



## Unit 7

# Problem Solving Skills

## Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

Identify your leadership profile and explore ways to use this knowledge to improve your success as a manager.

Enhance your ability to communicate with others in meetings and through presentations.

## Unit 7

# Problem Solving Skills

Leaders can be managers, but all managers are not necessarily leaders. Within your organization, you will find job titles that are associated with leadership roles, and we also have people who are not formally in a management role, but they are certainly leaders. This section will discuss the elements of leaders and managers. Decide what kind of role you fulfill, and consider whether you will further develop your leadership and management skills.

**Who are people that you would consider to be great leaders of today?**

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**Who are some leaders in your particular industry, organization, or geographic location?**

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**What qualities make these leaders stand out among their peers?**

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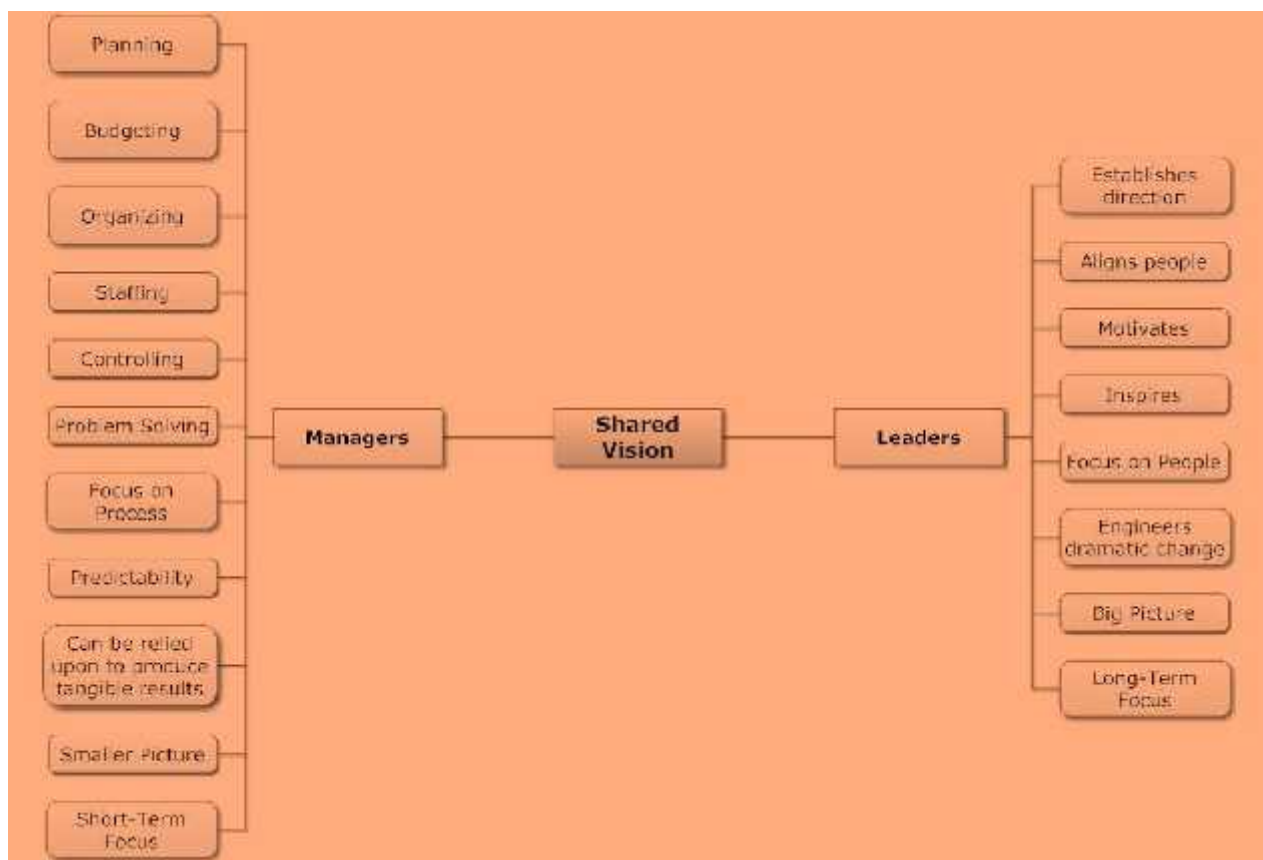
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Workplaces need people who can **both lead and manage**. Being an authentic, strong, and successful leader is not easy, and we should not expect it to be. Becoming a good athlete, physician, or musician is not easy. While you may see leaders who make the journey look easy, it's important to recognize that they have to work at it.

