

Problem Solving, Critical Thinking, Field Note Taking

The purpose of this section is to enhance the Explorer's critical thinking and problem solving abilities.

Importance of problem solving ability

- Essential element of professionalism
- Distinguish from a functional bureaucrat
- "If you don't do your own thinking, someone else will do it for you!" (Edward de Bono)
- "Thinking is the source of knowledge. If knowledge is power, then thinking is the source of power." (Sint-Arnaud)

Four typical reasons for errors in reasoning:

- Person fails to observe and use all the relevant facts of a problem
 - Person fails to approach the problem in a systematic step-by-step manner, making leaps in logic and jumping to conclusions without checking them
 - Person fails to spell out relationships fully
 - Person is sloppy and inaccurate in collecting information and carrying out mental activities.
- Whimbey, Arthur & Lochhead, Jack. (1986). Problem solving and comprehension (4th ed.), p.11.

Methods of Good Problem Solvers:

- Positive attitude
- Concern for accuracy
- Breaking the problem into parts
- Avoiding guessing
- Activeness in problem solving

Whimbey, Arthur & Lochhead, Jack. (1986). Problem solving and comprehension (4th ed.), pp.25-27.

Introduce problem solving mode.

- Scanning or problem identification
- Analysis
- Problem framing
- Review of data
- Generating alternatives
- Response or action
- Assessment
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Problem definition is the key.

Research has shown that an effective way to improve one's skill in problem solving is to work in small groups together, think aloud, learn from each other, and read how experience problem solvers approached the same problems (Brainstorming)

*"For every problem there is an answer that is simple, quick, and easy, and wrong."
(H.L. Mencken)*

Development of problem solving skills.

Discuss examples of problem-solving in policing.

Proactive response with problem-solving emphasis

The theory behind problem-oriented policing is that underlying conditions create problems. These conditions might include the characteristics of the people involved (offenders, potential victims, and others), the social setting in which these people interact, the physical environment, and the way the public deals with these conditions.

A problem created by these conditions may generate one or more incidents. These incidents, while stemming from a common source, may appear to be different. For example, social and physical conditions in a deteriorated apartment complex may generate burglaries, acts of vandalism, and other incidents.

In the problem-solving approach the police may attempt to determine the course of the problem and work with the property owner or other agencies to correct the problem, rather than returning to the location to take reports as in the incident driven system.

EXAMPLES:

Use of problem-solving techniques to respond to such problem as:

- Drug traffic in residential neighborhoods.
- Neighborhood and business burglary control.
- Specific traffic safety problems (speeding, racing, noise disturbances, etc.)

Identifying community needs and responding to these needs.

The use of community organization strategies are involved to identify problems and determine the most successful approach to resolving these problems.

The SARA problem solving method may be used to respond to such needs. It includes the following techniques:

- Scanning the environment to identify problem.
- Analysis of the problems or issues.
- Response to problem.
- Assessment of response to evaluate the impact of the police effort.

Use of citizen problem solving groups working with police personnel.

Citizen police training such as the citizen police academy concept.

Quality service or citizen satisfaction survey to measure performance.

Involvement of other city departments and governmental organizations in problem solving and decision making.

Problem-Solving Process, Scanning Stage Objectives, Types of solutions or responses.

Police/community working together to solve problems (team work emphasis).

The emphasis is to use both new police response methods, and those found successful in the traditional model to provide quality services to the community. The citizens, police personnel, and other governmental agencies work together as a team to solve community problems.

The use of a citizen crime awareness committee to plan departmental response to problem areas.

The formation of police/citizen planning teams - strategic planning.

Checklist for Problem Solving

Made typical reasons errors in reasoning

1. Failed to observe and use all the relevant facts of a problem.
Yes___ No___
2. Failed to approach the problem in a systematic step-by-step manner, making leaps in logic and jumping to conclusions without checking them.
Yes___ No___
3. Failed to spell out relationships fully.
Yes___ No___
4. Sloppy and inaccurate in collecting information and carrying out mental activities.
Yes___ No___

Used methods of Good Problem solvers

1. Positive attitude
Yes___ No___
2. Concern for accuracy
Yes___ No___
3. Breaking the problem into parts
Yes___ No___
4. Avoiding guessing
Yes___ No___
5. Activeness in problem solving (Wimbey & Lochhead, pp. 25-27)
Yes___ No___

Used other methods

1. Generated alternatives for framing the problem
Yes___ No___
2. Generated alternative solutions
Yes___ No___
3. Analyzed the solutions
Yes___ No___

Evaluating Sources Skillfully

Why is There a Need to Evaluate Sources Skillfully?

