

Collaborative Problem Solving

Do not copy, post, or distribute

*To the wise people we met along the way.
They taught us the true value and magic of
collaborative problem solving.*

and

*To our readers, may this work provide you the
knowledge to launch your journey, and may this
book do justice to the wisdom entrusted to us.*

Collaborative Problem Solving

A Step-by-Step Guide for School Leaders

Lawrence A. Machi/Brenda T. McEvoy

Do not copy, post, or distribute



For information:

Corwin
A Sage Company
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320
(800) 233-9936
www.corwin.com

Sage Publications Ltd.
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP
United Kingdom

Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
Unit No 323-333, Third Floor, F-Block
International Trade Tower Nehru Place
New Delhi 110 019
India

Sage Publications Asia-Pacific Pte. Ltd.
18 Cross Street #10-10/11/12
China Square Central
Singapore 048423

Vice President and Editorial Director:
Monica Eckman
Senior Acquisitions Editor: Tanya Ghans
Content Development Manager:
Desirée A. Bartlett
Senior Editorial Assistant: Nyle De Leon
Marketing Manager: Melissa Duclos
Production Editor: Vijayakumar
Copy Editor: Karin Rathert
Typesetter: TNQ Tech Pvt. Ltd.
Proofreader: Girish Kumar Sharma
Indexer: TNQ Tech Pvt. Ltd.
Cover Designer: Candice Harman
Marketing Manager: Melissa Duclos

Copyright © 2024 by Corwin Press, Inc.

All rights reserved. Except as permitted by U.S. copyright law, no part of this work may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

When forms and sample documents appearing in this work are intended for reproduction, they will be marked as such. Reproduction of their use is authorized for educational use by educators, local school sites, and/or noncommercial or nonprofit entities that have purchased the book.

All third-party trademarks referenced or depicted herein are included solely for the purpose of illustration and are the property of their respective owners. Reference to these trademarks in no way indicates any relationship with, or endorsement by, the trademark owner.

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Machi, Lawrence A., author. | McEvoy, Brenda T., author.

Title: Collaborative problem solving : a step-by-step guide for school leaders / Lawrence A. Machi, Brenda T. McEvoy.

Description: Thousand Oaks, California : Corwin Press, [2024] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024012469 | ISBN 9781071926055 (paperback) | ISBN 9781071946671 (adobe pdf) | ISBN 9781071946640 (epub) | ISBN 9781071946664 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Educational leadership. | School management teams. | Problem solving. | Decision making. | School management and organization. | Educators—Professional relationships.

Classification: LCC LB2806 .M195 2024 | DDC 371.2/011—dc23/eng/20240417

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024012469>

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

24 25 26 27 28 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

DISCLAIMER: This book may direct you to access third-party content via web links, QR codes, or other scannable technologies, which are provided for your reference by the author(s). Corwin makes no guarantee that such third-party content will be available for your use and encourages you to review the terms and conditions of such third-party content. Corwin takes no responsibility and assumes no liability for your use of any third-party content, nor does Corwin approve, sponsor, endorse, verify, or certify such third-party content.

Contents

Publisher's Acknowledgments	ix
About the Authors	xi
The Problem-Solving Process Flowchart	xii
Preface	xv

Chapter 1 School Problem Solving in a Nutshell **1**

Problem Solving in Schools	1
Beginning With the Basics: Defining Terms	2
A Collaborative Problem-Solving Process	3
Why Go to All This Trouble?	6
When Is a Collaborative Process Needed?	6
The Prerequisites for Successful Collaboration	8
Common Leadership Foibles and Fumbles	13
How This Text Is Organized	14

Chapter 2 Identify and Define the Problem **17**

Foibles and Fumbles When Defining a Problem	18
Putting It All Together: Defining the Problem	20
Task 1: Define the Elements of a Problem	21
Task 2: Define the Type of Problem	24
Task 3: Determine the Difficulty of the Problem	26
Task 4: Urgency to Solve the Problem: The Strength Weakness Opportunity Threat (SWOT)	30
Creating the Written Definition	32

Chapter 3 Develop a Common Understanding and Intent **35**

Getting on the Same Page	36
Foibles and Fumbles While Developing a Common Understanding and Intent	36
Putting It All Together: Develop a Common Understanding and Intent	38
Task 1: Determine the Stakeholders	39
Task 2: Get Stakeholders' Commitment to Work Together	42
Task 3: Develop Understanding of the Problem Defined	51

Chapter 4 Image the Solution and Determine Its Impact **53**

Foibles and Fumbles While Imaging a Solution and Selecting a Problem-Solving Procedure	55
Putting It All Together: Imaging the Solution and Determining Its Impact	57
Task 1: Creating the Desired State	59
Task 2: Determine the Solution Impact	65

Chapter 5 Develop the Solution Criteria and Select a Problem-Solving Procedure **69**

Foibles and Fumbles While Setting Solution Criteria and Selecting a Problem-Solving Procedure	70
Putting It All Together: Set the Solution Criteria and Find Solution Alternatives	72
Task 1: Develop Solution Criteria	73
Keeping Tabs on Criteria Building	76
Task 2: Select a Problem-Solving Procedure	79

Chapter 6 Define Search Strategies and Find Solution Alternatives

87

Foibles and Fumbles While Defining Search Strategies and Finding Solution Alternatives	88
Putting It All Together: Define Search Strategies and Find Solution Alternatives	90
Task 1: Defining Search Strategies	91
Task 2: Find Solution Alternatives	93
The Four Cases	95

Chapter 7 Weigh the Alternatives and Decide on a Solution

103

Foibles and Fumbles While Weighing Alternatives and Deciding on a Solution	104
Putting It All Together: Weigh the Alternatives and Decide on a Solution	106
Task 1: Set Decision-Making Roles	106
Task 2: Determine Rating System and Evaluate Alternatives	108
Task 3: Decide on the Solution	116

Chapter 8 Solve the Problem

119

Foibles and Fumbles When Solving the Problem	120
Putting It All Together: Solve the Problem	122
Task 1: Plan the Solution	125
Task 2: Assign Resources	126
Task 3: Create an Assessment Process	127
Task 4: Review Progress	130

The Problem-Solver's Toolbox

133

Tool A: Meeting Playbook 134

Tool B: Meeting Roles 136

Tool C: Communication Modes 141

Tool D: Group Sizes 147

Tool E: Meeting Space 151

Tool F: Glossary of Terms and Group Organizers 154

For Further Reading 169

Bibliography 179

Index 181

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Publisher's Acknowledgments

Corwin gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the following reviewers:

Peter Dillon, Superintendent
Berkshire Hills Regional School District
Stockbridge, Massachusetts

Jacie Maslyk, Educational Consultant
Coraopolis, Pennsylvania

Ellen Percont, Superintendent
Goldendale School District
Goldendale, Washington

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Do not copy, post, or distribute

About the Authors



Lawrence A. Machi is Professor Emeritus of Organizational Leadership at the University of La Verne, in La Verne, California. He holds an MA in curriculum development and an EdD in organizational leadership. He taught research methods and chaired dissertation studies as well as taught doctoral classes in organizational development. Before his tenure at La Verne, Larry taught in schools of education at the

University of San Francisco, St. Mary's College of California, and Sonoma State University. Dr. Machi served as an organizational development consultant in Viet Nam for 10 years. He has also served as a Fulbright Specialist Scholar in Taiwan for this last decade, working in the fields of leadership studies and research.

With K–12 experience as well, Larry worked as a secondary teacher and served as a school administrator in both secondary and elementary school districts in Northern California. He has occupied the roles of vice principal, principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. Dr. Machi has consulted with school districts and nonprofit organizations in leadership, organization development, finance, negotiations, and strategic thinking.

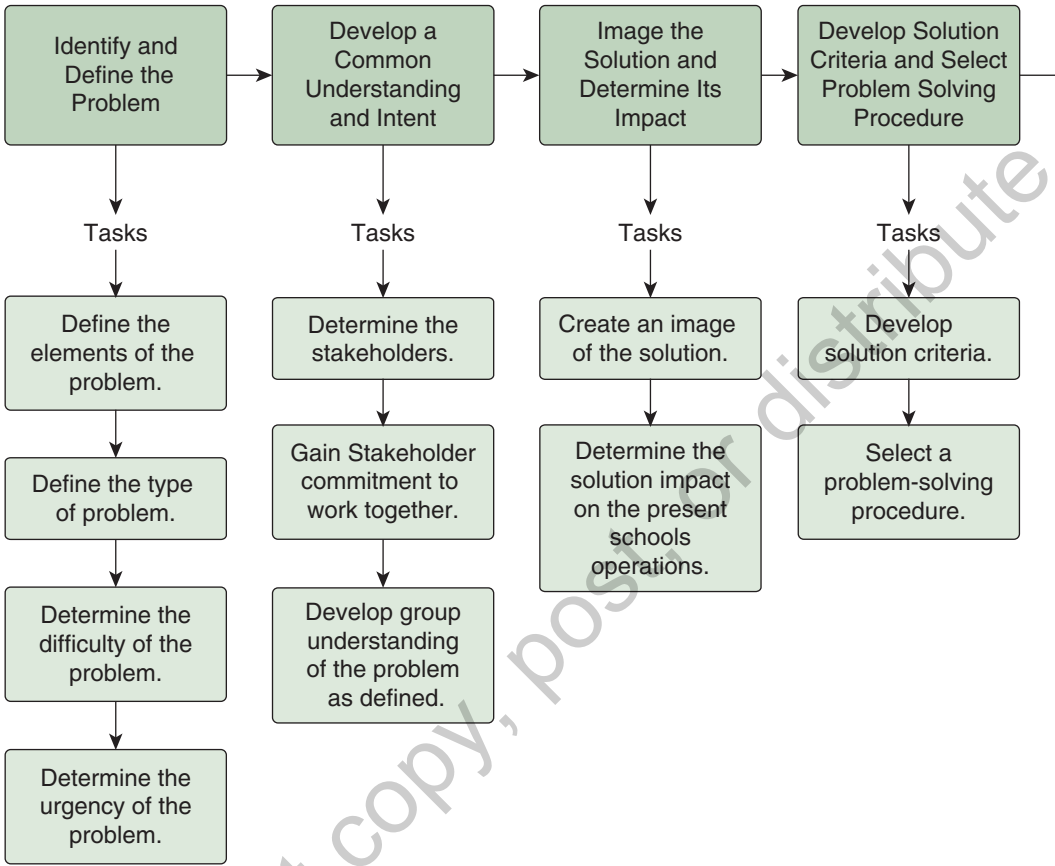


Brenda T. McEvoy taught high school English, history, and science for 36 years. Research skills were always part of her curriculum. For eight years, she worked for the California State Department of Education, leading groups of educators in improving their ability to edit and assess student writing. She has also served as a mentor for beginning English and history teachers. Participation in the California

Writing Project extended her knowledge of writing and the difficulties students face when producing a major assignment. She has worked as an editor for several books, focusing on helping writers create work that is clear and logical.

The Problem-Solving Process, Page 1

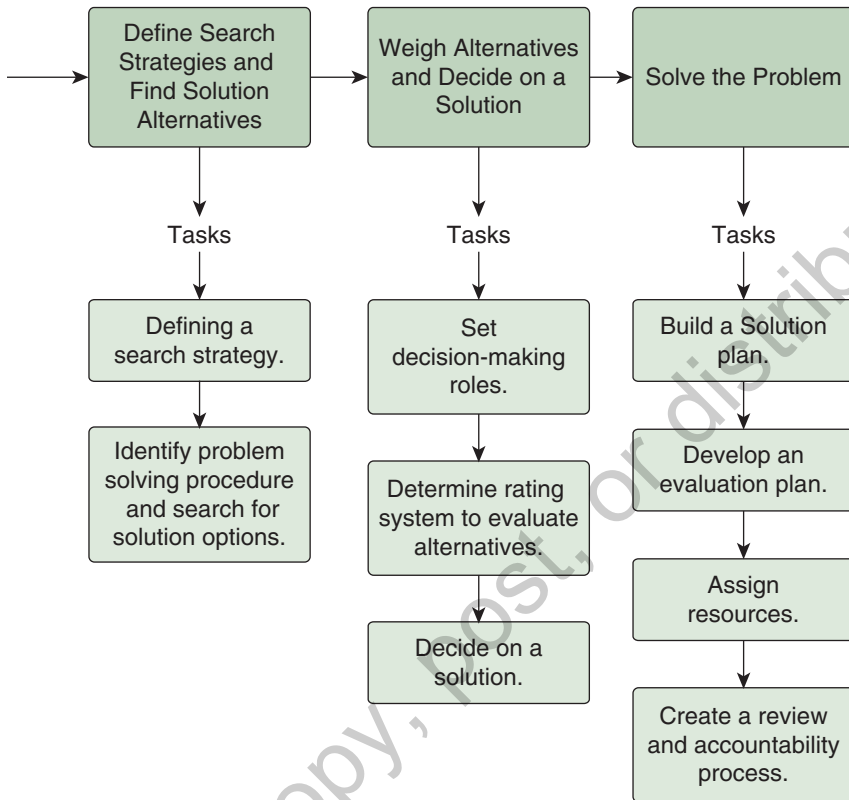
The Problem-



Do not copy, post or distribute

The Problem-Solving Process, Page 2

Solving Process



Do not copy, post, or distribute

Preface

In this age of many online meetings, it is easy to forget the strength of using an actual team gathering to meet, plan, and act together to work toward a common goal. This is particularly true for endeavors of importance, such as those concerning the well-being and teaching of our greatest concern and resource, the youth of today. This book is designed as a guidebook into the often-overlooked world of using a thoughtful approach to solve problems.

Audience

Those new to the world of school administration will quickly discover that much of their time will be spent identifying and solving problems of varying sizes and degrees of difficulty and urgency. A good start is to gain the working knowledge found in a practical guidebook.

In addition, this text is useful to any of those who work in a school community from K–12 to university graduate schools. Additional audiences can be found among those who are currently studying to become educators or who simply wish to improve their understanding of this important venue.

The text will also be useful to those who frequently spend time on school-related business, such as members of school boards or other school committees.

In fact, any leader who wishes to know how to deal with the very difficult problems that appear in group enterprises will find this book to be a useful guide to solving those inevitable problems that test the thinking and resolve in any organization's endeavors.

Text Organization

This book is organized as a field guide for solving school problems in a small group setting. It presents a step-by-step approach to rationally taking the guesswork out of the process. Organized as a seven-step model, the text systematically describes each phase of group collaborative problem solving. The text begins with a nutshell description of the process. Each subsequent chapter is dedicated to explaining a specific step, from the inception, where a problem is identified, to the final four tasks of implementing a solution.

Each chapter includes a description of those foibles and fumbles that can plague even a well-intended group and cause problem solving to run aground while explaining the specific tasks to be conducted to successfully complete that step. Graphics and charts clarify key points about

topics under discussion. Examples for facilitating tasks with a workgroup are provided as task cue cards. These are facilitation lesson plans. They outline the desired outcome, provide tailored group organizing strategies, the meeting sequence of activities, and a suggested timeframe. The chapters end with a suggestion for a metacognitive moment to consider.

This book ends by providing The Problem-Solver's Toolbox, which contains practical guidance for meeting development, meeting roles, modes of communication, dealing with varied group sizes, meeting space organization, and a glossary of group organizing strategies. An annotated list of further reading and a bibliography complete the book.

When facing a difficult problem, you have two choices. You can react blindly and hope for the best, or you can proceed in an organized, thoughtful manner. Successful leaders have learned that trial-and-error is frustrating, time consuming, and only rarely successful. Having a guide through the process will increase the number of successful outcomes, including stakeholder voice and choice, while reducing the stress of all concerned.

Do not copy, post, or distribute