

Problem-solving strategies that people use in an “Agile” mindset

Roberto Garcia

Today, more than ever before, agility has become a hot topic for many organizations across the globe. There is a need to look at different tools or assessments in order to be more efficient in keeping up with globalizing change. To accomplish this goal, key strategies, must be implemented. These strategies include, but are not limited to:

Identify:

- What is and/or has caused the problem?
 - o Get to the root of the problem and create a solid foundation to construct a solution to resolve the problem/drawback.
 - Enhance group **communication**
 - Through agility, these individuals/groups can evaluate their mistakes and reassess to prevent them from making the same mistakes in the future.
 - It is ok to disagree, but DO NOT belittle (point fingers) to peers if a particular strategy did not work in the past.
 - It is important to see things from my broad perspective (e.g., if THIS did not work, and THIS OTHER STRATEGY did not work, WHAT did?)
 - Individuals/groups will only fail in this stage if they **STOP** learning from their mistakes.

Define:

- When was the last time the current problem-solving strategy worked? Do we have a problem-solving system in place? If so, will it help the organization or group solve this problem and others that may arise? What do we know/ not know about “the” problem?
 - o This stage emphasizes asking the “what,” “how,” “still need to know” information about the problem.
 - o **Create a one-sentence definition of the problem.**

Explore:

- Brainstorm possible solutions as a group (multiple solutions)
 - o Everyone’s input is accepted without **judging** the perspectives others have to offer.
 - o Through agility, groups pick the best solution and examine what it would take to implement the chosen solution(s).

Action:

- Carry out the chosen solution per the problem stated in the “design” stage
 - o Ensure all individuals/groups implement “their” part of the solution
 - Through agility, these groups can develop small “smart goals” while working towards achieving the bigger goal (i.e., problem).
 - Work is completed in sprints.
 - Identify any miscommunication that can create setbacks.
 - Ensure everyone knows their role—and how they fit into the bigger picture.

Evaluate:

- What progress has been made? What smart goals have been reached? How far away is the goal from being achieved?

- The primary purpose of this stage is to track the progress, look at the bigger picture, and evaluate what is working and what is not working.
 - From an agility mindset, groups can access what has been **learned** and apply the learned behaviors in other situations.

Motivate and reward:

- It is essential that groups are continuously being **motivated** to solve problems while encouraging creative solutions.

- Research has shown that organizations with a reward system that **recognizes** individuals/groups for their accomplishments or company successes cultivate optimal performance and motivation among employees.
 - Rewards that are motivating to people are:
 - Verbal praise
 - Individual/group employee(s) of the month
 - Wearable badges
 - Monetary incentives

Summary

Due to the number of benefits that organizations have seen in return when thinking “Agile,” this methodology has gained popularity, allowing companies to be more efficient and stay ahead of their competitors. Companies develop effective strategies that help solve problems in a creative and time-efficient way to accomplish this goal. When tailored to be people-centric, these strategies allow organizations to change and adapt according to different scenarios that may arise. Problem-solving strategies include but are not limited to identifying, defining, exploring, taking action, evaluating, motivating, and rewarding.

Identifying symbolizes the stage in which groups work towards detecting the “cause” or “what has caused” the problem. This is done through brainstorming and communicating, which allows groups to evaluate the mistakes that caused the problem, thus reassessing their approach to prevent making the same mistake in the future. This enables groups to be agile and see that their mistakes and problems are not failures—instead, they are strategies that did not work for them in reaching a particular goal.

Defining represents the evaluation of if their current problem-solving strategy worked and if that same strategy will work in different problem scenarios that may arise. An essential part of this stage is that it emphasizes asking the “what,” “how,” and “any further information” that is still unknown in order to solve the problem. In an agility mindset, this stage is the steppingstone of promoting individual/group creativity in identifying what “they” think the problem is. In this stage, it is vital to create a one-sentence definition of the problem after everyone has had the opportunity to provide their perspectives.

Exploring signifies the sharing of ideas for possible problem-solving solutions. The primary goal in this stage is for every individual/group to share their perspectives on how to solve the problem they are facing. It is important to note that not every resolution will work. All input should be accepted without judgment and finger-pointing if the practice has not worked in the past. The goal is to collectively pick the best solution and assess what will work and what

will not work—and any resources that may be needed to help reach the goal (e.g., technology, training in a specific area, etc.)

Action denotes tackling the problem stated in the “design” stage using the chosen solution from the “explore” phase. In this stage, individuals/groups can visualize the problem and the steps they will take to solve the problem (e.g., accomplish the goal.) From an agile perspective, organization(s) can be more efficient if they set “smart goals,” allowing them to complete the minor task while still working towards resolving the bigger problem. However, it is important to note that there are different forms of goals, such as personally fulfilling and relationship goals; not every one of these goals requires smart goal planning. When things are not time-sensitive, strategic, and visually measurable, it is best to be agile in a non-strategic way. As goals become more strategic, a smart goal framework should be applied. In short, the action stage can be viewed as the sprint stage, where goals are reached in incremental chunks.

Evaluation illustrates the stage in which individuals/groups can look at the bigger picture and evaluate the progress that has been made. Furthermore, people can see firsthand practices that are working or not working as they problem solve—the ultimate goal is to learn and transfer those learned behaviors into future situations.

Lastly, motivation and reward are two of the most important practices to implement in problem-solving. People need to be motivated continuously in order to solve big and small problems, whether the problems are work—related or are other outside problems. That is, some of the most successful people have not made it to where they are today without being motivated by their peers. When individuals are motivated, they reflect optimal performance, and when rewarded, it reinforces people’s desire to continue working harder. Problem-solving can be a strenuous task for many individuals, especially when seeking solutions to their own problems. Therefore, organizations may want to consider offering rewards that are financial and non-financial to motivate people. Non-financial rewards can come in forms such as giving verbal praise, provide recognition (e.g., employee/group of the month), and offering wearable badges.

Here at Bilbao Consulting, we specialize in helping companies and individuals adopt an agile mindset to solving problems. Please reach out to one of our consultants to help identify your needs!