When we cannot witness an event ourselves, we use a secondary source of information like a newspaper, magazine, television program, or book to find out about it. We may also talk to other people who witnessed the event firsthand themselves. We similarly consult other sources with regard to more technical and/or general information that we may not be in a position to verify ourselves, like the usefulness of certain medications in treating illnesses or even the correct translation of something written in a foreign language we don't know. The amount of information we acquire in these ways is enormous, and our ability to continue to do so seems limitless.

Sometimes, though, we get misinformation from others. Deliberate deception or distortion is one way that this happens, but perhaps not the most frequent way that misinformation travels. Often well meaning people who have misinformation themselves pass it on to us unaware of its inaccuracy. Rumors are extreme examples of this. But there are other situations more subtle, like biases that those who tell us things may be unaware of. If we are to gather good accurate information in these ways there is a clear need to exercise discrimination amongst the information we are given so that we can make choices ourselves of what is accurate and what is not. In many cases where we have no direct access to the information in question, this amounts to the need to judge the credibility or reliability of the sources of the information more skillfully.

How Do We Engage in Skillfully Determining the Credibility of a Source?

While we often assume that the sources of our information are reliable, there are things we could find out that would support or count against their credibility. One problem that we must counter is thinking about this issue in the first place -- often we simply accept what we hear. Another, more subtle problem is that even when we raise the question of the credibility of a source we often only attend to a few of the relevant factors and may overlook others that are equally important. In some instances we accept a person as a reliable source because he or she seems honest. In others because they have expertise in a field. But we know that people who seem honest or who have expertise in a field may have biases, vested interests in certain points of view, or may be uncritical themselves in accepting information which they pass on to us.

One key thing to do when the quality of information we are getting is of importance to us is to consider all of the relevant factors and make a judgment of credibility based on them together. Such factors as reputation, track-record in providing reliable and accurate information of the kind being considered, the person's expertise, the datedness of the information, the procedures used in gathering it, and the vested interested interests of those relating the information to us are all important in general. When the information is based on firsthand observation (e.g. an eyewitness) then the conditions of observation, the use of observation enhancing instruments, the person's expectations of what he or she is seeing, and when the report was recorded are all important as well. One of these may cast some doubt on the reliability of the source. But no single factor is definitive; all of the factors must be weighted to make a sound judgment of credibility. And where there is a doubt, seeking out others who we scrutinize in the way and who independently corroborate what the source tells us can resurrect the credibility of the information even if we have some doubts about the source.

EVALUATING THE RELIABILITY OF SOURCES SKILLFULLY

1. List the factors present that are relevant to the reliability of the source in the following categories:

- primary or secondary
- expertise
- bias or point of view
- date recorded
- proximity to event reported
- attention
- expectations
- corroboration
- etc.

2. Weigh the factors present and make a judgment of reliability based on them.

DETERMINING THE ACCURACY OF AN OBSERVATION

1. What are the following features of the observer, observation, and report that are relevant to its reliability/accuracy?

- Observer:
- Background
- Qualifications
- Usual reliability
- Free of bias?
- State of mind?
- Physical ability to observe (eyesight, etc.)?
- Capacity to observe (proximity, direction, free of distraction)?

- Expectations/point of view
 - Vested interest in having audience believe report?
 - Conduct of the Observation
 - Frequency?
 - Equipment:
 - Strength or accuracy?
 - Condition
 - How operated?
 - Date and location?
 - Replicated?
 - Report
 - How soon after observation?
 - Details (drawings, photographs, graphs)?
 - Language and findings expressed objectively?
 - Corroboration:
 - By others?
 - By me?
2. When you weigh these factors how reliable would you judge the observation to be?

