

**EBOOK**

# **Which business problems should I tackle first?**

# Introduction

Nearly every business problem stems from people problems. But when your data points to a host of issues, how do you choose where to start?

As a leader in your organization, it's your responsibility to understand which issues should take priority over the rest and steer the company to focus on those problems.

To help you do this, we'll turn to [talent optimization](#). This discipline empowers you to align your people strategy with your business strategy so you can accomplish your business goals. In this e-book, we'll drill down into the Diagnose aptitude of talent optimization where you'll let the people data tell you which issues are most important to the business strategy.

# Analyze your people data objectively.

Part one of diagnosing people problems starts with collecting measurements that matter. You can learn more about the types of data you should be collecting in [this blog](#).

Once you've aggregated the raw data, start looking for patterns and developing hypotheses on potential problem areas.

As you do this, keep an open mind about the causes of problem areas. Though you might already have a general idea of the challenges in your organization, when you approach the data with assumptions, you risk missing the less obvious issues.

For example, maybe the data shows that the customer service team has been receiving low ratings from clients. While the immediate reaction might be to focus on customer service training, the root of the issue might be related to team dynamics, management, or competing priorities (such as compensating on metrics for both average handle time and customer satisfaction which can conflict with one another).

## Analysis tools

If your data set is small enough, you can use tools like Microsoft Excel or Google Sheets to help you aggregate the data. But as the amount of data you collect grows, analyzing the evidence by hand can become unwieldy. Consider using more advanced [analytic tools](#) to help you uncover patterns.

# Which problems should I tackle first?

In all likelihood, your analysis will produce a laundry list of issues. However, it's impossible—and unwise—to try to tackle them all at once.

## Beware these common traps

As you develop a prioritization strategy, steer clear of these common mistakes.

### Trap #1: Focusing on minor issues

Evaluate the magnitude of each issue to determine whether it's worth tackling. For example, discovering that 10% percent of a division is disengaged may mean a lot more to a small business than it does to an enterprise company.

A good way to measure this is to develop benchmarks based off your previous data to compare to. Similar to the example above, a certain employee engagement score might be considered low for one company, but for another organization with historically low scores, it could signal a path to improvement. Measure the magnitude of the issue within your own business context.

### Trap #2: Focusing on irrelevant problems

Not every problem is a major problem—and not every problem impacts your ability to reach your goals. Before you start prioritizing the issues you want to tackle, make sure you're clear on the business strategy and objectives. The purpose of all of this is to align your talent to your business strategy so you can achieve the organization's goals, so don't lose sight of them.

Ask yourself these two questions gauge the relevance of a problem:

1. Is this issue impacting business goals?
2. Is it affecting employee welfare?

As you consider these questions, be mindful of which employees and departments are being affected. If the problem is impacting low performers, it may not be as much of an issue as those that impact your high performers.

### **Trap #3: Focusing on localized issues**

A low engagement score for one team in the organization might seem alarming, but don't forget to look at the results in the larger business context. Are there problems that are more widespread in the company?

Imagine this scenario: Your data analysis comes back and shows that performance on the marketing team has dropped significantly. At the same time, the data shows engagement scores across the organization have dropped significantly. Which do you address first? Probably the latter issue because it's impacting the whole organization.

Of course, there are exceptions to this. For example, if a particular group of people are key to achieving business goals, it might make sense to prioritize problems impacting them over others. But it's good practice to first weigh the breadth of problems before deciding.

