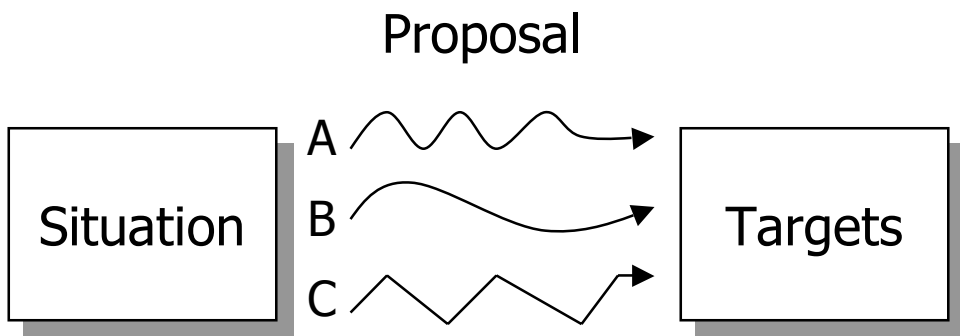

S-T-P PROBLEM SOLVING



Problem Analysis Definition

Symptoms

We usually feel that a problem exists before we can define it. Incidents or conditions that evoke dissatisfaction, frustration, tension, and other negative feelings are all symptoms of a problem. Such symptoms arouse negative feelings because a more desirable alternate state is implied, although the person may be unaware of what it is. Thus, we say a problem exists when we experience a discrepancy between the current state and a desired state.

Problem Definition

Stating a problem is more than just itemizing symptoms. A problem is not well defined until three sets of information have been clarified:

The problem statement is simply a clear delineation between the way things are and the way you would like them to be.

1. What are the essential features of the current state?
2. What are the key attributes of the desired state?
3. What forces either help or inhibit our moving from the current to the more desired state?

S-T-P Model

The S-T-P Model is a method of organizing information to define a problem, and to manage the conflict that occurs in creating a solution. Information is organized into three interrelated dimensions:

1. Situation:

Information about a) the essential features of the current state, and b) the forces that impede moving to a more desired state.

2. Target:

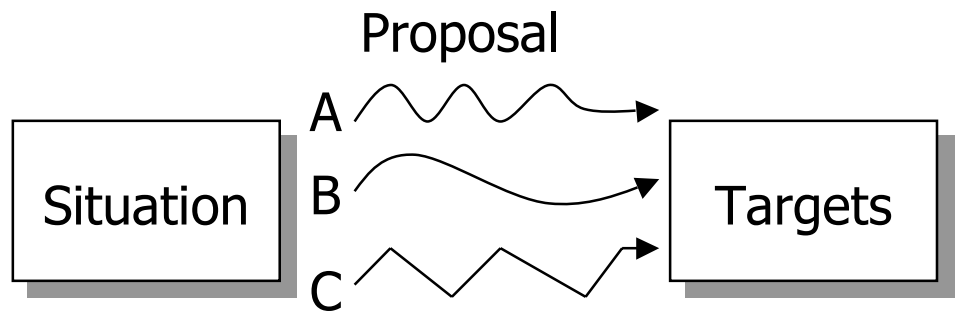
The desired state; what we want to accomplish or to avoid. Targets are chosen because those working on the problem value and desire them; they are not imposed. (Imposed requirements are part of the situation dimension.)

3. Proposal:

Any action group members can support that will change the current state into the desired alternate state. The proposal answers the question, "Who will do what?" Any proposal for action implies some view of the situation and target.

Here are some common expressions and terms that fit into each dimension:

| SITUATION: <i>How things are now</i> | TARGET: <i>How you'd like them to be</i> | PROPOSAL: <i>How to get there</i> |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starting point • Facts and opinions about current conditions • Predictions about efforts to change • Environment as the group perceives it | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals, aims, ends, values, purposes, and objectives • Outcomes desired by the group • Termination point | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Path from S to T • Means, plan, strategy, implementation, procedure • Solution or suggestion |



Here is a display of the movement of a solution from left to right:

| The way it is! | How to get there! | The way I'd like it to be! |
|---|--|---|
| Facts Data Norms Current Reality | Solutions Pathways Strategies Actions | Goals Desires Wishes Ideal State |

Joint Inquiry with S-T-P Model

The Dimensions are Interdependent

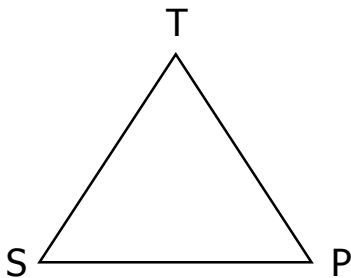
Problem solving occurs during discussions among people as they share realities, discuss goals and wishes, and initiate solutions to "the problem." The kind of discussions typically found in problem solving activities are truly a series of comments about the three dimensions of S-T-P.