Often, you will see managers defined as looking after administration, systems, or a particular structure; being accountable; and getting things done correctly. All of these things are absolutely essential in business success. However, the leader is observed as an innovator, a visionary who inspires trust, someone who has a long term view, and someone who is able to empower managers and others to get the work done. When the leader sets a direction and shares a vision, the manager is responsible for implementing it.



Perhaps Peter Drucker said it best: “Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.”

## Types of Thinking

### Directional Thinking

Directional thinking is the thought process that a person goes through, whether individually or

within an organization, that ultimately produces a vision or establishes a direction.

The process consists of two major steps:

- Ñ A direction-setting opportunity.
- Ñ A direction-setting decision.

A **direction-setting opportunity** (DSO) is an event that occurs in a person's life. It may be ordinary or it may be extraordinary. But it does present an opportunity to change a particular course of action.

In general there are two types of DSOs: those that occur arbitrarily through forces outside your control and those that are intentional.

A **direction-setting decision** (DSD) occurs when you choose between the existing pattern and a new direction. Once you make a DSD, it will change your course and put you on a road that leads in a different direction.

We can create this new direction by using several different techniques.

### Paradigm Shifts

One example of a paradigm shift is the story Stephen Covey told in his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. He was on a subway train early one Sunday morning. All was quiet as people read their paper, sipped their coffee, or caught a few more minutes of sleep. At one stop, the quiet was broken as a man and his three small children got on the train. Within minutes the children had disrupted the calm as they jostled people, threw things, and yelled back and forth. The atmosphere was charged with unspoken anger toward this man and his children.

Covey's own resentment grew, and since the father was sitting next to him, Covey brought the children's behavior to the man's attention. The stranger replied, "We just came from the hospital where their mother died about an hour ago. I don't know what to think, and I guess they don't know how to handle it either."

Here is the paradigm shift: people's anger and resentment shifted to sympathy and compassion as the magnitude of what had taken place registered for each individual. People expressed an interest in the children as Covey spoke with their father, and the shattered peace was no longer important.

### Mind Mapping

This technique is an example of creative or lateral thinking versus linear thinking. Linear thinking is sequential and orderly. However, this is not always the way our minds work. For example, say you were thinking of starting a garden in your backyard. Your mind might think about these things:

- Ñ Lights
- Ñ Perennials/annuals
- Ñ Soil
- Ñ Layout

Write these ideas in a list. Then under or beside “Lights” write what comes into your mind as in: up lighting, motion sensors, etc.

Soon you have a mind map that is anything but sequential, but which can be made sequential when the time comes.

### Reframing

Think of how these phrases might be reframed to sound more positive:

Negative	Positive
It's them	
It's a problem	
We don't have enough time	

Reframing an idea or problem can give us a new perspective on it and help us come up with new insights.

### Consequential Thinking

**Consequential thinking** is the process of identifying the risks associated with a particular action and then considering whether to continue in pursuit of that goal.

No one is immune from risk. Choices create risk. We all live with risk on a daily basis and leaders encounter risks with every decision they make, and every action they pursue. The difference between the risks you take as an individual and the risks you take as a project leader is the number of people who are affected.

In *Managing Risk*, author Vernon L. Grose argues there is no such thing as an accident. He feels that what we call accidents are actually the result of choices. For leaders, the question before proceeding in a certain direction should not be, “How likely is an accident?” but rather, “What are the risks associated with my choices? Which risks can be eliminated? Which risks can be avoided?”



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## Influence Strategies

At the very core of leadership is the ability to influence people. The importance of this ability is reflected in most definitions of leadership.