## Trap #4: Focusing on one-time or short-term issues

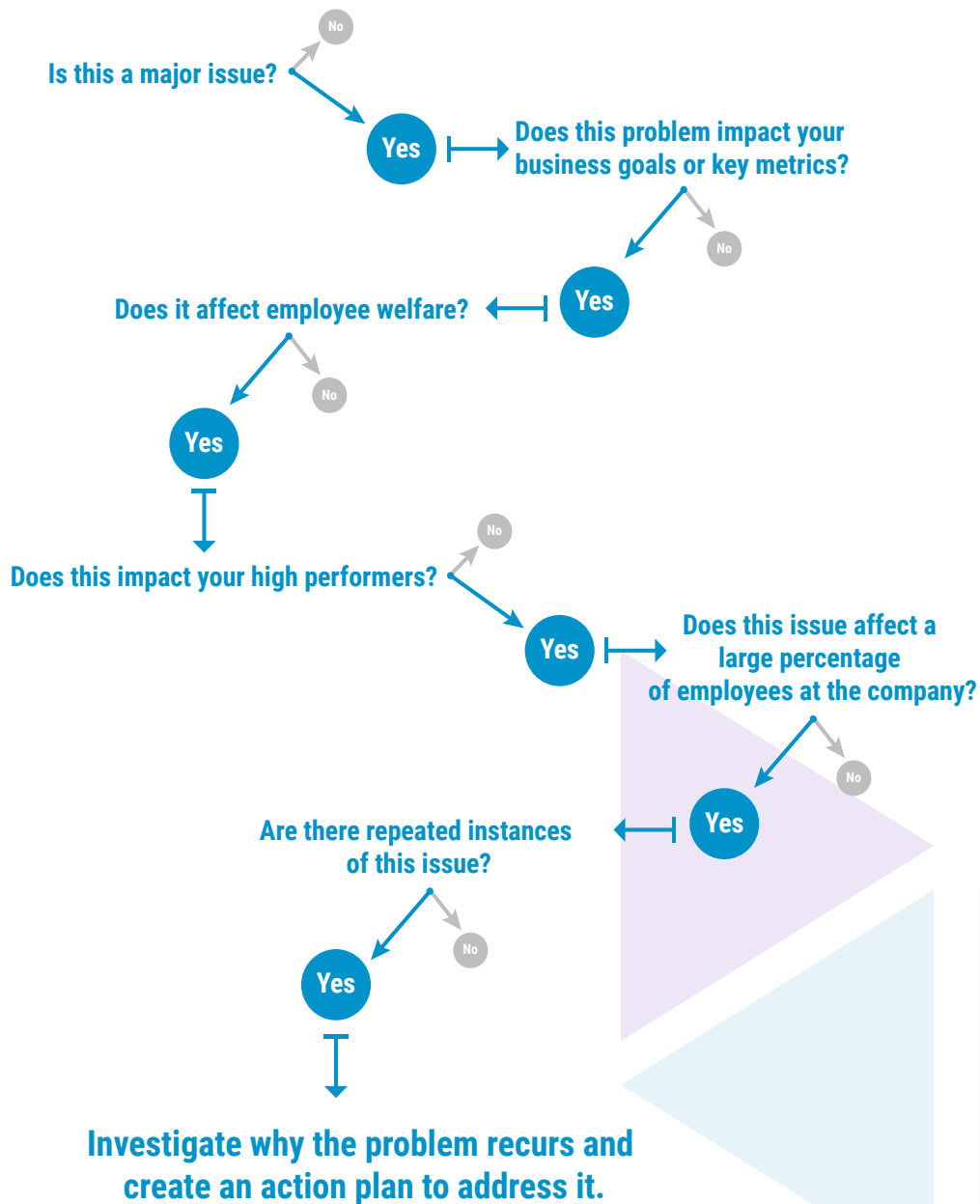
When you see a glaring problem, it's easy to assume you've found the answer and stop looking at the data. What you're missing, however, is the true "why" to the issue. What were the trends leading up to the problem? Who or what could have been the cause?

We can look at how doctors diagnose patients to illustrate this. Even if you tell the doctor you're there to address a cold, they ask you questions about how long you've had symptoms, your lifestyle, any medication you're taking, your family's medical history, and so on. Doctors do this to make sure your cold is a one-time issue, and not symptomatic of a deeper problem.

In the same way, when you conduct your data analysis, look for recurring themes or patterns beyond the surface issue. Is low performance consistent on this team? If so, is the problem coming from low engagement? Poor management? Lack of resources? When did the problem start? Going through this thought process will allow you to recognize systematic issues while also revealing the root of the problem.

# Create a priority list of problems.

Use the flowchart below to identify problems that need to take priority over others and avoid the four traps. If you answer “no” to any of these questions on a particular issue, make a note of the problem in a backlog. Come back to it next time you’re taking a diagnostic of your people problems. It might not be top priority now, but it’s good to keep it on your radar to make sure the problem isn’t growing.



## What's next?

Once you have your hierarchy of improvement areas, it's time to move on to the final step of the Diagnose aptitude: prescribe improvement actions.

Whichever aptitude your people problems fall in, we have resources to help you start resolving them:

- Improve your hiring with [The guide to making better hires with talent optimization.](#)
- Struggling to engage and retain employees? Download this guide to create [an effective employee engagement plan.](#)
- Learn how to intentionally design your business and people strategy in [The CEO's guide to designing a successful organization](#)
- Need help diagnosing your people problems? Use the [Maturity Model Calculator](#) to identify improvement areas.

## Looking for a tool to help?

Learn how PI can help you collect the people data you need to address major business problems.

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