What is unique about the S-T-P problem analysis method is that any utterance about any one dimension of S-T-P encodes information about the other two dimensions.

One person says to the group, "The window is shut." This bit of situation data implies both a target and a proposal. The target may be, "It is 70 degrees in here," and the proposal might be, "Open the window." By translating, we mean clarify and elaborate the information so that anyone can describe all three parts of the problem.

Because the three dimensions are so closely connected, it is helpful to think of them as a single, interacting unit (as shown in the diagram at left) rather than as three separate factors related in a straight line sequence from S to T to P.

A shared understanding of the problem analysis exists when each party to the joint inquiry understands the situation, target, and proposal dimensions from the other's point of view. Such a shared understanding is the objective of joint inquiry.



Situation-Target

Interdependencies:

- S reflects a drive toward T, implies a standard of comparison.
- T uncovers what is unsatisfactory about the current S.

Target-Proposal

End - Means:

- T defines the outcome that occurs because of action, P.
- P embodies assumptions about conditions, alternative to S, are desired.

Proposal-Situation

Means - End:

- P embodies assumptions about causes of unsatisfactory features of current S, and resources/requirements for change.
- S limits which proposals might be effective and feasible in accomplishing T.

Exercise in S-T-P Translating

Instructions:

Work through each item on your own first, then discuss it with your partners before moving on. For each statement, determine whether you think it is a Situation, Target, or Proposal and check the appropriate box. Then, translate the message by writing your own set of S-T-P statements.

| | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| S | T | P |

1. The new admin arrives and announces, "I think we need to update our word processing software."

Your translation:

S: _____

T: _____

P: _____

| | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| S | T | P |

2. One group member says to another, "This is the third time in a row that we canceled our staff meeting!"

Your translation:

S: _____

T: _____

P: _____

| | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| S | T | P |

3. The boss of the meeting says, "Our customers should be 100% satisfied that our orders are delivered on time."

Your translation:

S: _____

T: _____

P: _____

Exercise in S-T-P Questioning

Instructions: Read each problem statement below. Your task is to write in a question that will translate to an S-T-P within the problem. When you are finished, invite discussions and comparisons with your partner.

Statement: Whew! The temperature in this room is so warm, people are feeling groggy.

Write in a question to uncover . . .

The Situation _____

The Target _____

The Proposal _____

Statement: This morning when I got in my car to drive to work it just wouldn't start. I feel so frustrated and mad, I don't know what to do!

Write in a question to uncover...