Consider these quotes:

- Ñ Any time you try to influence the behavior of another person, you're engaging in an act of leadership. (Ken Blanchard, in *Leadership and the One-Minute Manager*)
- Ñ What leaders do is inspire people, empower them. They pull rather than push. If you want to lead people, the first thing you have to do is get them to buy into shared objectives. (Warren Bennis and Joan Goldsmith in *Learning to Lead*)

There are several things to consider when we talk about influencing others:

- Ñ An individual's resistance to change
- Ñ Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
- Ñ The types of strategies that manipulate
- Ñ The type of strategies that persuade people to change (usually based on principles of fairness and mutual gain)

In *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, Robert Cialdini has identified six influence strategies.

### Reciprocity

This refers to an obligation to return what we get. When people remember our birthday, anniversary, or an event we feel obligated to give them or do something of equal value in return.

### Commitment

Once we have made a commitment to do something, we feel both internal and external pressure to follow through. For example, if I made a commitment to look after your pet goldfish for the weekend, I would feel pressure in my own mind to do so, even if circumstances made it very difficult to follow through.

### Social Proof

One way we can determine what is the correct or best way to do something is to find out what others are doing and then do the same thing. This influencing factor is even more effective when

we are uncertain what the standard should be and we seek opinions from people that we know and trust.

### **Likeability**

People generally prefer to do business with people they know and like, rather than people they don't know or don't like. Successful sales people usually have excellent interpersonal skills that help them connect with people. This might be remembering their name or their birthday, the ability to find some common ground with them, or simply the ability to make others feel good about themselves. Remember, we catch more flies with honey than we do with vinegar.

### **Authority**

People will be more apt to comply with requests if they think the request comes from a figure of authority. We rarely question police officers, fire officials, doctors, or professors when they ask us to comply with their requests.

