

Problem management process – checklist

Whenever you encounter an unexpected problem, that is impeding or blocking your (or your team's) work, you should:

- A. Step back from your current task and write down the problem, and all the details you know about it.
- B. Analyse the impact of the problem: Is the problem a complete blocker for work, or is it just a hinderance? If it stops the work completely, it is clear that you encountered a critical problem that must be dealt with immediately. Make sure that you evaluate the criticality and urgency of the problem, so you know how fast (and if) it needs to be solved.
- C. Try to figure out the scale of the problem: Does it affect you, your team, your department, division or the whole company? Or does it affect one customer, or several customers? Solving problems on a larger scale will always bring greater benefits, but bigger problems also need more analysis and planning before execution. Scale of the problem should be considered also when thinking about criticality and urgency.
- D. Try to analyse what is the core reason for the problem and write it down next to your problem. The technique called “5 whys” is a good way to find the core reasons.
- E. Whenever you have time, go back to unsolved problems on your list, and think about possible solutions and note them down. This list is perfect material to discuss with your manager or teammates in team meetings. Whenever there is a chance for suggesting and executing improvements, use your list. It is also one of the crucial resources on your way to more responsibility and promotions in the future. This is a perfect way to show ownership of your work and work environment by improving it for yourself and others around you.
- F. Below you will find a few common problems encountered in knowledge work, and a way to handle them.
 - If it is a **company process**, and you don't know why it is there or why the task has to be done in a certain way, check with your teammates or manager to understand the reasons (or the lack of reasons). Once you know the reasons, either make a proposal to your manager / team to improve the process, and offer to execute the proposal. If the process change is not possible at this time, make the best out of the current situation and just work with it for now, and keep the problem on your list of unsolved problems. Do not complain, or let this slow you down.



7 Principles of Becoming a Leader by Riku Vuorenmaa Extras

- If **you lack some skills** needed, let your team and manager know, but also let them know that you will train them.
- If there **is a problem with environment**, such as missing or poor tools, note it down and let your team and manager know, and try to find someone who can help you with the problem. Don't just throw the problem to your manager to solve, but try solving it yourself. Only when you are totally stuck, get help from your manager.
- If the problem is caused by **missing or inadequate input**, you just need to track down the person who is responsible for the inputs and ask him to fill the missing spots. If this is not an exception, but rather a recurring event, add the topic to your ever-growing list of problems, and work on it when you have time. You might need your management's help on solving the bigger recurring problems with inputs that you receive from outside your own team or department. Figure out the actual problem and think of possible solutions before you go asking for support.
- **If it is a problem with the team or teammate**, the key is communication. In general, we are working with intelligent people, who also want to reach the same goals than we do. There might be differences of opinion on how to reach your goals, but always remember that the goal is the same. If talking (calmly), listening closely and considering your teammates' opinions does not resolve the conflict, or if you realise that you have different goals, take it to your manager. He is there to clarify the situation and can facilitate further discussion if needed. Also remember that there is never need to get into personal debates with your teammates over conflicting opinions. You are a professional, and you keep your discussions on a professional level.

