

FAST training course

Module 4 – Problem solving and organisational skills

Unit 1: Problem-Solving

Introduction

Soft skills are equally desirable in the workplace as hard skills. Almost every industry requires individuals who possess not only knowledge and expertise in certain fields, but interpersonal attributes that would allow them to work well with others. Effective communication, well-developed organisational and problem-solving skills and empathy are some of the most sought-after soft skills. This module will cover these four soft skills and equip future Accessibility Travel Facilitators (ATF) with relevant knowledge and experience. This module is divided into 2 units/topics:

- Unit 1: **Problem-Solving**
- Unit 2: **Organisational Skills**



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Learning goals

The main learning objective of this unit is to support ATFs in honing their communication, problem-solving, organisational skills and empathy, and improving their overall interaction with tourists with disabilities. Upon completion of this module you should be able to:

- Understand main problem-solving elements so as to apply when required with the specific ATF clients/customers

2020-1-SI01-KA202-075871



CONTENTS

01 Unit 1: Problem-Solving

Unit 1: Problem-Solving

Icebreaker - Self-assessment (potentially via Mentimeter)

Please answer the following questions:

- What associations do you have with 'problem solving'?
- Have you ever dealt with the topic of 'problem solving' in detail and, for example, participated in a corresponding training/workshop?
- What is the importance of 'problem solving' in your professional practice so far and how is efficient problem solving relevant for your work as an ATF?
- What do you expect from this training?
- Which contents/topics do you want to work on in this training in order to be able to optimise your problem-solving competence as an ATF accordingly?

2020-1-SI01-KA202-075871



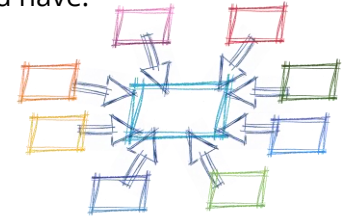
Unit 1: Problem-Solving

Problem-solving is an essential tool to achieve business success and offer solutions, especially in critical times. Strong problem-solving skills enable one to identify risks/issues at an early stage so as to create efficient approaches to solve them and/or prevent them before occurring or once they occur. These are important requirements/skills that an ATF should have.

Learning goals:

Upon completion of this Unit participants should be able to:

- Understand main problem-solving elements so as to apply when required
- Effectively analyse and solve complex issues and present evidence in problem-solving with the specific ATF clients and customers along the value chain
- Understand the importance of judgement and active listening and are able to respond and act in unexpected situations creatively in a timely manner.



2020-1-SI01-KA202-075871

Unit 1: Problem-Solving

Learning methodology

At the beginning of this unit the learners are introduced to the concept of problem-solving. Since problem-solving is an activity that consists of different phases and steps to follow, the learners get to know problem-solving elements that explain their complexity and the strategies required to follow in more detail. A short intro like the course theory should provide a basis for further hands-on sessions. In this phase, the learners deal with techniques on how to identify problems/risks and how to prevent them, particularly with the ATF clients/customers who have different needs and challenges to consider compared to other audience groups.

After the theoretical part, serious role plays in groups can help engage, collaborate, communicate and exchange thoughts whilst allowing to develop own decision-making and analytical thinking by the challenges they will face through these role plays.

2020-1-SI01-KA202-075871



Unit 1: Problem-Solving

Definition: What is problem-solving?



Problem-solving is the process of understanding a challenge and working toward finding an effective solution to it.

When employers talk about problem-solving skills, they are often referring to the ability to handle difficult or unexpected situations in the workplace as well as complex business challenges. Organizations rely on people who can assess both kinds of situations and calmly identify solutions. Problem-solving skills are traits that enable you to do that.

Why is problem-solving important?

Problem solving skills and the problem-solving process are a critical part of daily life both as individuals and organizations. Developing and refining these skills through training, practice and learning can provide the ability to solve problems more effectively and over time address problems with a greater degree of complexity and difficulty.

2020-1-SI01-KA202-075871

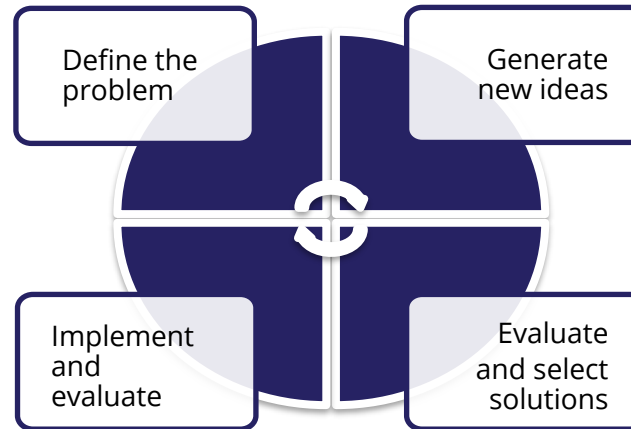


Unit 1: Problem-Solving



Please watch the video 'Problem Solving': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ahha-igVmJw> and get a first insight into the problem-solving process.

