

FACT SHEET

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Focusing on Management in the Family:

PROBLEM SOLVING

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TYPES OF PROBLEMS

Policy

Allocation

Organization

Interaction

Problems! We all have them. We all complain and worry about them. But can we identify them?

One homemaker asks, "Do you have a budget for a family making \$6,000 a year?"

Another may want to know, "Do you have information on how to alter clothes for a chubby teenage girl?"

They ask questions. But are they stating their real problems?

Did the first homemaker need budget information or was she looking for a channel of communication between her husband and herself? Perhaps she wants her opinion considered as to where the family dollar goes.

The mother of Susie, the chubby teenager, perhaps is not so concerned with finding clothes that fit as with the reasons why her Susie is overweight, what she can do about it and how she can help Susie feel important to her peers.

Homemakers need to recognize their real problems. Questioning can help people recognize real problems and then it can encourage them to seek meaningful solutions. Identifying real problems helps people anticipate and prevent problems from arising.

WHAT IS THE REAL PROBLEM?

From the situation described in the box, determine the major problems of the Hendricks family.

The decisions the Hendricks make depend on what they believe to be their real concerns. *The management process begins with recognition of the problem.*

SHORT-TERM, LONG-TERM, POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CONCERNS

Short-term concerns affect the functioning of the family in the next day, week or month.

Long-term concerns affect the functioning of the family during one or more particular stages of the life cycle. These involve major resources, such as housing, occupation or residence.

Positive concerns relate to improving physical situations, such as reorganizing your kitchen so you

Mrs. Hendricks' heart rose and sank as she hung up the telephone. Pam's music teacher had called to remind the Hendricks for the second time that their 13-year-old daughter had musical talent that deserved training beyond what their small town could offer.

Proud of Pam? Indeed they are but troubled, also. To move would mean giving up the family business. For Mrs. Hendricks (the bookkeeper of their concern) to take Pam continuously to a larger urban area means Dad would have to hire someone fulltime to take her place. And 17-year-old Greg certainly wants to finish his last year of high school in Baytown. Sending Pam away for the years of necessary training is financially impossible.

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can work more efficiently. Or they affect the development of family members, creating the best atmosphere for optimum achievement. They also help prevent development of serious problems, such as protection gained from insurance.

Negative concerns relate to finding a remedy for an already serious situation. Their presence poses a threat, a feeling of losing something needed.

Analyze the Hendricks' problem:

What are some of this family's short- and long-term concerns?

Short-term — meeting immediate financial needs
— finding time to discuss family concerns

Long-term — consideration of both Pam's and Greg's educational needs
— consideration of family aspirations for their business

What are some positive and negative concerns of the Hendricks?

Positive — developing Pam's musical ability
— putting Mother's time and talents to best use

Negative — giving up the family business
— finding a competent bookkeeper to replace Mother

For practice, determine whether the following problems are short-term or long-term, positive or negative.

- deciding whether to buy shoes for your son now or at the end of the season
- deciding whether you can plant additional crops in spring without a new tractor
- helping your daughter choose a college
- deciding whether Mom should take a full-time job outside the home

All problems are not negative. Some affect our immediate lives; others, our future. We must know how to sort out and deal with crucial problems without wasting precious resources on relatively unimportant ones.

"CRUCIAL" PROBLEMS

How can we identify these problems? Below are some criteria to help us decide. When a problem arises, ask yourself these questions:

1. What are the physical consequences? Will general or mental health be endangered? Will human development opportunities be restricted?

2. How many resources will be used? What is the real cost of a resource? Real cost is the satisfaction given up because a resource was not used on another wanted or needed project.

3. How long will consequences be felt?

4. Is there a great deal of risk and uncertainty? How sure is the outcome?

5. Is it urgent, such as death, divorce or loss of property? Must the problem be faced now?

6. Do public regulations and social trends influence the situation?

7. Will solving the problem be a good learning experience for the family?

Use these seven questions to identify the Hendricks' problems as crucial or not crucial. Here are more situations; determine whether they are "crucial."

- A family with six children has been evicted from its apartment.
- A neighbor asks you to support a community campaign to build a hospital.
- Someone has asked you to buy stock in a local manufacturing concern.
- Your washer is broken down and will be expensive to repair.

What did you decide? How important are these problems?

To judge their importance, also consider other problems of the family. Know their resources and their own feelings toward the problems.

For instance, one problem may be the son's shooting his beebee gun at the neighbor's window. This may be fairly important in a middle class home. But perhaps a low-income family would believe this the least of their worries.

Unfortunately, problems do not fit always in a neat little package labeled "A", "B" or "C". Problems, like people, are different. Consequently, problems have different "faces," making them difficult to recognize.

However, problems can be grouped according to types.

IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS BY TYPES

Serious family problems can be grouped into four types: (1) policy, (2) allocation, (3) organization and (4) interaction.

Because all problems involve resources, we identify the primary resource concerned in the example.

