

Problem Solving for Communities Using the OSARA Model

The OSARA model is the most familiar process for doing problem solving within the police which we have adopted for use in identifying issues within our communities and developing solutions to recurring problems. The acronym OSARA stands for:

- Objective
- Scanning
- Analysis
- Response
- Assessment

You should move through the steps to understand what the problem is (Scanning), why the problem is recurring (Analysis), what you hope you achieve (Objective), what you are going to do about it (Response), and whether it worked (Assessment).



Identifying a Problem

Individuals can determine problems through:

- Personal experience with location
- activity or behaviour that has come to the community/police attention
- Communication with residents, businesses, or other public/private agencies

A problem is two or more (as a minimum, likely many more) incidents which are similar in nature, are causing harm, or have the potential to cause harm, and the public expects the partners at CHARM to deal with. Similarity among incidents include:

- Person
- Location
- Behaviour
- Time

Scanning

By first using the Problem Analysis Triangle, communities can identify and start to understand the specific nature of the problem, who is causing it, who is being affected, and where it is happening. You should be able to use this information to specifically define your problem. For example, instead of defining your problem as 'youth ASB in a park', you could define it as 'a group of 5, 12–15-year-olds, causing noise-related ASB in the play area of the park, on weekend afternoons, which is resulting in local residents not using the play area'.



Who is affected?

Consider police and partner data including names, ages, genders, vulnerabilities, number of people affected, duration of their involvement and nature of victimisation.

Who or what is the cause?

Consider police and partner data, including names, ages, genders, vulnerabilities, number of people causing the problem, duration of their involvement, and nature of their involvement.

Where is it happening?

Consider physical features of the area, if there are any other local problems occurring that relate, what else is in the immediate vicinity, affluency, condition, security, and ingress/egress routes.

When using the triangle, it is important to be specific and use it for each individual problem, for example:

- Problem – repeated criminal damage to the Village Hall
- Objective – prevent further criminal damage
- Where is it happening – village hall
- Who is affected – those that use and run the hall, members of the local community?
- Who or what is understood to be the cause – young people?

In addition, it is worth identifying when the problem occurs, e.g., does it occur more often on a weekend, during the evenings, or in the colder months? Also, consider what has previously been tried to resolve the problem and why it did or didn't work.

Analysis

Put simply, problem solving analysis can be defined as, 'reviewing data to identify why your problem is occurring'. In Scanning, you identified what is happening i.e., who was involved, where it was happening, and what incidents were occurring. You now need to look at why it is happening.

The keyword to analysis, is 'why'. Why is your problem continuing? If you can identify the root causes for why the problem persists, you can start to think of ways to stop it (your Response). To successfully analyse your problem, you need to take the information you obtained in Scanning and review it, to determine why the problem continues.

Who is affected?

- Why is this person or item being targeted (e.g., person harassed each day as pass offender on way to work)?
- What characteristics make the problem likely to recur (e.g., loneliness increases likelihood of romance fraud)?
- Is repeat victimisation occurring?
- Why is this person vulnerable to this specific problem (e.g., victim's dementia increases the chance of them going missing)

Who or what is the cause?

- Why are they causing the problem?
- What objectives/motives do they have (e.g., cancelled after-school clubs mean youths gather and cause ASB)?
- What are their characteristics that mean the problem recurs?
- What risks (or lack of) come with offending?
- What facilitates their offending (e.g., drinking alcohol increases the offender's propensity for violence)?
- How do they access the location (e.g., by car or on foot)?
- What is their MO (mode of operating)?
- What skills/resources enable them to cause the problem?

Where is it happening?

- Why does it occur here (e.g., poor physical design, secluded, lack of lighting, hiding spots, Broken Windows Theory)?
- Is there a hot spot? If there is- why, if not- what do different locations have in common (e.g., is there a high footfall- so there are lots of potential victims, or low security measures)?
- Is there anything else in the area that contributes to the problem (e.g., a shop is repeatedly vandalised due to its proximity to a bench where youths gather)?

It is helpful to consider whether there are guardians of those affected (e.g., parents and carers) or managers of locations (e.g., landlords or trustees). Consider how well they are performing and whether they could act differently to assist with the problem?

Analysis should be thorough and involve critical thinking, as the characteristics of each problem vary. Effective responses cannot be developed unless you know what is causing the problem. The nature of the problem may appear obvious at first glance, but through thorough scanning and then analysis, you can feel avoid assumptions and feel confident that you have identified the true root causes of the problem.

Response

Based on the scanning and analysis steps, solutions can be designed to:

- Eliminate the problem
- Reduce the problem
- Reduce the harm caused by the problem
- Deal with the problem better
- Identify the best individual/agency that can better handle the problem

Responses should be:

- Targeted
- Evidence-based
- Creative (where appropriate)
- Proportionate

Assessment

This is where you evaluate the effectiveness of your response. It may include:

- Total elimination of the problem
- Less serious or harmful problems
- Better handling and improved response to the problem

A way to see if the assessment has had any impact on the community could be:

- Reduced fear from the community in relation to the problem
- Increased use or footfall in an area
- Decrease in crime and incidents in relation to that location

Assessment allows us to look at what effect the response had on a problem. If the response had little or no effect, more analysis can be completed so that a more appropriate response can be applied. If the response resulted in a positive change, it can be determined what, if anything, is needed to maintain the change. Remember to consider cost effectiveness in terms of time, finances, and resources. Also, you should consider sharing your results to let others across the county know about what does and doesn't work.