

Situational Awareness

Tool: Problem Solving Methodology for Decision Making



Situational-Awareness (n.)

Having awareness of one's immediate surroundings, the associated meanings of such surroundings, and the future potential of such surroundings.

Consider the following statement: **Opportunity is nowhere**. How do you read this statement? In many instances, we would read it as Opportunity is nowhere, as in there is no opportunity to be had or it does not exist. But what if we reconsidered this statement with a deeper sense of awareness and a dash of creativity? The statement now reads as **Opportunity is now here**, as in opportunity is present in our current situation, waiting for capitalization.

Situational-awareness is all about properly identifying opportunities and taking action to use those opportunities to your own advantage. Opportunity comes in many different shapes and sizes, but often manifests itself in the form of a **problem** confronting society or a **need** waiting for fulfillment.

As humans, it is part of our nature to continually seek out problems that confront us in order to find a resolution that leads to greater personal well-being or otherwise relieves unnecessary suffering. At a microscopic level, situational-awareness is you realizing that those 2 sodas you drink every day are contributing to the growth of your love handles, thus preventing you from achieving that beach body you are working towards. At a macroscopic level, it is Abraham Lincoln realizing the disparate views of the North and the South on which people have human rights prevented the future growth and strength of the United States.

“If I were given one hour to solve the planet, I would spend 59 minutes defining the problem and one minute resolving it.” – Albert Einstein

Albert Einstein is historically known as the scientist with arguably the greatest hairstyle of all time. Einstein was respected for not only his scientific findings, but also his many philosophical considerations of life.

Do you remember the something called the **Scientific Method** from your high school biology, physics, or chemistry class? Many of us still remember hypothesizing about whether or not bounty paper towels were more absorbent than the bargain brand paper towel (duh, everyone knows that bounty is the quicker picker upper). What we may not have realized, is just how fundamental the scientific method is to our everyday awareness. Here's a refresher:

The Scientific Method

1. **Purpose:** What are you trying to learn, test, or prove?
2. **Hypothesis:** Your prediction for the outcome, posed as an **IF/THEN** statement
3. **Experiment Variables:** The specific variables are you considering
 - a. **Independent:** What you are changing or altering in each scenario
 - b. **Dependent:** What is affected by changing independent variable
 - c. **Control:** What stays the same in each scenario

Actualize Development Program

The scientific method helps us consider all of the relevant factors of a situation, especially complex situations where there are hundreds of variables that all affect the outcome. Think of a time when you applied for something such as a job and were rejected. There is a strong chance you started to question which of your actions, behaviors, or traits helped or hurt your chances of getting the job. You may have wondered, “If I had just done this... or if I mentioned my experience here... then I would’ve gotten the job.”

The actions, behaviors, or traits in question are your **variables**. Your “What if” questions are your **hypotheses**. Your questioning into your performance stems from your desire to get the job, thus your desire for the job is your **purpose** for your personal “experiment.” As you can see in this example, our everyday logical thought processes often follow the essence of the scientific method without us even realizing it. We have evolved as problem-solving machines.

One of the main advantages humans have over other animals is our ability to pose **What if? Scenarios**. Going back to our previous examples: What if you stopped drinking those 2 sodas every day? What if everyone in the United States agreed that all humans had equal rights? What if? questions consider what a change in certain **variables** of a given situation will look like. Thus the cornerstone for developing situational-awareness is your ability identify the variables that help you achieve your goal and those that prevent you from achieving your goal.

