

SECTION OVERVIEW

5.1: Facts

When faced with a problem, people often overgeneralize from their previous experience and fail to use known facts of the problem situation. People overgeneralize when they see similarities between the current problem and one of a past experience, while overlooking the differences. Although basic principles from a past experience can be effectively applied to similar problems, learning the wrong lesson is common, for every experience is unique in some way. The effort required to draw useful findings from facts can be tedious, so people tend to grasp at easy solutions that are not supported by the facts of the problem situation. Such solutions are gambles that are rarely effective.

To counter these psychological barriers to effective problem-solving, Maier (1963) has advanced four principles for screening solutions, two negative principles and two positive principles, as follows:

1. Solutions transferred from other situations should be rejected (Negative #1).
2. Solutions supported by facts or interpretations of facts that are challenged by other members of the group should be rejected (Negative #2).
3. Solutions founded either upon any of the unchallenged facts or unchallenged interpretations of facts taken from the problem situation should be selected for consideration and evaluation (Positive #1).
4. When exceptions to a trend in results can be satisfactorily explained, solutions based upon the trend should be selected for further consideration (Positive #2).

Maier envisioned that the leader of a problem-solving discussion group would apply these principles to screen out less desirable solutions and screen in more desirable ones *after* the group has arrived at a list of proposed solutions, for the overarching principle of problem solving is that the solution-generating process should be distinct from and precede the solution-evaluating process. Both processes are necessary, but whereas solution generation requires creativity, solution evaluation requires criticism. Criticism inhibits creativity. When the two processes are muddled, people limit their contributions to ideas that will not be criticized. The group does not get to the best solution, because discussion ends with the first solution that is acceptable.

Topic hierarchy

5.1.1: Financial Statements

5.1.2: Porter's Five Forces

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