

Using Potential Problem Analysis under Time Pressure

Purpose

To apply the concepts of Potential Problem Analysis to situations requiring quick action.

Introduction

When quick action is necessary, there is rarely enough time for a full formal analysis, and yet the action must work. While conducting a visible, complete Potential Problem Analysis may be impossible under the circumstances, some Potential Problem Analysis thinking with a few good questions makes very good sense. This informal, quick use of Potential Problem Analysis saves embarrassment and prevents future fire-fighting.

Take the following example. Rush-shipping replacement parts to a customer may be very urgent and necessary. Suppose you ask a few questions:

What could go wrong with this rush shipment?

Are the parts well packaged?

How can we be sure the address is correct?

Is the shipper alerted to the need for quick action?

These will either uncover potential problems or assure you that the product will reach the customer in time.

Or, perhaps, you are asked to make a special, unrehearsed presentation on a recommendation. By quickly checking what could go wrong (equipment foul-up, wrong people at the meeting, not giving good answers to questions), you might identify some preventive or contingent action that will save the presentation.

Another situation where quick Potential Problem Analysis can be useful is when a change outside your control comes to your attention. For example, you learn that a key supplier is experiencing a raw materials shortage. By quickly jotting down how late deliveries might affect your business, you may find you need to make arrangements with another supplier immediately.

Instructions

1. Briefly describe a recent situation where action had to be taken under tight time pressure and you were not satisfied with the results.

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2. What quick Potential Problem Analysis questions could have improved those results?
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3. Identify one kind of time pressure situation where you must repeatedly take quick action on your job.

4. What two or three Potential Problem Analysis questions will improve your success in this kind of situation?

5. How can you make sure you use these questions in handling this type of situation?