How does problem-solving work? – the problem-solving process



2020-1-SI01-KA202-075871



Unit 1: Problem-Solving

The problem-solving process



1. Define the problem

- Differentiate fact from opinion
- Specify underlying causes
- Consult each faction involved for information
- State the problem specifically
- Identify what standard or expectation is violated
- Determine in which process the problem lies
- Avoid trying to solve the problem without data

2. Generate alternative solutions

- Postpone evaluating alternatives initially
- Include all involved individuals in the generating of alternatives
- Specify alternatives consistent with organizational goals
- Specify short- and long-term alternatives
- Brainstorm on each others' ideas
- Seek alternatives that may solve the problem

2020-1-SI01-KA202-075871



Unit 1: Problem-Solving

The problem-solving process

3. Evaluate and select an alternative

- Evaluate alternatives relative to a target standard
- Evaluate all alternatives without bias
- Evaluate alternatives relative to established goals
- Evaluate both proven and possible outcomes
- State the selected alternative explicitly

4. Implement and follow up on the solution

- Plan and implement a pilot test of the chosen alternative
- Gather feedback from all affected parties
- Seek acceptance or consensus by all those affected
- Establish ongoing measures and monitoring
- Evaluate long-term results based on final solution



2020-1-SI01-KA202-075871



Unit 1: Problem-Solving

Obstacles to problem-solving

To solve a problem can take time and patience. One of the best ways to solve any problem is pausing and evaluating the problem.

Obstacles to problem-solving are,

- **Misdiagnosis** ... is a common problem that can occur due to preconceived ideas, biases or judgments. Defining and having a concrete understanding of the problem is the first step in the problem-solving activity. This can be difficult. If you are not careful, you may spend your time and resources solving the wrong problem and finding the wrong solution.
- **Communication bias** ... are caused when we are unable to explain the problem to the team or are presuming we know more than everyone else. Everyone must be on the same page. You may need to acknowledge you have a limited understanding of the problem.
- **Solution bias**... thinking there may be a universal solution or thinking the same solution can solve multiple problems. You need to evaluate a problem independently than try to force-fit a solution that worked previously.
- **Cognitive bias** ... or the tendency to jump to conclusions. When finding fixes fast, firms often end up with an irrelevant solution. This may cause more problems down the line.
- **Lack of empathy** – Every problem is associated with human emotions or abilities. It is important to identify and recognize people who are affected by the problem or it will be difficult to find a solution that will help.

2020-1-SI01-KA202-075871

Unit 1: Problem-Solving

What are problem-solving skills?

Problem-solving skills help you determine the source of a problem and find an effective solution.

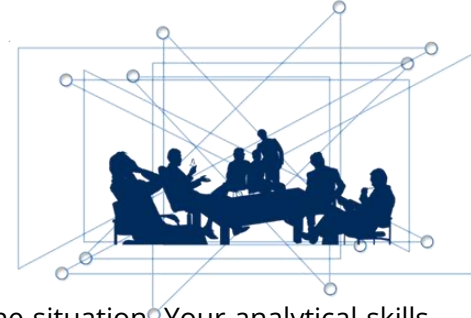
Some key problem-solving skills

include:

- Active listening
- Analysis
- Research
- Creativity
- Communication
- Dependability
- Decision making
- Team-building

Problem-solving skills examples:

- **Analysis:** The first step to solving any problem is to analyse the situation. Your analytical skills will help you understand the problem and effectively develop solutions.
- **Research:** As a problem solver, you need to be able to identify the cause of the issue and fully understand it.
- **Communication:** Once you find a solution, communicating it clearly will help reduce any confusion and make implementing a solution easier.
- **Dependability:** Solving problems in a timely manner is essential. Employers highly value individuals they can trust to both identify and then implement solutions as fast and effectively as possible.
- **Decision making:** You will need to make a decision about how to solve problems that arise. At times - and with industry experience - you may be able to make a decision quickly. Solid research and analytical skills can help those, who have less experience in their field.



