COACHING priceless

TriMetrix®HD Integrative Ability

Integrative Ability

The ability to identify the elements of a problem situation and understand which components are critical; the ability to see different types of situation structures and therefore, different types of solutions.

Why is this skill important?

Most people think of problem solving as just that—one step called solving a problem.
In fact, problem solving involves multiple components that build on one another, including:

- Problem/situation analysis
- Integrative ability
- Problem management

In the first, problem/situation analysis, you determine what the component elements of the problem situation are. The second component, Integrative Ability, refers to using what you know of these variables to make decisions on WHAT TO DO about the problem situation. And finally, in the third, problem management, you IMPLEMENT what you have developed with your Integrative Ability.

Let's put it another way. You can't solve a problem EFFECTIVELY unless you under- stand what elements contributed to the problem situation and approach EACH component with the RIGHT solution at the RIGHT time. Integrative Ability not only involves good basic analytical skills, but also a focus on prioritization and sequencing events.

A person who has strong Integrative Abilities is able to integrate all of the variables of a situation into a single homogeneous picture, then use this understanding to make to make decisions regarding planning, resource allocation, problem solving, and other decisions. People you know who have good Integrative Abilities are probably good project planners, proactive thinkers, and people who are rarely caught off-guard.

In contrast, a person who has not developed his Integrative Ability may not be able to see the most obvious solution to a problem. He may get mentally "blocked" by focusing too much attention on any one component in the problem—e.g., people, system structure, resources, etc. We all know these people—people who get hung up on allocating a small portion of the department budget, focus too much on one customer's requirements, forget to call people back, make unreasonable demands of assistants. In all of these cases, the individual's focus is too narrowly on one aspect of a larger problem situation, and this small focus makes it impossible to see the whole, real picture.

Someone who has particularly bad Integrative Abilities may also tend to have preset ways in which he solves problems—meaning he will find it difficult to break away from these narrow habits to utilize other problem-solving techniques or methods.

What are skills associated with Integrative Ability?

Someone who has mastered skills associated with Integrative Ability:

- Is able to prioritize critical events while not losing track of less critical ones.
- Accurately defines the key elements in problem situation.
- Develops effective solutions that address components of problem situations in priority order.
- Is a good project planner and scheduler.
- Is able to see different types of solution structures isn't stuck on one method of problem solving.

How do you develop your own skills in Integrative Ability?

- Approach each problem situation as a new, unique situation. Don't have preconceived notions about how to solve the problem before you investigate it fully.
- Pretend that you are a detective when you are presented with a new problem. Try to deduce what caused the problem, how it came to be a problem situation, and what are the critical elements in the problem situation.
- Make a list of five to ten key components to the problem situation.
- AFTER you have analyzed the problem situation carefully, see if you can recall having experienced something similar before. THEN, apply what you know to the component it is relevant to.
- Prioritize your responses to problem components—you may need to put out a fire before you determine what caused it!
- Don't focus too much on any one component of a problem situation—it may prevent you from seeing the importance of another.
- Be creative—the most obvious solution may not be the best or most effective one. On the other hand, sometimes you can over-think a solution. Learn to balance!
- When you are looking at a problem situation, pretend you have all the time in the world to solve it. Of course, address any "fires" immediately—but take the time to plan your response to the larger problem situation carefully.

• Approach problem solving as a project that requires planning. Break the problem response down into component parts, write them down, and manage resources to ensure the problem situation is remedied and shouldn't happen again.
• Don't rely on stop-gap measures. If you put plastic over a hole in your roof, water will still come in eventually!
• Develop strong analytical skills. Be logical and orderly in how you approach problems and solution development and implementation.
• Be pro-active. Plan ahead and see if you can anticipate problems that may occur. This isn't to say to be negative—rather, see if you can learn from experience how to avoid or head off problems that seem to recur.
• If you are confronted with recurring problems, try to get to the root of the problem—it shouldn't just occur over and over again. Think of instances of the problem situation as part of a bigger problem—see what you can do to solve the bigger problem in a systemic way.
• Be smart about managing resources when fixing problems. Don't over-burden one individual just because he or she is good at solving problems or works quickly. Instead, see what you can do to evenly distribute responsibilities and resources to most effectively solve component problems.
• Don't be afraid to ask for assistance. Take advantage of what other people have learned, observed, and can offer.
• Keep good notes on what problem components are, how you are solving them, to whom you delegated component tasks, etc.

Integrative Ability

Activities

Activity 1: Analyze This

See if you can analyze two problematic or difficult situations you are facing currently in the workplace.
First, define what you think each problem is.
For example: My project team isn't finishing our annual report on time.

1. _____

2. _____

Next, see if you can determine what components are part of the problem.
For example: One of our most efficient employees is in the hospital, we have spent too much time analyzing last year's data, the CEO has pulled me away from the task repeatedly to deal with other things, etc.

1a. _____

1b _____

1c _____

1d _____

2a. _____

2b _____

2c _____

2d _____

Activity 2: Learning from the Past

Have you experienced a recurring problem situation in the last year? Something that seems to keep coming up again and again. Something frustrating that you (or some- one else) have "tried" to solve, but it just hasn't helped.

1. What was the problem situation?
2. How did you react to the problem?
3. What solutions have you tried in attempts to fix the problem?
4. Looking back on it, what do you think the BIGGER problem is? What is the fundamental problem that has caused these recurring events?
5. What structures or activities need to be changed in order to fix the root problem? 6. In what priority order should these structural changes or activities be completed?

Activity 3: Components

Practice breaking down bigger projects into smaller tasks. Once you define the components, see if you can anticipate potential problem areas and head them off before they have a chance to occur.

1. Project title?
2. Key milestones?
3. Component tasks to reach milestones?
4. To whom have you delegated each task?
5. What are your own tasks?
6. Where are potential problem areas?
7. What can you do to try to prevent potential problems from happening?

Priceless Professional Development LLC