Process Improvement Made Easy: The 8d Problem Solving Process Explained

By Lyndsay Swinton

What is the 8d Problem Solving Process? Anything that involves "eight disciplines" must be complicated and difficult to learn, right? Here to help you, is the 8d problem solving process explained in everyday language.

The 8d problem solving is about teams working together to resolve problems, using a structured 8 step process to help focus on facts not opinion. So far, so good! Let's get into some more detail - the eight disciplines explained....

Discipline 1 — Build The Team

Assemble a small team of people with the right mix of skills, experience and authority to resolve the problem and implement solutions. Ensure these people have the time and inclination to work towards the common goal. Get your people "on board" by using team building tools such as ice-breakers and team activities.

Discipline 2 — Describe the Problem

How can you fix it if you don't know what's broken? The more clearly you describe the problem, the more likely you are to resolve it. Be specific and quantify the problem where possible. Clarify what, when, where and how much e.g. what is the impact to customers? Consider using checklists from professional 8d problem solving suppliers to stimulate and open up your thinking.

Discipline 3 — Implement a Temporary Fix

What "sticking plaster" can you use until you figure out what's really causing the problem? Implement a temporary fix and monitor and measure the impact to ensure it's not making things worse. Remember to keep going, as a sticking plaster will never cure a broken leg!

Discipline 4 — Eliminate Root Cause

There will be many suspects causing the problem, but usually only one culprit. The key is figuring out which one. This is where it can get a bit numerically challenging, as statistical tools are often used to get a deep understanding of what is going on in a process.

Discipline 5 – Verify Corrective Action

You know what's causing the problem – how are you going to fix it? Test to make sure that your planned fixes have no undesirable side effects. If so, are there complementary fixes that eliminate side effects? If your solution just isn't feasible, you can still change your mind before you move to the next "go live" stage.

Discipline 6 – Implement Permanent Fix

Go for it! Implement your permanent and complementary fixes and monitor to make sure it's working. Usually you will get it right, but if not, go back a few steps and try again – the culprit is there to be caught!

Discipline 7 – Stop It Happening Again

If you've gone to all this trouble, you don't what the problem to sneak up on you again! Prevent recurrence of the problem by updating everything related to the process e.g. specifications, training manuals, or "mistake proofing" the process.

Discipline 8 – Celebrate Success

Teamwork got you this far, so put on your collective party shoes and celebrate your success. Going public with success spreads knowledge and learning across your organisation, and let's face it, we all like a little recognition now and again. The 8d problem solving process is used by big businesses such as National Semiconductor, Shell and Toyota. The key is focusing on facts and not opinion, being disciplined enough to follow the process and remembering that a good team are worth more than the sum of the individuals. Do that, and you'll save time, money and lift your employees.

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