use an 8-D format for office issues or supporting functions? How about a customer or internal audit? Is an 8-D really the most effective format to respond to this issue? It is easy to get caught up in focusing more time on filling out a form than solving the problem.

Not all corrective actions are created equal. For the right problem, 8-Ds and similar disciplines are great tools. However, some issues simply do not lend themselves to the typical

methodology mandated by our customers.

There are two types of corrective action responses that any organization needs. The first type relates to product-related claims and the activities needed to address those issues. Typically, a disciplined problem-solving process such as an 8-D or 7-Step is ideal for a product nonconformance. Still, a small number of these issues lend themselves to this type of methodology.

The second type of corrective action response relates to service and quality system issues. These are the issues where a unique approach to a resolution is most applicable. Trying to utilize the details of an 8-D process for these issues wastes time and becomes an exercise to challenge your creative writing skills.

Why not use a format that gives you the flexibility to respond in the most useful and effective manner for your organization? Develop a form that is not inflexible or static but one that allows you to utilize the fields that are most appropriate for the situation.

There are core fields that need to be in use in order to develop your solution. Listing your problem statement (the nonconformance), identifying the requirement that you are violating, and choosing a root cause for the issue are the standard fields that you need.

The key in problem solving is to simplify your approach. If you can identify the broad root cause of your issue, you will quickly arrive at the



corrective, preventive and systemic activities that will resolve the problem. I challenge you to identify one issue that you have had in the past that wasn't a process-related nor a training-related issue. In fact, it could be said there are only four fundamental root causes that can exist for any problem:

- 1) Lack of a process – No procedure or standard way to complete the task exists.
- 2) Inadequate process – The procedure or standard practice exists, but needs to be better defined.
- 3) Lack of training – Personnel have not been trained to perform the task involved in the nonconforming issue.
- 4) Inadequate training – Personnel have received training, however, the extent of that training needs to be broadened and made more effective.

(Continued on next page)

In This Issue...

- A Problem Solving Approach
- PMPA Management Update 2007: A World of Opportunity
- Sentinel Events- Recognize, Respond, Revisit
- Member Profile: Fordsell Machine Products Co.
- Recent Listserve Topics
- PMPA Calendar

Problem Solving....continued.....

Your work to resolve the issue will be found within one of these four root causes. This approach forces you to review all of the evidence in order to select the root cause of the problem. The subsequent actions detail how you are to address the root cause of the issue. Of course, supporting data and documentation still needs to accompany any effective problem solving plan.

Using this approach shows that you do not look at problem solving as a standard, "one-size-fits-all" format. This methodology provides the flexibility to view your issues as unique events and helps you to respond to these events most effectively. The

key to this response is to maintain your flexibility; it does not mean that you should be less thorough.

You will deliver a response that is ensured, and you will follow up on that answer to ensure continued har-

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A simplistic look at your response process will build harmony with your internal and external customers. This approach also will set you apart from other customers. It will accentuate the fact that you understand that not all problems are created equally.

mony (ISO calls it 'effectiveness'). Visit www.pmpa.org/resource/tech_quality/ProblemSolving_example.pdf for two example forms. The first form describes the purpose of each field within the form. The second form provides a sample response.