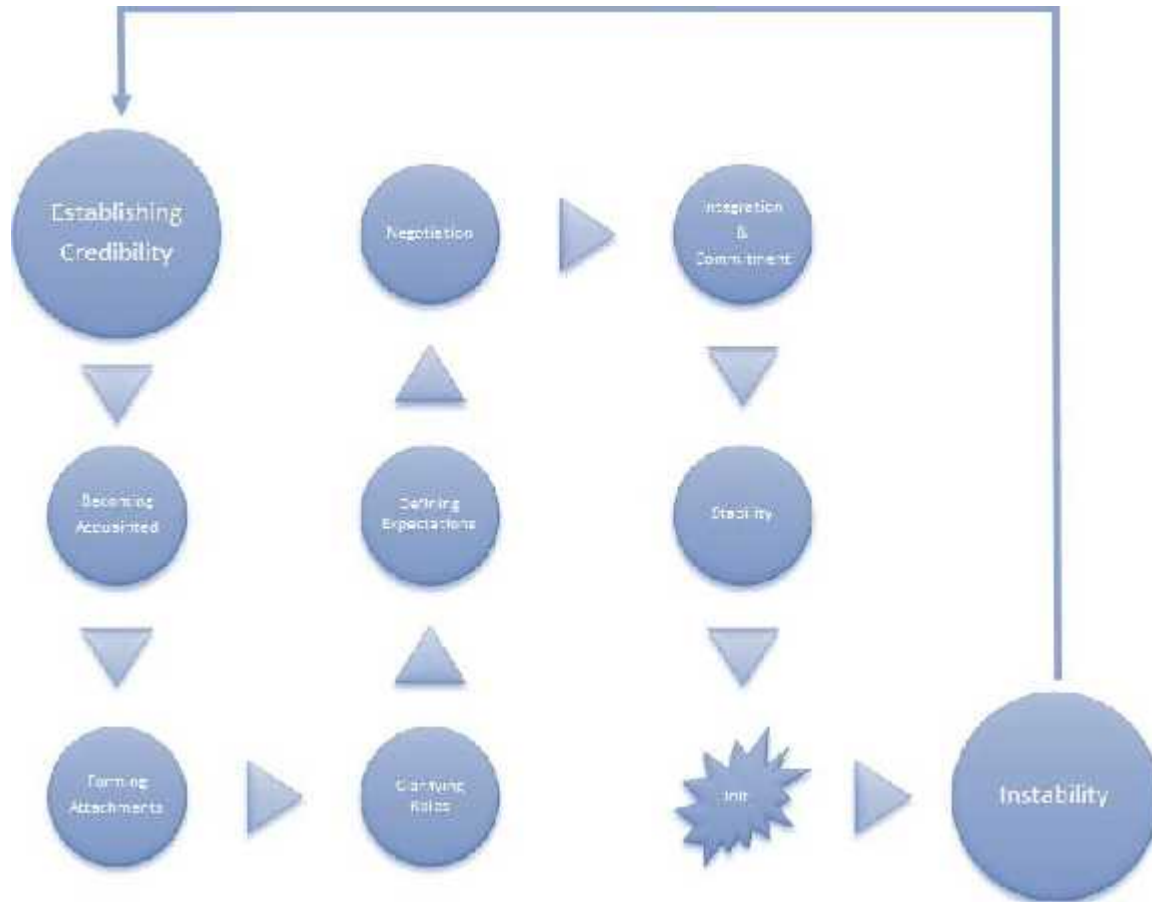
### **Scarcity**

If stores are about to run out of something, we feel the urge to stock up whether we need the item or not. We don't want to lose our sense of being in control. This opens the door to unfair price-gouging during times of stress, like major storms or disasters.

## **Managing Relationships**

### **The Relationship Cycle**

Look at the illustration below. You can see how relationships develop, function, and in some cases disintegrate. Unsuccessful relationships usually come about because of unresolved conflict.



Successful relationships are those in which conflicts are confronted and resolved so that the productive functions of the relationship are maintained. At the jolt point in the relationship, there is an eroding commitment. If the partners don't resolve these jolts as they occur, tension mounts and intensifies over time and could lead to the disintegration of the relationship, usually with a great deal of resentment and hostility.

### Coaching Through Conflict

One of our roles as a leader is to help others. The ability to help others improve their skills and attitudes is both rare and important.

What is coaching? It's that one-on-one mentoring that helps people develop their skills, set goals, and understand your company's success. Coaching is a way of telling the truth, confronting tough issues, and using language to inspire.

The secrets of successful coaching? Build on the positive, be diplomatic with the negative, and never, ever yell.

When you are helping your team deal with the inevitable conflicts that come up in the workplace, help them to build their listening skills. This includes the ability to:

- Ñ Make eye contact
- Ñ Use supportive body language
- Ñ Acknowledge what the other person is saying or feeling
- Ñ Use open-ended questions

When you are working with your employees, help each of them tell their side of the story without interruptions. It can be difficult to coach other people on dealing with conflict if we feel we aren't able to deal with it very well ourselves.

When people become engaged in a conflict, there are two major concerns that they have to take into account:

- Ñ **Achieving your personal goals or objectives:** You are in conflict because you have a goal that conflicts with another person's goal. Your goal may be of importance to you, or it may be of little importance.
- Ñ **Keeping a good relationship with the other person:** You may need to interact effectively with the other person in the future. The relationship may be very important to you, or it may be of little importance.

How important your goals are to you and how important the relationship is to you also affects how you act in a conflict.

Given these two concerns, five styles of managing conflict can be identified. They may go by different names, but if you do any additional reading on conflict, these styles will surface. We'll reference work done by David W. Johnson in *Human Relations and Your Career* to discuss styles called The Turtle, The Shark, The Teddy Bear, The Fox, and The Owl.

As you read about each style, decide whether this style is one you use often or not. Try to pick the one you think is most like you.

### **The Turtle (Withdrawing, avoiding)**

Turtles withdraw into their shells to avoid conflicts. They give up their goals and personal relationships. They stay away from the issues over which the conflict is taking place, and from the people they are in conflict with. Turtles believe it is hopeless to try and resolve conflicts. They feel helpless. They believe that it is easier to withdraw (physically and psychologically) from a conflict than to face it.

**The Shark (Aggressive, forcing)**

The shark tries to overpower opponents by forcing them to accept their solution to the conflict. Their goals are highly important to them and the relationship is of minor importance. They seek to achieve their goals at all costs. They are not concerned with the needs of other people. They do not care if other people like or accept them. Sharks assume that conflicts are settled by one person winning and one person losing. They want to be the winner. Winning gives sharks a sense of pride and achievement. Losing gives them a sense of weakness, inadequacy, and failure. They try to win by attacking, overpowering, overwhelming, and intimidating other people.