Problem-Oriented Policing Agencies

1. Focus on problems of concern to the public.
2. Zero in on effectiveness as the primary concern.
3. Be proactive.
4. Be committed to systematic inquiry as first step in solving substantive problems.
5. Encourage use of rigorous methods in making inquiries.
6. Make full use of the data in police files and the experience of police personnel.
7. Group like incidents together so that they can be addressed as a common problem.
8. Avoid using overly broad labels in grouping.
9. Encourage a broad and uninhibited search for solutions.
10. Acknowledge the limits of the criminal justice system as a response to problems.
11. Identify multiple interests in any one problem and weigh them when analyzing the value of different responses.
12. Be committed to taking some risks in responding to problems.

From: Goldstein in Eck and Spelman (1987) Problem-Solving: Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News. NIJ. P. 3.

Problem-Solving Process

- Scanning identifying the problem;
- Analysis learning the problem's causes, scope, and effects.
- Response acting to alleviate the problem; and,
- Assessment determining whether the response worked.

Problem-Oriented Policing requires that officers use their critical thinking skills to look for underlying causes behind events or a series of incidents rather to focus on individual occurrences as isolated events.

From Eck and Spelman (1987) Problem-Solving Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News. NIJ

Scanning Stage Objectives

1. Looking for possible problems;
2. Making a preliminary identification of possible problems;

3. Conducting a preliminary analysis to determine if a real problem exists and whether further analysis is needed; and,
4. Setting priorities among problems and assigning responsibilities for conducting further analysis.
From Eck and Spelman (1987) Problem-Solving Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News NIJ p. 44.

Types of Solutions or Responses

1. Solutions designed to totally eliminate a problem;
2. Solutions designed to substantially reduce a problem;
3. Solutions designed to reduce the harm created by the problem;
4. Solutions designed to deal with a problem better (treat people more humanely, reduce costs, or increase effectiveness); and,
5. Solutions designed to remove the problem from police consideration.

From: Eck and Spelman (1987) Problem-Solving: Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News. NIJ. p. 49.

PROBLEM SOLVING AND CRITICAL THINKING

Case Studies on Problem Solving

The purpose of this activity is to increase the Explorer's proficiency in problem-solving and to explore different ways of handling difficult situations

SUGGESTED USES: individual work, small group discussion, and large group wrap up.

ACTIVITY:

1. Share purpose of activity.
2. Assign individuals to cases based upon their interest or their needs with sufficient time to do homework.
3. Assign to small groups of five to nine people for discussion, critical thinking, and formulation of a report for the whole class. (The Advisor may let the group elect a spokesperson or assign someone as appropriate).
4. Oral presentation to the whole class of their learning's, critiques of practices, thinking, decision-making, etc.
5. Make the connection between their findings and current practices. Emphasize that while there is room for disagreement in some areas the importance of generating alternative ways to handle situations and to solve problems.
6. Review their written responses and give them feedback about the thoroughness of their thinking, clarity of expression, and the quality of their answer in terms of practical and innovative approaches.

Notes to the Advisor:

Be sure to be sensitive to the variations between departmental philosophies, current practices, and ideal recommendations.

PROBLEM-SOLVING

Generate at least two alternative responses. Give pros and cons for each alternative and your first choice with explanation as to why it is the best choice. Your response should be written

Case No. P - 1

You are called to a department store because the owner has caught an eight year old shoplifter. He wants you to take the child home. On the way home the child tells you that the father has abused him before. He is afraid he will be beaten.

1. Identify possible underlying problems and define the ones that should be worked on.
2. What steps might you take to analyze the problems and develop an understanding of them?
3. What alternative solutions are available or possible and which ones should be implemented?
4. How could you assess whether the responses taken were effective?

Case No. P - 2

A woman with three children aged 2, 3, and 4 has set up a street corner with a sign saying, "I will work for food." The children are dirty and appear to not have had their diaper changed.

1. Identify possible underlying problems and define the ones that should be worked on.
2. What steps might you take to analyze the problems and develop an understanding of them?
3. What alternative solutions are available or possible and which ones should be implemented?
4. How could you assess whether the responses taken were effective?

Case No. P - 3

Groups of workers from a large employer have been engaging in drug dealing, drug usage, and drinking during their lunch break.

Identify possible underlying problems and define the ones that should be worked on.

What steps might you take to analyze the problems and develop an understanding of them?

What alternative solutions are available or possible and which ones should be implemented?

How could you assess whether the responses taken were effective?

Case No. P - 4

There have been a series of burglaries in the Windridge Apartment Complex.