The SCQ Problem Solving Methodology

S – Situation: The context of the current state

→ Summer is fast approaching and your friends want to go to the beach

C – Complication: The perceived issue or problem with the situation

→ You don’t think your body is ready for the beach because you have love handles

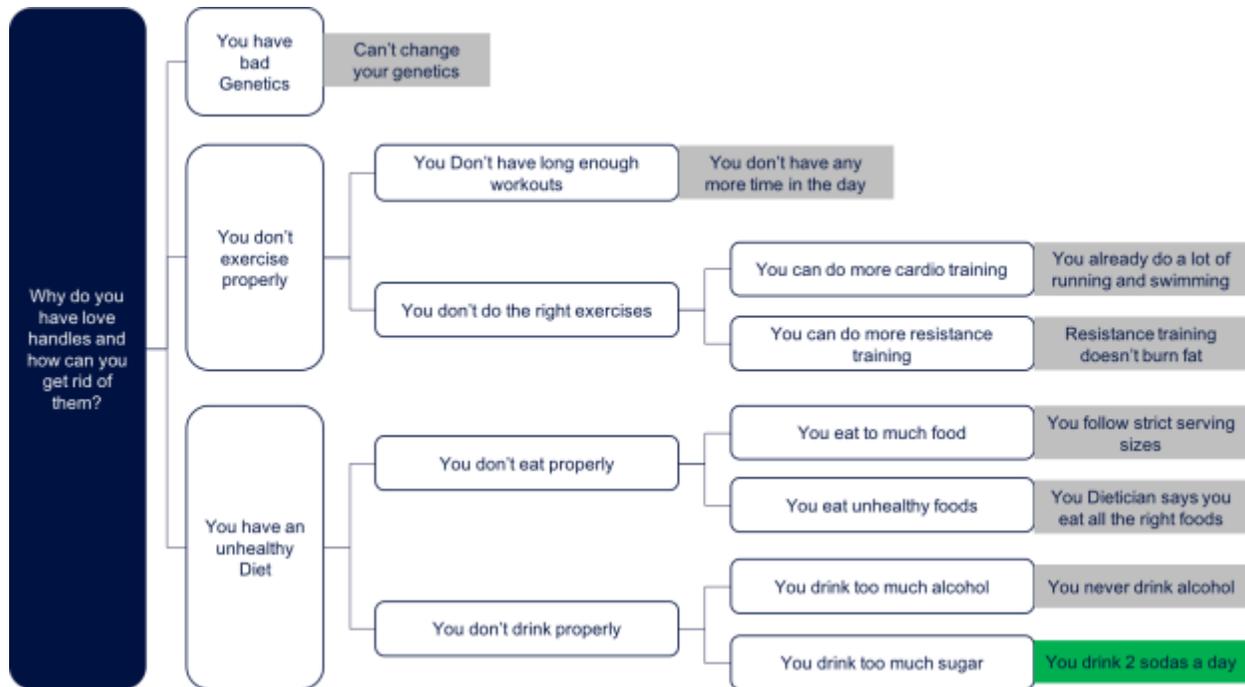
Q – Question: Begs for the answer that will resolve the problem

→ Why do you have love handles and how can you get rid of them?

One of the popular methods used by many organizations specializing in problem solving is the **Issue Tree**. The issue tree takes a question aimed at solving a problem and breaks it down into smaller and smaller components in a process called **disaggregation**. The objective of disaggregation is to find the **root cause** of the problem or issue presented. In order to find the root cause of the problem, we must consider all of the variables that contribute to it by using the **MECE method**. MECE stands for Mutually Exclusive and Collectively Exhaustive. MECE helps us make sure that each of our variables are independent from one another (mutually exclusive) and that the sum of all of the variables together form the whole (collectively exhaustive) Once the root cause(s) of a problem is found, we can then create a hypothesis to solve the problem.

Consider the following Issue Tree for the example of getting rid of your love handles:

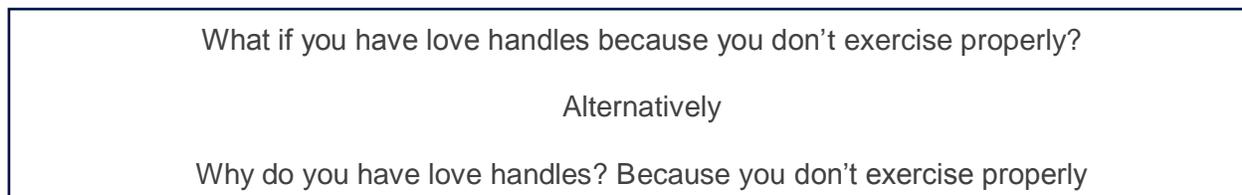
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The Resulting Hypothesis:

If you stop drinking those 2 sodas a day, then you will get rid of your love handles.

Notice that each of the white boxes pose What if? Questions in the form of a **Why** Statement:



Also notice that the grey and the green boxes represent **How** actionable the **Why** statement is. The MECE method helps us to reach all potential solutions to the problem in order to determine which of them will work or not.

Although this may seem a very time consuming process, it will save you the future pain of realizing you spent so much time working on the wrong problem. Just remember, Einstein would dedicate 59 minutes out his world saving hour defining the problem.

Key Takeaway: Opportunity is now here, but you might have to dig a little deeper to find it