2020-1-SI01-KA202-075871

Unit 1: Problem-Solving

Active listening

Active listening involves listening with all senses. In addition to giving full attention to the speaker, it is important that the 'active listener' is also 'seen' to be listening. Active listening means also actively showing verbal and non-verbal signs of listening.



Non-verbal signs of active listening:

- **Smile:** Combined with nods of the head, smiles can be powerful in affirming that messages are being listened to and understood.
- **Eye Contact:** It is normal and usually encouraging for the listener to look at the speaker.
- **Posture:** The attentive listener tends to lean slightly forward or sideways whilst sitting.
- **Mirroring:** Automatic reflection/mirroring of any facial expressions can help to show sympathy & empathy in more emotional situations.
- **Distraction:** The active listener will not be distracted and therefore will refrain from fidgeting, looking at a clock or watch, doodling, playing with their hair or picking their fingernails.

However these signs may not be appropriate in all situations and across all cultures.

2020-1-SI01-KA202-075871

Unit 1: Problem-Solving

Verbal signs of active listening:

- **Positive Reinforcement:** Although some positive words of encouragement ('very good', 'yes', 'indeed') may be beneficial to the speaker. It should be used sparingly so as not to distract from what is being said or place unnecessary emphasis on parts of the message.
- **Remembering:** Remembering details, ideas and concepts from previous conversations proves that attention was kept and is likely to encourage the speaker to continue.
- **Questioning:** By asking relevant questions the listener also helps to reinforce that they have an interest in what the speaker has been saying.
- **Reflection:** ... is closely repeating or paraphrasing what the speaker has said in order to show comprehension.
- **Clarification:** ... usually involves the use of open questions which enables the speaker to expand on certain points as necessary.
- **Summarization:** ... involves taking the main points of the received message and reiterating them in a logical and clear way, giving the speaker a chance to correct if necessary.



Please watch the video 'Improve Your Listening Skills with Active Listening': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2z9mdX1j4A&t=5s>

2020-1-SI01-KA202-075871



Unit 1: Problem-Solving

Judgement

A judgment is an opinion that you have or express after thinking carefully about something. Measuring judgment and engaging in the process of improving it requires understanding the six elements of judgment, according to Likierman:

- **What you take in:** It focuses on the ability to learn, how well one listens and how much attention we pay to what is heard or read. Be aware of your own “information filters,” and question the information you’re receiving and whether it fits with your experience.
- **Who and what you trust:** It’s important to care about the quality of the information we consume. It’s also valuable to seek diversity of opinions and information. Make judgment a quality you seek in colleagues. Question the credibility of information sources.
- **What you know:** Experience is a critical element of judgment and decision making, helping shape decisions and allowing an individual to anticipate potential challenges and issues. Track your decisions and what went right/wrong, particularly those made in stressful times.
- **What you feel and believe:** Values are key drivers of decisions. It’s important to be aware of them. Take steps to understand biases and to mitigate their impact. Seek the input of an impartial third party.
- **Making the choice:** This is the stage of bringing together the “raw material” of the decision in a way that improves the chances of success. That might mean not accepting the obvious options as the only options.
- **Acting on the decision:** This stage involves acknowledging that the decision itself isn’t the final step. Consider your own experience delivering on such decisions and that of others involved in the decision-making process.

2020-1-SI01-KA202-075871



Unit 1: Problem-Solving

Six ways to improve personal judgement

Decision making is a case of choosing between different alternatives. Divergent thinking techniques can be helpful in generating creative ideas, while convergent thinking can assist in structuring and evaluating potential solutions. So how can busy professionals improve their personal judgement to become better decision makers? Use this six ways to improve your personal judgement:

1. **Be aware of personal bias.** Recognise where your unconscious preferences and motivations influence how you make decisions
2. **Consider opposite points of view.** Good judgement is about making the best decision rather than ensuring your viewpoint wins out.
3. **Accept your mistakes.** Good leaders are self-aware, able to take responsibility for mistakes and to take negative feedback when required.
4. **Learn from experience.** Bank what works and avoid repeating what didn't.
5. **Avoid flip-flopping.** Use instinct where necessary to make a decision and start to take action.
6. **Automate repeat and routine** decisions to free your mind for more important decisions.