- *Policy problems* are those involving family goals and values. Policies are the guidelines determining how we use resources.

EXAMPLES OF PROBLEMS

PRIMARY RESOURCE

Of the many organizations asking for donations, which ones should we give to? How much should we give? And why?

Money

Should Mother work for pay outside the home or remain a full-time homemaker? Why?

Time

Linda doesn't like to take care of her room. Yet she should learn to accept responsibilities around the home. What should we do about this? Why?

Human

Should our family buy a house or rent a place to live for the next five years? Why?

Property
(Material)

The children need swimming lessons and a place to swim. We could use the community pool or we could join the country club. Which should we do? Why?

Community

- *Allocation problems* are those determining how to use resources.

EXAMPLES OF PROBLEMS

PRIMARY RESOURCE

Should we take a vacation trip, or buy a color television or save the money for the children's college education?

Money

Should I do some reading I've wanted to do for some time or make a dress for daughter Jane?

Time

Mother is skilled at sewing and Bobby needs new pajamas. Barbara needs new blouses. There isn't time for Mother to do both. Who needs the clothing more?

Human

Should we plant flowers or a vegetable garden behind the garage?

Property
(Material)

To which magazines should we subscribe and which ones should we use from the public library?

Community

- *Organization problems* are those concerning direction and supervision within the family.

EXAMPLES OF PROBLEMS

PRIMARY RESOURCE

What's the best way to keep our financial records, so we'll have ready answers on income and expenditures at income tax time and for other purposes?

Money

I have many things to do today. Which shall I tackle first? Which can I leave until later? Can I leave some jobs?

Time

The wife and husband feel it important that both get an education, so they both attend college. They have a 6-month-old baby and feel strongly that her development and care should not be turned over to an outsider. How can they achieve both goals?

Human

A one-car family has no money for another car. Both parents and teenage sons use the car. Can they adopt a "fair-share" plan?

Property
(Material)

Free polio immunization is being given this Friday at the health department. How will our scattered, busy family get there?

Community

- *Interaction problems* are those relating to conflicts and adjustment within the family.

EXAMPLES OF PROBLEMS

PRIMARY RESOURCE

A husband and wife have a joint checking account. What plans can they use to keep account of the checks they have written? Which plan is best?

Money

Jamie is a dawdler and often late to school. What's the best way to speed him up?

Time

The kids pay attention to what their father asks of them. They may or may not pay attention to Mother. What can be done about this?

Human

The husband has a work bench in the basement with an array of tools. Often the wife or children must use these tools. He dislikes their bothering his things. What's the solution?

Property
(Material)

Senior high has teen-hops after school Fridays. Peggy and Ron decided to go but said nothing to their folks until the morning of the "hop." The parents objected because Friday is the time they want the kids home to mow the lawn or baby-sit with younger children. How can they resolve this conflict?

Community

Now classify the following into four types: P — policy; A — allocation; O — organization; or I — interaction. (Don't look now, but the answers are on the last page.)

___1. Each of our family members has his own interests, and it's hard to find something we can do and enjoy together.

___2. I never plan ahead for more than one or two meals at a time.

___3. It takes all our money to live; there is none left for the upkeep of our house.

___4. We can't afford to give to all organizations asking for donations.

___5. There never seems time to finish my ironing.

___6. Everyone seems more interested in his own activities than in those of the entire family.

___7. We seldom have money for medical and dental care.

___8. Credit plans? We don't use them, because we don't like making payments.

___9. I can't take time to stop and look at things. I am always in a rush when I go shopping.

PROBLEMS OF IOWA HOMEMAKERS

One researcher asked 594 Iowa homemakers and Extension home economists to identify problems causing concern in managing home and family. Here are the results.

In family spending, the top five problems were

- Purchasing ready-made clothing
- Gift giving and contributions
- Purchasing home furnishings and equipment
- Paying taxes
- Paying debts

In family activities, the top five problems were

- Sewing, altering or mending
- Meal planning

- Regular or daily home care
- Buying clothing for family members
- Special or seasonal home care

In family goals, the top five problems were

- Being better informed about homemaking
- Improving ability as a wife and/or parent
- Becoming financially secure
- Seeing that children receive a good education
- Rearing children to be spiritually healthy

The common threads running through each area are the limitations of *time, money and knowledge*, three most precious resources.

FOR REVIEW

Problems can be *long-term or short-term, positive or negative*.

Serious family problems are related to the following:

- Human consequences
- Resource use
- Duration of decision consequences
- Risk and uncertainty
- Degree of urgency
- Crisis situation
- Public regulation
- Learning experiences

Families have problems of:

- Policy
- Allocation
- Organization
- Interaction

Solutions to a problem are not effective until the *real* problem is identified. *The management process begins with recognition of the problem.*

Answers to classification of problems:

- 1 — I, 2 — O, 3 — A, 4 — P, 5 — O, 6 — I, 7 — A, 8 — P, 9 — O

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