**The Teddy Bear (Smoothing, cooperating)**

To teddy bears, the relationship is of great importance, while their own goals are of little importance. Teddy bears want to be liked and accepted by other people. They think that conflict should be avoided in favor of harmony, and believe that conflict cannot be discussed without damaging relationships. They are afraid that if the conflict continues, someone will get hurt, and that would ruin the relationship. Teddy bears say, "I'll give up my goals and let you have what you want in order for you to like me." Teddy bears try to smooth over the conflict so as not to harm the relationship.

**The Fox (Compromising)**

Foxes are moderately concerned with their own goals and about their relationships with other people. Foxes seek a compromise. They give up part of their goals and persuade the other person in a conflict to give up part of his goals. They seek a solution to conflict where both sides gain something—the middle ground between two extreme positions. They are willing to sacrifice part of their goals and relationships in order to find agreement for the common good.

**The Owl (Confronting or problem-solving)**

Owls highly value their own goals and relationships. They view conflicts as problems to be solved and seek a relationship that achieves both their goals and the goals of the other person in the conflict. Owls see conflict as improving relationships by reducing tension between two people. They try to begin a discussion that identifies the conflicts as a problem. By seeking solutions that satisfy both themselves and the other person, owls maintain the relationship. Owls are not satisfied until a solution is found that achieves their goals and the other person's goals. And they are not satisfied until the tensions and negative feelings have been fully resolved.

**Preparing for Conflict**

Each of us has had some experience with conflict, so now that you know a little bit more about conflict styles, how can you prepare for conflict situations? How or where do you get information about how the other person might be thinking or feeling? What are your hot buttons; the issues and behaviors that make you react or get angry?

The most important part of preparation is **attitude**. Reminding ourselves of our conflict management skills can help us deal with our fears. We can also adopt the attitude that there is more than one way to cut up the pie, and quite likely more than one way to satisfy concerns.

Good preparation can also mean the difference between success and failure. It is the most critical element in achieving your objectives. **Know the issues involved**; know what you and your organization want to achieve. Look at the situation from the other person's perspective. Plan your strategy.

**Do your homework** so you really know what's fair. Find out what is common practice. Look at the situation through the other person's eyes. Brainstorm some options with your colleagues.

**Know your hot buttons**. What makes you feel angry, defensive, fearful, or guilty? These are your stressors. What are the long-term effects of feeling stressed or fearful? (Examples: Fatigue, high blood pressure, heart disease, insomnia, absenteeism.) Life isn't fun any longer.

As long as there are negative emotions, what will happen to the conflict situation?

During our preparation, we should have already **dealt with our own emotions**. To overcome our fear, we will face it and just keep going in spite of it. To overcome our anger, we have to recognize it isn't going to get us what we want.

Can you think of a time when you responded to a sales clerk or waiter or gas pump attendant with anger and got even worse service that you were originally complaining about?

**Pour oil on the troubled waters**. Try helping the other party regain their control and mental balance, and get them to listen.

Sometimes **past habits** can get in our way, or in the way of the other party. Do you have any examples you can think of? Have you ever tried to discuss issues with anybody who just won't discuss or negotiate, who responds, "Whatever you decide is all right with me?" We can carry past desires to give in, to please, or to respond with aggression and anger, into our conflict situations.

Have you ever encountered **skepticism** when you were trying to win people to your way of thinking? For example, when you are from a government agency, skepticism is apt to be high, perhaps based on past experiences or just the general perception about government as a bureaucracy.

**Change the game and bridge the gap.** Engage the other person in mutual problem solving.

**Power** is another challenge. Most of us tend to rate our own power as too low. Power is whatever you think it is. If you think you have no bargaining chips, you don't. You have to help both yourself and the other party understand there might be a win/win resolution to an issue if both parties are willing to look for them.

Make it easy for the other party to **say yes**. Make it hard to say no.