2020-1-SI01-KA202-075871



Unit 1: Problem-Solving

How to improve your problem-solving skills

Improving your problem-solving skills will give you a distinct edge as an ATF. You can hone your problem-solving skills by:

- **Seek out opportunities to solve a problem:** By putting yourself into new situations you are more likely to be exposed to opportunities to problem solve.
- **Do practice problems:** Practice/role-play can be useful tools. Find a scenario like, “How would you handle an angry customer?” or “How do you respond when a customer asks for a refund?” Practicing how you might handle these or other scenarios common in your industry can help you call upon solutions quickly when they arise on the job.
- **Observe how others problem solve:** If possible, ask one of your more experienced colleagues if you can observe their techniques.
- **Practicing brainstorming activities** such as mind mapping
- Approaching everyday issues with a **"what if"** mentality, regularly testing new approaches
- Keeping an **idea journal** where you jot down all your ideas, no matter how out-of-the-box
- Working through **logic puzzles** and games like Sudoku
- Following **industry publications** covering strategies for common issues



2020-1-SI01-KA202-075871

Unit 1: Problem-Solving

Improve your problem-solving skills - Role play/dialogue

Imagine the following situation: You are travelling with your clients to an art exhibition in a large barrier-free exhibition centre, to which the clients are very much looking forward to. Two of your clients are in wheelchairs. When booking the exhibition tickets, you (ATF) were assured that the exhibition, which is spread over several floors, is accessible with the disabled lift or via ramps. This morning, unfortunately, there was a technical problem in the area of the art exhibition: the handicapped accessible lift is closed due to urgent maintenance, and the ramp leading to the first floor was so badly affected by the technical problem that it is also closed and cannot be used. For the two clients in wheelchairs, a visit to the art exhibition is now unfortunately not possible, which they are very disappointed about.

Work out possible solutions/alternatives in a role play/dialogue so that the time of the exhibition visit can also be a pleasant and enjoyable stay for the two clients in the wheelchair. The participants can take on the role of the ATF, the exhibition manager, the two clients in the wheelchair as well as other committed clients who would like to contribute constructively to finding a satisfactory solution. The remaining participants act as observers and give feedback to the actors afterwards. If necessary, the roles can be swapped or further possible solutions can be worked out together.

2020-1-SI01-KA202-075871



Unit 1: Problem-Solving

What is creative problem-solving?

Creative problem-solving is an approach that identifies unique solutions to issues through a process of problem identification and resolution planning. It goes beyond conventional approaches to find solutions. It requires a strategic approach and practice to get better.

Follow these steps to start improving your creative problem-solving skills.

- **Use a strategic framework:** Creative problem-solving is a framework within itself. It lets you break down issues that are hard to measure with a structured approach. 1) Gather information, 2) Identify relationships, 3) Develop a solution and 4) Implement.
- **Practice empathy:** It's a key element of emotional intelligence. In the workplace it allows you to understand the viewpoint of customers.
- **Get a hobby:** A hobby presents its own set of challenges that require you to use your brain differently.
- **Relax your assumptions:** Key details/information get left out when you make an assumption based on past knowledge/how things have always worked. Overcome this tendency by clarifying the assumptions of others, responding appropriately and defining goal expectations.
- **Practice persistence:** Persistence towards a goal requires maintaining a level of strategic focus through challenging situations until you come to a resolution.

2020-1-SI01-KA202-075871

Unit 1: Problem-Solving



Follow these steps to start improving your creative problem-solving skills.

- **Question standard practices:** Collaborating is a great way to come up with creative solutions. If your coworkers/industry is leaning toward one way of doing things, consider if this solution is the best way and try to discuss alternate solutions.
- **Consider your past experiences:** Past experiences give you a unique perspective that you can apply with critical thought. Ask yourself if you've ever been in a situation similar to one you may be currently experiencing in your workplace, recall how the situation ended and determine what you can do to achieve similar or better results.
- **Become an expert in your field:** The more you understand the technical side of your industry, the easier it will be to clarify problems, identify connections and develop solutions. Exposure to more scenarios also gives you the foresight to identify issues before they arise.
- **Practice creative problem-solving:** The more issues presented that need creative solutions, the easier it will become to hone a problem-solving process. Try regularly exposing yourself to new scenarios that require different thinking.
- **Ask for help:** If you are stuck on a problem, try asking someone else in your field for advice. Their personal experiences offer exposure to a way of thinking that you may have never previously considered.

