



EPICENTRAL

A Newsletter from Epicenter Development Group highlighting ideas that improve organizations

Welcome to Epicenter Development Group's newsletter, EPICentral. The purpose of this newsletter is to highlight fundamental ideas that have helped organizations develop and maintain great manufacturing and service operations. We hope that you find our EPICentral newsletter helpful, and we would welcome your comments on its content.

Unlocking the Human Potential to Innovate

What makes organizations truly world-class? Technology? Geographical Location? Marketing Skills? Although these may be important components for success, some would argue that the most important criterion for long-term success is how a company manages and uses its **human resources**. People have a huge capacity to learn new concepts and innovate unique solutions. These strengths, coupled with the fact that people have an inherent desire to make improvements, can lead to dramatic improvements to a organization's operations. The article talks about the idea of building your employees' capacity to innovate through a progressive series of tasks.

Set Up for Failure

Many companies have employees take a class in problem-solving techniques and then challenge them to solve major problems within their organizations. In many cases this leads to failure and demoralization of the employees involved (and an end to the process improvement program). The truth is that effective problem solving skills are developed, not just taught in the classroom and require three main components - **technique**, **experience** and **confidence**.

"It's a lot like learning how to drive a car."



The steps involved in learning to solve problems are similar to those steps taken by most people when they learn to drive.

Technique:

Before you can get behind the wheel of a car, you must first attend lectures and learn the basics of driving. Similarly, before people can effectively solve problems, they need to learn how to use the fundamental problem-solving tools like root cause analysis, experimental design and how to work in teams. Over time, people can learn how to use more advanced tools depending upon their needs.

Experience:

Experience is what transfers technical knowledge into practical skills. As you wouldn't start teaching a new driver on the Autobahn in Germany, you shouldn't start working with a problem-solving team on high-level, difficult problems right from the start. The general rule is to start with a problem that has a direct impact on the team members, can be solved in less than ninety days and requires little upfront capital to implement. To ensure success, a mentor or coach should be assigned to help the team through solving the initial problems. As the team gains experience, they will have the ability to tackle more complex issues on their own.

Confidence:

Confidence, a driving force for continuous improvement, can only be developed through repeated success. In driving, people start as nervous "student drivers" and evolve into confident drivers that all think they are "above average" in ability. This confidence enables people to drive into unknown territory and, sometimes, in poor weather. In teams, people will be hesitant to actively participate in problem-solving activities until they feel confident that they will not be ridiculed for their ideas and that they do have the ability to effect improvement (however small) in their workplace. To build confidence, start by solving smaller problems with simple solutions and quick payback and move slowly towards more challenging and "higher level" issues.

	Driving	Problem-Solving
Technique	Read book and attend lectures. See "infamous" crash videos.	Read book and attend lectures on root-cause analysis, effective communications and statistical tools
Experience	Road training with teacher. Start in parking lot, move to local streets and advance to highway.	Start with relatively simple problems with an assigned "coach", move to more difficult problems solved independently and advance to teach others.
Confidence	Nervous driving the first time to confidently driving in downtown traffic in a snowstorm.	Hesitant to tackle small problems due to "project of the month" mentality moving towards a "driving-force" for improvement.

Other Thoughts:

- A main point to consider is that problem-solving is a learned skill that gets better with experience. Consider providing opportunities for employees to "practice" problem-solving on a regular basis on progressively more difficult assignments
- If you are interested in learning more about root-cause analysis tools, you also check out our past Epicentral Article on [Cause-and-Effect Diagrams](#).

- If you are interested in customized problem-solving training for your team, please contact Bill Proctor at wproctor@epicentergroup.com

Next Steps

If you would like more information on this topic or other similar types of tools, please contact Bill Proctor with your request at wproctor@epicentergroup.com or 216-702-0952. You can also find previous issues of EPICentral at [Newsletters](#).

Mr. Proctor also speaks on a variety of problem-solving and system design topics that can help companies significantly increase the success and profitability of their businesses. If you are interested in having Bill speak at one of your upcoming meetings/events or would like more information on any of the speaking topics, please visit [Speaker Services](#) or you can email sales@epicentergroup.com.

Epicenter Development Group is a unique consulting firm that seamlessly integrates the disciplines of Systems Engineering and Organizational Analysis & Development to create practical design solutions to your toughest challenges. It is on the cutting edge of problem-solving solutions and the creator of a unique process called GreenRoom Engineering. This process adds greater value and cost savings for clients as compared to traditional engineering methods.

William Proctor, Epicenter's founder and president, has provided services around the country to more than 100 companies consisting of a variety of organizations; and Epicenter continues to grow as a resource for firms of all sizes.

To learn more about Epicenter Development Group, visit our website:

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Epicenter News

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