

PROBLEM SOLVING TASK FORCE WORKSHEET

YOUR NAME: _____

BACKGROUND

A task force is an important and useful tool for bringing together members of different areas of an organization to quickly and efficiently define problems and solutions. Task forces, when given a clear charter, are able to unite divergent interests for the common good of the whole. The very strength of the task force comes from the diversity of opinions from different areas, the secret to success is the ability to use these differences and not be divided by them. A structured and planned approach are the ingredients to the cement that holds the group together.

The five steps to developing a plan to resolve a problem are:

1. Problem identification
2. Defining the causes
3. Defining the root cause of the problem
4. Brainstorming solutions
5. Defining the plan

INSTRUCTIONS

The above will be worked through in sequence using this document. To begin the discussion, develop your own definition. What is the purpose of this group? List your charter, include your limits:

FIVE STEPS

The task force discussion should follow this carefully established sequence:

1. Problem Identification

Finding a specific definition of the problem is not as easy as it might first seem. If the problem is obvious to everyone in the group, it probably would have been resolved long before. Avoid the tendency most people have to leap to discussion actions to fix the problem, only to find their solution is not that of others. Right now it is premature to undertake step #5 below without a clear identification of what needs to be corrected. Start with these questions to react:

- a. Is there any "pain" that you, other individuals, and other functions are experiencing as part of this issue?
(Pain means inconveniences, wasted time, uncomfortable situations, etc.) Are these "pains" felt by others and if so, how?
- b. What time and resources are being wasted by this issue? What is done repetitively because of this?
- c. Relative to this issue, what is not happening that should be happening?
- d. Relative to quality and efficiency issues, what is occurring that is related to this issue?

Before consulting with others on the team, list what you think the current problems are. Be specific - what do you feel has been happening? After listing these, we will have a group discussion.

Agreement must be reached on the above before going to step #2.

2. Defining the Causes

Now that the problems in step #1 have been defined, the causes need to be identified. You may anticipate some disagreement over the causes, as these are often brought on by different perspectives, individual needs, and functional interests. This is ok. Causes are usually multiple and should not focus on discussions of "who is to blame", etc. as this is counter-productive. Causes need to be directly related to the problem as defined above.

First, list your opinions of the causes of the above problems:

3. Defining the "Root Cause" of the Problem

Now it is time to identify the one factor that is most directly related to creating your problems. The root cause is not an individual or a group, but something that is happening or needs to happen such as the lack of good process, inadequate task definition or skills, a re-occurring communication issue, etc. If the root cause is properly identified, fixing this one thing will eliminate most of the current problems.

What do you think this **one** root cause is:
