UNIVERSITY OF THE PEOPLE

STUDENT RESOURCE GUIDE

Webinar Title: From Problem to Plan: Identifying Business Opportunities and Making Strategic Recommendations

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About This Resource Guide

This guide provides students with additional resources to continue developing the analytical and strategic-thinking skills introduced in the webinar.

The webinar focuses on moving from a business challenge to an actionable recommendation through four connected stages:

1. Frame the Problem → 2. Diagnosing the Root Cause → 3. Evaluate Strategic Options → 4. Recommendation and Act

The resources below can help you practice these skills after the webinar using freely accessible learning materials, tools, and examples.

1. Identifying and Framing Business Problems

Resource: ASQ – Problem Solving

What it covers: This resource introduces a structured approach to problem solving, including defining the problem, diagnosing root causes, selecting and implementing solutions, and sustaining results. It also introduces several useful problem-solving tools, including Five Whys, Fishbone diagrams, decision matrices, and decision trees.

Why it is useful: Before attempting to solve a business problem, it is important to understand exactly what is the problem ?. A clearly defined problem helps prevent organizations from jumping too quickly to solutions.

Who it is for: Students, managers, entrepreneurs, and professionals who want to strengthen structured problem-solving skills.

Access:

https://asq.org/quality-resources/problem-solving?utm

2. Diagnosing Root Causes

Resource: ASQ – Five Whys and Five How's

What it covers: Five Whys is a questioning technique used to move beyond visible symptoms and investigate the underlying causes of a problem. Five How's can be used to develop greater detail around a potential solution.

Important reminder: The goal is not simply to ask **"Why?" exactly five times**. Depending on the situation, it may take fewer or more questions to reach a useful understanding of the underlying cause.

Who it is for: Anyone who wants to improve their ability to investigate business problems systematically.

Access:

https://asq.org/quality-resources/five-whys?utm_source

Resource: ASQ – Fishbone / Cause-and-Effect Diagram

What it covers: A Fishbone diagram helps teams identify and organize possible causes of a problem into meaningful categories. It is particularly useful when a problem may have several contributing factors.

Why it is useful: A Fishbone diagram helps prevent teams from focusing on only one explanation. Instead, it encourages them to consider multiple possible causes and identify which ones require further investigation.

Access:

https://asq.org/quality-resources/fishbone

3. Evaluating Strategic Alternatives

Resource: ASQ – Decision Matrix

What it covers: A decision matrix helps organizations evaluate and prioritize alternatives using predetermined criteria. Options can be rated against criteria and, where appropriate, weighed according to their importance.

Possible evaluation criteria include:

- Effectiveness
- Feasibility
- Cost
- Time required
- Resources required
- Customer impact
- Risk
- Organizational fit
- Ease of implementation
- Potential unintended consequences

Why it is useful: When several solutions appear possible, managers should avoid selecting an option simply because it "feels right." A structured comparison makes assumptions, trade-offs, and priorities more visible.

Access:

https://asq.org/quality-resources/decision-matrix?utm_source

4. Making Evidence-Based Recommendations

A strong recommendation should do more than state:

"The company should improve its customer experience."

Instead, a strong recommendation should be explained:

What should be done?

Clearly identify the proposed course of action.

Why should it be done?

Connect the recommendation to the evidence and identify problems.

Key Takeaways from the Webinar

1. Start with the right problem.

A visible symptom is not necessarily the underlying business problem.

2. Separate facts from assumptions.

Possible causes should be investigated rather than automatically treated as facts.

3. Use structured analytical tools.

Fishbone diagrams and Five Whys can help teams explore root causes.

4. Compare alternatives systematically.

Good decisions consider multiple criteria and recognize trade-offs rather than relying solely on intuition.

5. Recommendations should be evidence-based.

A recommendation should connect the identified problem, evidence, alternatives, and decision criteria.

6. A recommendation is not the end of the process.

A recommendation creates value when it is converted into an actionable plan with ownership, resources, timing, and measures of success.

Resource Note

The resources above are intended for continued learning and practice after the webinar. Website availability and content may change over time. Students should evaluate resources in the context of their own country, industry, organization, and business situation.

Further Reading:

1. Okes, D. (2019). *Root Cause Analysis: The Core of Problem Solving and Corrective Action* (2nd ed.). ASQ Quality Press.

2. Duffy, G., & Furterer, S. (2020). *The ASQ Certified Quality Improvement Associate Handbook*. ASQ Quality Press.