2020-1-SI01-KA202-075871



Unit 1: Problem-Solving

Problem solving scenarios - Problem-solving games

Problem-solving games are interactive challenges that aim to teach, promote and encourage the practice of analyzing problems and developing solutions for them. By participating in problem-solving games/activities, you can increase your higher-order thinking skills, develop your skills and focus on learning as a process rather than an outcome. Crucial steps in a problem-solving process include the following:

- Identifying and defining problems in a situation
- Creating possible solutions
- Evaluating possible solutions and selecting the most appropriate one
- Implementing solutions



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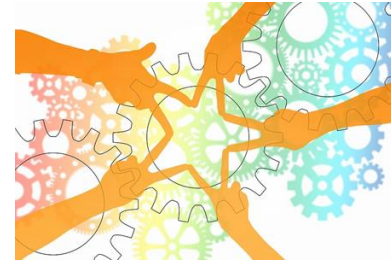
Unit 1: Problem-Solving

Problem-solving activities for adults

Game-based learning can provide many different benefits in the workplace. It helps build a strong network of camaraderie at work and puts an emphasis on both team accomplishments and individual abilities. Allowing time for team-based activities at work helps instill a sense of pride among group members and improves teamwork through negotiation and cooperation.

Problem-solving game-based activities help you hone necessary analytical skills to help your work environment thrive. Seven effective and compelling problem-solving activities for adults are:

- The great egg drop
- Escape room
- The human knot
- Sell an item on your desk



2020-1-SI01-KA202-075871



Unit 1: Problem-Solving

Problem-solving activities for adults

1) The great egg drop:

Teams of three to four per group are provided with an egg, masking tape and straws. The challenge is to build a structure that will protect the egg from being broken when dropped from a designated area or height.

Through cooperation, this activity practices creativity, adaptability, teamwork and communication skills.



2020-1-SI01-KA202-075871



Unit 1: Problem-Solving

Problem-solving activities for adults

2) Escape room:

The escape room is a concept that has gained popularity as a form of recreation but remains an excellent option for problem-solving within work teams. The team is gathered in a room and locked inside.

The goal of the game is to solve puzzles and understand clues hidden within the room, which will lead to the discovery of a hidden key. Most escape rooms have a time limit, which can be reduced to enhance the rigor of the challenge.

This exercise helps you practice effective communication, creative thought processes and collaboration to overcome obstacles.

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Problem-solving activities for adults

3) The human knot:

The human knot is an activity that requires no materials but can still be an effective problem-solving game at work.

Participants stand in a circle and hold hands with two different people not directly next to them. This action creates the knot.

Then, without letting go of any hands, the group unties the knot forming a perfect circle.



2020-1-SI01-KA202-075871



Unit 1: Problem-Solving

Problem-solving activities for adults

4) Sell an item on your desk

Every participants picks a random item from their desk and meet together in a conference room.

Once gathered, they will have to sell the chosen item to the others.

This exercise helps build creativity and harbor a positive environment through friendly competition.

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Problem-solving activities for adults

Your tutor has more activities. If you are interested in finding out more:



go to: <https://www.ntaskmanager.com/blog/top-problem-solving-activities-for-your-team-to-master/> and find the 'Top 20 Problem Solving Activities for Your Team to Master'

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Self-Assessment – Feedback

Traffic light feedback

Share your feedback with us by raising your green, yellow or red card to the following questions/statements.

(Green = yes, red = no, yellow = don't know, don't care).

- In today's training I learned a lot of new things.
- I was able to sufficiently expand my knowledge and skills in problem-solving.
- I feel well prepared for future situations where problem solving with customers and clients is required.
- I am satisfied with the improvement of my problem-solving skills.
- Overall, I am satisfied with today's training.



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Unit 1: Problem-Solving

References and material recommended for further study:

Web-links:

<https://asq.org/quality-resources/problem-solving#Resources>

<https://kepner-tregoe.com/blogs/what-is-problem-solving-and-why-is-it-important/>

<https://meliuscareers.com/blog/six-ways-to-improve-personal-judgement>

<https://smallbusiness.chron.com/problem-solving-skills-training-workplace-11656.html>

<https://theonebrief.com/the-6-elements-of-good-judgment-for-better-decisions/>

https://unremot.com/blog/problem-solving-activities/#Obstacles_to_problem_solving

<https://www.careerbuilder.com/advice/what-are-problemsolving-skills-and-why-are-they-important>

<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/de/worterbuch/englisch/judgment>

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/effective-problem-solving-steps>

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/improve-creative-problem-solving-skills>

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/problem-solving-games-workplace>

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/problem-solving-skills?from=careeradvice-US>

<https://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/ActiveListening.htm>

<https://www.ntaskmanager.com/blog/top-problem-solving-activities-for-your-team-to-master/>

<https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/active-listening.html>

<https://www.stroudinternational.com/solving-hard-problems-case-studies/>

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