

# Potential Problem Analysis

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A method designed by Kepner and Tregoe (1981) as part of their problem solving technique. Its aim is to provide a challenging analysis of an idea being developed or action plan so that you can determine ways in which it may go wrong. See [BulletProofing \(/BulletProofing\)](#) and [Negative Brainstorming \(/Negative\\_Brainstorming\)](#)

The method is closely related to some of the methods used in identifying potential faults in complex hardware systems, it has a 'rational' rather than 'creative' approach, but still provides and first-rate supply of creative triggers if approached in an imaginative spirit.

A substantial amount of effort is required to carry out the analysis thoroughly and therefore the method is usually set aside for the more ultimate action plan (or perhaps the final handful of options).

1. Define the Key requirements, a 'must' – outputs, actions or events that must take place if the implementation is to be successful. Failure of any of these is likely to cause problems.
2. Record and investigate all possible problems for each of the key requirements that have now been identified, listing all 'potential problems' – i.e. potential ways it could go wrong (a technique such as [Negative Brainstorming \(/Negative\\_Brainstorming\)](#) could help) and look at each of them (a technique such as [Five Ws and H \(/Five\\_Ws\\_and\\_H\)](#) could help). If you have come up with an excess of possible problems, it is advisable to make a initial estimate of the by and large risk (see below) that each problem creates, so that you can give attention to the rest of the analysis on those that offer the greatest risk.
3. List possible causes for each potential problem, and the risk associated with it, the risk reflects both the likelihood of an event, and the severity of the impact if it did, so that 'high likelihood / high impact' causes present the highest risk.
4. Develop preventative actions where possible rather than having to muddle through a problem after it has happened. Where possible try to develop ways of preventing potential problem causes or minimising their effects and estimate the residual risk that might still remain even if preventative action were taken.
5. Develop contingency plans where necessary, i.e. where problems would have serious effects, but you cant prevent them, or there is a high residual risk even if you do.
6. The table (step 7) below is a simple way of displaying the analysis, which could contain a variety of quantitative estimates from crude 'high, medium and low' subjective judgements, to carefully, researched measures depending on the demands of the situation.

Analysis for Key activity: 'Complete Project report for client'					
Potential problem	Possible causes	How likely?	Ways to limit risk	Residual risk	Contingency plans
A: Report not delivered in time	Not prepared in time	High	Switch preparation to the 'A' team	Low	Allow generous margin in promised delivery time
	Mailing delays	Low	Hand delivery instead of internal mail	Minimal	Not needed – risk acceptable
B: Report production delayed through illness...	...	...	...	...	...

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