The Situation _____

The Target _____

The Proposal _____

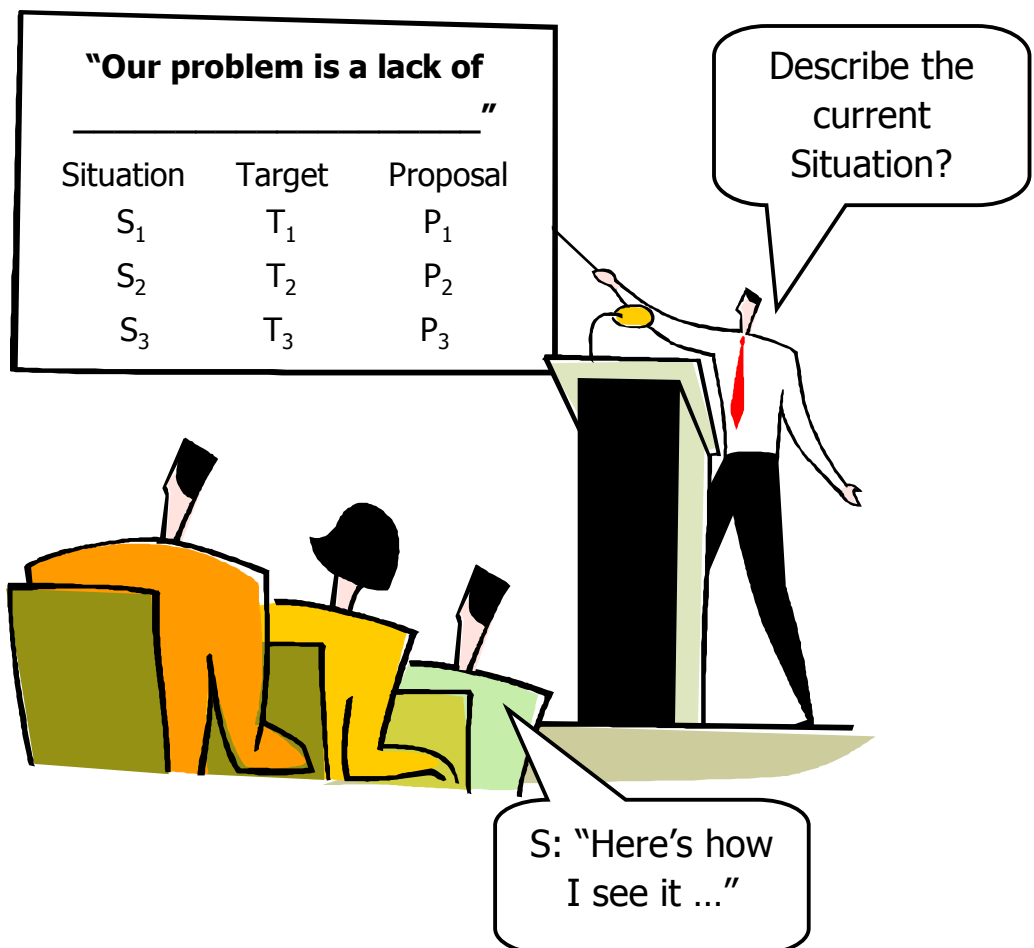
S-T-P Group Problem Solving

Begin using S-T-P as a group discussion method by placing the words Situation, Target, Proposal at the top of three separate worksheets.

To begin, simply name the problem at the top of one of the sheets, state the problem as, "A lack of..." and finish with a goal or desired end state.

For example, "A lack of a plan to implement Business Process Improvement in our department" or "A lack of timely, effective performance reviews for our team."

Ask someone to be the "scribe" to write the main points of discussion on the flip chart. Have a "facilitator" run the group discussions, and use a "timekeeper" to stay on track.



Helpful Hints for S-T-P Problem Solving

1. Pick a Solvable Problem

Define your problem in a way that is actionable and specific.

- Don't be vague: "Lack of communication."
- Don't be too specific: "Lack of a pay raise."

2. Title Your Comments

When you add items to the S-T-P lists, say it as an S, T, or P with a subscript number.

- "T₂ could be to have a happy, satisfied customer."
- "P₂ put up the solution, "bring our customers to a staff meeting once a month, and listen to our discussions"."
- "S₂ should read, "Not enough facts about our customers, that seems to be a real situation."

3. Recycle - Not Rigid

The Recycling Approach:

Agreement does not need to be reached first on S, then on T, and finally on P. Such a rigid, mechanical sequence may arouse resentment or feelings that a comment out of sequence is inappropriate; this can stifle creativity and decrease involvement.

In a recycling approach, the group discusses the problem freely and spontaneously, contributing information about S or T or P as it occurs to them. Any proposal may reveal new targets or new information about the situation. Comments about S or T, likewise, may result in information in any dimension. The form in which the information will be organized need not dictate the form of the inquiry. The interaction can be spontaneous, although the information generated is recorded in three columns.

Hints for S-T-P Problem Solving (continued)

4. Select Targets

After exhausting the spontaneity of the group, go back to the target list and circle those targets the group agrees to support. For the problem of "Lack of affordable, reliable automobile transportation," the targets might be listed as:

- T1 Good mileage
- T2 Great color
- T3 Leather Seats
- T4 Sporty looking
- T5 Affordable price
- T6 Safe on highway
- T7 Four wheel drive

5. Rank Order your Targets

After circling the targets, rank them in priority.

