

# WAYS FOR IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS

When designing and carrying out a solution, it is of utmost importance to be sure that the real problem is being solved. Since it could be the case that such a "solution" could instead be creating more new problems.

Many leaders believe that finding solutions to complex problems is closely related to data availability, believing that only detailed information is needed on the alleged direct causes and the harmful effects of the problem.

However, having objective data is usually not enough to carry out an analysis of the complex dynamics corresponding to the main problems. And from experience, analyzes that have a single point of view or perspective on a problem do not succeed. That is why it is more convenient to have a broader point of view that allows looking inside and beyond the large amounts of data that are available and thus finding the root causes and preventing similar events from happening again in the future.

What is the most convenient way to identify and solve a real problem?

There are six action steps that are useful to guide decision makers through a systemic process, then let's see what they consist of.

## **Action steps:**

By taking action steps into account to identify a problem, you guarantee that the analysis is focusing on the correct problem and that you have considered the ramifications of possible solutions. This process decreases the disadvantages of dealing with complex decisions and, on the other hand, increases their ability to assume the calculated risks that all leaders must face.

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**Do not get carried away by the large availability of data.** Problems usually have some complexity, as they are affected by various factors. You may have the idea that having a large amount of data will help you find the best solutions and predict their behavior, the data can be useful only if you take the time to make sense of it. If you want to find a durable solution, you need to do a thorough analysis of the data instead of spending too much time collecting it; something that many leaders do not take into account.

It is necessary to look beyond the surface to understand the system that is not in plain sight in a problem. The events are only the tip of the iceberg: they are easy to see and explore. These are usually shown “on the surface” of patterns and trends, systemic structures, and mental models.

**Possess a broad focus.** Considering diverse perspectives is important when dealing with people. Solving the problem for just one (or a small group) of those involved will surely produce resistance from other stakeholders. Rather, an approach should be planned that integrates the roles and objectives of all key people involved in complex problems.

**Determine the limits of the problem.** Once the data has been collected and the stakeholders are considered, the next step will be to eliminate all the factors that are not directly related to the problem. The main objective is to focus on the cause, its main causes and its effects, so it is very important to define the limits. When setting limits, care must be taken that they are open enough to include all relevant cause-effect relationships, and on the other hand narrow enough to avoid generalization and loss of focus. These limits will be useful to create a new and clear description of the problem that is being solved.

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**Identify the causes, effects and key stakeholders.** Once the limits are determined, it is time to focus on the causes and possible solutions. To achieve this, the following questions can be asked: What are the root causes of the problem and what are the possible effects of those causes? What are some potential solutions and the effects of those solutions? Who are the key stakeholders that will benefit from a change in the system? How can they be part of the solution? It must always be considered that a single effect can be the result of multiple causes, and a single cause can have multiple effects in a system.

**Analyze possible future changes.** When the root cause of the problem is well understood, future analysis should be performed. For this, it is necessary to prepare forecasts based on past and current trends and patterns in order to predict some changes that would affect the problem in the future. The question that can help in this step is what are the future paths you could take and the effects of each path?

## Referencia

Wharton University of Pennsylvania. (2015) *Better Decision-Making: Identify the Real Problem*. Recuperado de <https://executiveeducation.wharton.upenn.edu/thought-leadership/wharton-at-work/2015/06/identify-the-real-problem/>