The final and most difficult challenge is to **remain calm** in the face of all these challenges. Once we start getting emotional too, the ball game is almost over. No matter what the situation, two angry, frustrated, and/or overwrought individuals will seldom be able to think through a solution that works, or that people feel good about.

### Managing Stress

One of the hardest parts of learning how to manage conflict is managing your own emotions.

Provocative situation	What I expect from the other person	How I can take responsibility and control


### The Positive Effect

What can you do as an individual to make the positive effect work for you? Try these recommendations:

- Ñ Keep yourself in a positive mood.
- Ñ Induce positive effect in others.
- Ñ Find everyday uppers.
- Ñ Offer help whenever you can.
- Ñ Be kind.

### Fifteen Steps for Dealing with Upset People

- 1) Be glad when a person shares their feelings of discontent with you. It implies that the person still has confidence in your interest in the problem and your ability to do something about it.
- 2) Think of the situation as an opportunity to shine.
- 3) Don't take it personally or become defensive.
- 4) Show genuine care and concern.
- 5) Listen.
- 6) Let the complaining person vent. Don't interrupt with defensiveness.
- 7) Politely interrupt the upset person and offer guidance.
- 8) Apologize assertively when you have made a mistake.
- 9) Express empathy, if it is genuine.
- 10) Take notes about the situation.
- 11) Tell the upset person what you can do.
- 12) Try to find a solution you can both agree on.
- 13) Thank the person for sharing his or her concern.
- 14) Follow up later, when appropriate.
- 15) Phrase your comments positively.

### Five Tips for Dealing with Difficult People

- Ñ Maintain a friendly and professional attitude.
- Ñ Acknowledge that a difficult situation exists.
- Ñ Calm the person by questioning and verifying that you understand.

- Ñ Focus the person on the problem.
- Ñ Handle the problem.

### Six Steps for Dealing with Angry People

- 1) Listen closely so you will understand the problem.
- 2) Ask questions.
- 3) Apologize.
- 4) Stay calm and don't take their anger personally.
- 5) Remain courteous.
- 6) Propose an action plan and then follow through!

## A Simple Problem Solving Process

### Systematic Problem Solving

There are many systematic ways to tackle the problems of planning to achieve objectives. It is probably more important that everyone in the team understands and follows the process, rather than having a complicated procedure that only a few use.

The process below is widely used.



Let's look at each step in detail.

### Establish Context

- Ñ Explore the background of the objectives

- Ñ Link the work of the team to the wider organizational purpose and business background
- Ñ Examine individual values and different viewpoints, skills, and abilities
- Ñ Ensure everyone knows why they, in particular, are part of the team

### **Set Goals**

- Ñ State goals clearly and briefly
- Ñ Identify essential, "must have" goals and "would be nice to achieve" goals
- Ñ Prioritize goals
- Ñ Get agreement on goals

### **Analyze factors**

- Ñ Get the team to analyze all factors affecting it
- Ñ Use visual analysis such as graphs, fishbone technique
- Ñ Clearly define resources available to the team and the constraints imposed

### **Evaluate Options**

- Ñ Consider as many options as possible
- Ñ Be innovative
- Ñ Select courses of action according to clear criteria
- Ñ Get agreement on courses of action

### **Plan**

- Ñ Allocate tasks to individuals
- Ñ Set sequences, timing and deadlines
- Ñ Publish plans
- Ñ Have flexibility

### **Communicate**

- Ñ Ensure all members of the team understand what is happening
- Ñ Use conflicts constructively

### **Implement**

- Ñ Act effectively and efficiently to meet agreed targets
- Ñ Communicate results of actions

### **Monitor and Review**

- Ñ Praise and reward team members for their actions
- Ñ Carry out performance reviews
- Ñ Look for better ways of doing things

**Personal Problems**

**My Problem**

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**The Situation**

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**How I Did/Will Handle It**

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**Group Suggestions**

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### My Action Plan

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### Further Reading:

- ✓ *Adair, John. Decision Making and Problem Solving Strategies. Kogan Page, 2010.*
- ✓ *Browne, Neil M., and Stuart M. Kelley. Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking (10th Edition). Longman, 2011.*