6. Convert Proposals into Actions

The Action Plan format:

| Who | Will Do What | By When |
|-----|---|----------|
| You | P1: Talk to funding sources about how much we can borrow. | Monday |
| Me | P2: Consult the car seller and set an appointment for a test drive. | Tuesday |
| Us | P3: Take a ride in our preferred car. | Saturday |

This last step of the S-T-P process invites the group to place in sequence a list of tasks so specific, you can "check off" each item as it is accomplished. Identify who is in charge, what will occur, and the time/date by when it will get done.

7. Stay Flexible

Don't get too hung up on the technique; some items might go in more than one category. Jot it down and keep going. Virtually any comment by any individual can become a statement on the flip chart as an S-T-P.

8. Have Fun!

Try to enjoy the process, and debrief at the end. What helped us move along? What hindered? What should we do next?

Getting Started with the S-T-P Process

Buying a Car Exercise:

Review the S-T-P you used the last time you bought a car. Put S1, S2 in the situation column, T1, T2 etc., in the target column, and off you go.

Problem: "Lack of a dependable vehicle for work and play."

| Situation | Target | Proposal |
|-----------|--------|----------|
| S1 | T1 | P1 |
| S2 | T2 | P2 |
| S3 | T3 | P3 |
| S4 | T4 | P4 |
| S5 | T5 | P5 |

Sample Problem:

“Lack of timely, helpful performance reviews for our team”

| Situation | | Target | Proposal |
|-----------|---|---|---|
| S1 | People do not seem to know the procedure for getting performance reviews. | T1 Employees know their strengths and weaknesses. | P1 Conduct an annual performance review with each employee on the hiring anniversary. |
| S2 | The last manager made the process so painful, people were relieved when it didn't happen. | T2 Everyone has a developmental plan and knows what they are striving to improve. | P2 Ask employees to do a self evaluation as well. |
| | | T3 The performance review is helpful and growth producing. | P3 Place a blank form and letter of instruction in the mail box for each boss/employee two weeks before the anniversary date. |
| | | T4 Productivity improves for both employee and employer. | P4 Ask appropriate staff to monitor this closely. |

Sample Action Plan:

| Who | Will Do What | By When |
|---|--|------------|
| Personnel Dept. Head | Draft a procedure, a letter, and a performance evaluation format. Route it to our management team. | July 1 |
| Company president, Senior managers | Review the HR department proposal, critique, make corrections, and approve for implementation. | August 1 |
| Personnel Dept. Head, Company president | Present the new format at the August all-managers meeting | August 15 |
| HR staff | Review the method. Is it working? | December 1 |

Sample Problem:

“Lack of a plan to roll out BPI to our areas”

| Situation | | Target | Proposal |
|-----------|---|--------|----------|
| S1 | Skeptical workforce | T1 | P1 |
| S2 | Management is not informed of process improvement methods | T2 | P2 |
| S3 | Unit Managers (UM) do not see the need | T3 | P3 |
| S4 | We are busy with customer service training right now | T4 | P4 |
| S5 | Multiple locations | | P5 |
| S6 | Lots of processes needing help | | P6 |

Our Action Plan:

| Who | Will Do What | By When |
|-----|--------------|---------|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

"Our Problem is a lack of:

"

| Situation | Target | Proposal |
|-----------|--------|----------|
| S1 | T1 | P1 |
| S2 | T2 | P2 |
| S3 | T3 | P3 |
| S4 | T4 | P4 |
| S5 | T5 | P5 |

Our Action Plan:

| Who | Will Do What | By When |
|-----|--------------|---------|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

"Our Problem is a lack of:

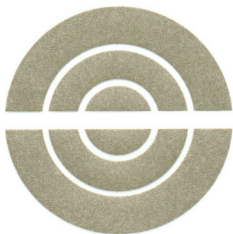
"

| Situation | Target | Proposal |
|-----------|--------|----------|
| S1 | T1 | P1 |
| S2 | T2 | P2 |
| S3 | T3 | P3 |
| S4 | T4 | P4 |
| S5 | T5 | P5 |

Our Action Plan:

| Who | Will Do What | By When |
|-----|--------------|---------|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

My Notes:



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