

APPENDIX 15 (QIIP, 2009)

that can help teams solve problems and make 'good' decisions. In essence, teams make decisions using problem solving techniques. Thus, the process largely rests on the selection of a course of action following the evaluation of two or more alternatives.

To effectively navigate this path, the following step-by-step approach can be used (Lafferty, 1988).

1. **Recognize the Problem.** Teams must see and recognize that a problem exists and that a decision needs to be made to move forward. While on its face this step appears elementary, many teams do not always recognize that there is an issue that needs to be addressed due to issues such as group think.
2. **Define the Problem.** In this stage, teams must map out the issue at hand. During this step, teams should:
 - State how, when, and where members became aware of the problem;
 - Explore different ways of viewing the problem – different ways of viewing the problem can lead to an improved understanding of the 'core' problem;
 - Challenge any assumptions that are made about the problem to ensure that the team fully sees the 'real' issue at hand;
 - Identify any deadlines.
3. **Gather Information.** Once the problem has been defined, teams need to gather information relevant to the problem. Why do teams need to perform this step? Two reasons: (1) to verify that the problem was defined correctly in Step 2; and (2) to develop alternative solutions to the problem at hand.
4. **Develop Alternative Solutions.** While it can be easy for teams to 'jump on' and accept the first solution, teams that are effective in problem solving take the time to explore several potential solutions to the problem. Some ways to generate alternatives include:
 - a. **Brainstorming.** Teams are encouraged to come up with as many ways as possible to solve the problem at hand. While brainstorming can help generate creative solutions to problems, a few guidelines are needed to help it work most effectively:
 - No criticism of any ideas during the brainstorming phase;
 - All ideas, no matter how silly, get recorded; and
 - Get past the sillies – sometimes very creative, and viable, solutions come after people have made what appear to be 'silly' suggestions.
 - b. **Ask Questions.** Network with colleagues internal and external to the organization to get their ideas and suggestions.

- c. **Explore.** Read journals/books, go to networking functions, and attend conferences that cover similar issues. Also be prepared to go outside of the healthcare domain. Other industries may have faced similar issues and their solutions can provide insights for you.
- 5. Select the BEST Alternative.** Once all the alternatives are in, the team needs to determine the alternative that best addresses the problem at hand. For this to be effective, you need to consider both rational and human elements and the implications for the team.
- a. **Determine the Desired End State.** Here teams need to clearly define what success looks like.
- b. **Evaluate Alternatives against the Desired State.** Here teams discuss the merits of each alternative and the extent to which each can move the team to the desired state. To help on this step, some teams rate each alternative on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is low and 5 is high.
- c. **Discuss Potential Adverse Consequences of Each Alternative.** Here teams need to discuss the potential downsides of the options. To facilitate an objective examination of adverse consequences, some teams use a mathematical formula.

Specifically, they assess the severity of the adverse consequences in terms of the formula:

$$\text{Adverse Consequences} = \text{Likelihood} \times \text{Severity}$$

Likelihood = the likelihood of the adverse consequence occurring (using a 5-point scale where 5 is high). Severity = severity if the consequence does occur (using a 5-point scale where 5 is high).

Personal Skills & Team Decision-Making

It is important to consider personal skills that may affect decision-making, which are described in the table below.