1. Identify possible underlying problems and define the ones that should be worked on.
2. What steps might you take to analyze the problems and develop an understanding of them?
3. What alternative solutions are available or possible and which ones should be implemented?
4. How could you assess whether the responses taken were effective?

Case No. P - 5

Groups of youths drinking, using marijuana, making noise and littering near a residential community.

1. Identify possible underlying problems and define the ones that should be worked on.
2. What steps might you take to analyze the problems and develop an understanding of them?
3. What alternative solutions are available or possible and which ones should be implemented?
4. How could you assess whether the responses taken were effective?

Field Note Taking

The Explorer should understand the principles, uses, and the application of taking proper field notes.

Define and identify use of field notes.

Definition: Brief notations concerning specific events and circumstances that are recorded while fresh in the officer's mind and used to prepare a report.

Uses:

Report writing:

- Provides basis for report
- Reduces need to re-contact parties involved
- Provides greater accuracy relative to time, statements, and events than memory alone

Court:

- Notes used in court are subject to scrutiny of the court
- If placed in evidence, may not be available until released by court
- May produce impeachable inconsistencies between notes and reports
- Notes used in court kept for future use
- Non-police information should not be written in notebook, i.e., personal comments and other unrelated information

Utilize this information in every scenario/role-play possible to give Explorers practice in note taking

Select and organize types of information that should be entered into officer's field notebook.

Persons:

- Suspect(s)
- Victim(s)
- Witness(es)

Describe from head to toe:

- Race and sex
- Hair - color, style, curly, straight, etc.
- Hat - color, style
- Face - complexion
- Eyes - color, shape
- Nose - mouth area and any distinguishing marks
- Shirt - color, style
- Pants - color, style
- Shoes - color, style
- Other distinguishing marks
- Tattoos, scars, limp, missing teeth, etc.

Vehicles

Describe top to bottom

- Color - top to bottom
- Year model
- Manufacturer
- Model name
- License plate: year of expiration, state registered
- Distinguishing mark/damage
- Value
- Insured
- Mortgaged

Other property

Description will differ by the type of property but should include:

- Manufacturer
- Model name
- Model number
- Serial number
- Cost/value
- Color
- Size
- Style
- Use, if not obvious

Date(s) and time(s), Exact location of occurrence, Persons involved

Other important information

- Case number
- Location and chain of evidence/custody
- Assisting officer activity
- Type of incident

Compile questions that should be answered in field notes in order to complete report.

Who?

Persons involved should be identified by role as suspect, victim, or witness.

- Correct spelling
- Complete name, address, telephone number, work address and telephone numbers
- Any aliases used
- Age and date of birth
- Sex and race
- Occupation, if employed
- Student - school

What?

- Type of offense committed
- Type of property involved
- Means of transportation used , if any, or by foot
- Statements made
 - Speech impediments
 - Unusual words or phrases

When? (Date and Time)

- Offense occurred
- Reported
- Discovered
- Evidence located
- Witness(es) and victim(s) contacted
- Arrest(s) made

Where?

- Exact location that offense occurred
- Reference points map used
- Type area - residential, business, open field
- Location of victims, witnesses, suspects in relation to crime.

Why?

- Motive or cause
- Revenge
- Monetary gain
- Drug addiction
- Accidental

How?

- Occurred
- Property obtained
- Suspect approached
- Suspect gained access/entry
- Exit/leave scene

Identify and describe the two systems of field note taking and the mechanics of keeping field notes.**Permanent field notes recorded in notebook**

- Record officer name and badge number/I.D. number on notebook
- Be neat when recording
- Keep pages intact and in proper sequence
- Record day/date in sequence
- Record daily call(s) in sequence
- Record note at scene follow-up in sequence
- Keep permanently

Temporary field notes

- Discard following the completion of report
- Be neat
- Record notes in order of events (field vs. follow-up)

List the advantage of proper field notes.

Provides for recall at a later time/date.

- Enables officer to separate details of the offense
- Not totally dependent on memory
- Provides detail when preparing report and testifying in court.

List the rules for complete note taking.

Restrict notes only to important facts, and information.

- Witness, suspect, victims
- Property
- Vehicles used
- Details of how offense occurred.

Alternate between listening and writing.

- Impossible to listen well while writing.

Ask a question/take another look.

Check notes