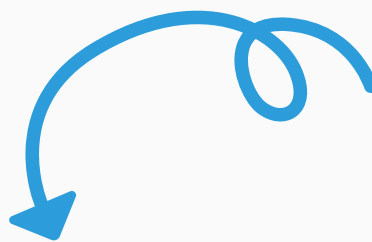


NARRATE Exercise

| Units In-House | Units In-Company | Skill cards |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| We | We | Self-awareness |

Problem Tree

| Minimum number of participants | Average time length | Individual setting | Group setting | Special Equipment | Online |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------|-------------------|--------|
| 3 | 2-3 hours | No | Yes | No | No |



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1. Overview

This small group exercise is designed to explore and understand how complex situations or problems manifest themselves, carefully considering the specific needs, challenges and characteristics of PoAS. The Problem Tree methodology is structured in three steps to identify the main challenges together with their causes and effects.

This method uses visual diagrams to clearly analyse the relationships between the causes of a challenge/problem and its effects. This approach is particularly useful for PoAS, who often find it easier to understand visual information than verbal information. The ProblemTree is built around a central challenge/problem, with causes traced at the bottom (the "roots") and effects at the top (the "branches"). This clear and visible structure helps reduce the perception of complexity of the problem, making it more manageable.

In addition to identifying the root causes of the problem, the Problem Tree provides a visual breakdown of challenges into their manifestations and causes. This visual output facilitates understanding of how the challenge affects daily life and how it can be addressed effectively. The activity is structured and predictable, designed to reduce anxiety and improve understanding for PoAS, encouraging their active and meaningful participation in the group.



2. Aim / Benefits

The main benefit of the challenge tree is that it allows participants to analyse the causes and effects of a particular challenge or problem.

In the challenge tree, the problem or challenge is broken down into manageable and definable parts, an especially useful approach for PoAS who may struggle to manage complex problems in a holistic way. This allows you to prioritise factors and help you focus your goals better, reducing overstimulation and anxiety related to dealing with problems that are too broad or unstructured.

It allows you to generate a deeper and broader understanding of the problem or challenge in question and its causes, which are often interconnected and sometimes even contradictory. This also helps to establish who the actors involved are and what processes are at play. For PoAS, having a clear visual representation of these elements can improve understanding and the ability to communicate their ideas and concerns.

Working on a challenge tree in a group helps create a shared sense of understanding and a basis for common purpose and actions to resolve related causes. This can be especially beneficial for PoAS who may have difficulty understanding and participating in group dynamics. The structured challenge tree process facilitates participation and generates meaningful conversations around a particular challenge, both during discussions in groups and during the final steps and debriefing of the activity, thus improving social interaction and sharing of experiences in a safe and supportive environment.

3. Training tier and UNIT(s) related

This exercise can be related to Inhouse Training – Unit WE, as it can help professionals **self-reflect on their narratives about the autism spectrum**, and support PoAS **self-reflecting on their narratives about the autism spectrum**.

This exercise can be related to In-Company Training – Unit WE, as it can help professionals supporting companies **self-reflect on the dominant narratives they have about the autism spectrum** and how they positively and negatively affect the way the working environment relates to PoAS employees or collaborators.

This exercise can be used to practise Self-awareness, a skill reflected in the skills cards. The Problem Tree helps to explore and understand how situations develop and become complex realities. By practising self-awareness, you can identify your emotions, thoughts, and behaviours related to the problem. This understanding allows you to analyse the root causes and effects, helping you to see the bigger picture and how your actions influence the situation. Reflecting on your experiences and maintaining an Emotion/Thoughts Journal can further enhance this analysis, leading to deeper insights and more effective problem-solving.

4. How to do the exercise

Step 1 / Preparation:

(MANDATORY to explain how to prepare and introduce the exercise to the participant)

A problem tree analysis can be conducted in 2 ways:

Option 1: The professional defines the problem or challenge:

The professional introduces the problem that will be the theme of the Problem Tree, using additional visual and contextual materials such as newspaper clippings or images. This approach helps to clearly explain the problem in a visual and concrete way, reducing anxiety and improving understanding for PoAS. It is essential that the professional provides clear and repeatable instructions, using simple and structured language.



Option 2: Participants define the problem or challenge:

The session begins with a brainstorming activity, where participants identify the problem or challenge they wish to address in the Challenge Tree analysis. Under the guidance of the professional, participants reach consensus on the challenge/problem to be examined. It is crucial to use facilitation techniques that promote inclusive communication, such as the use of speaking turns and visual supports, to ensure that all voices are heard and understood.

The central challenge should be formulated from the target group's point of view, in the form of a negative statement and should be quite specific. For PoAS, formulating specific, concrete problems can help reduce anxiety and improve understanding. The challenge should identify who are those affected and the period of focus, preferably a current issue. However, the exercise can also reflect on past problems to stimulate conversations about the past and analyse solutions with hindsight to extract lessons learned.

Don't worry if it seems like a broad topic because the problem tree will help break it down. For example, "High levels of unemployment among PoAS youth" is negative, but may not be specific enough. Much better would be: "Many young PoAS find it difficult to access apprenticeship or employment opportunities that meet their specific support and environmental needs."

Step 2

Participants receive a "Problem Tree" template that includes clear, structured visuals that are helpful for PoAS.

The challenge or problem is written in the centre of the template and becomes the "trunk" of the tree. This becomes the "focal problem" subject to analysis. While the understanding of what the problem is should be shared by the participants, the statement of the problem in the "trunk" itself does not have to be written in exactly the same way and in the same words for all groups, as the roots and branches will further define it.



Step 3:

The group proceeds by first identifying the causes of the central problem, represented as the "roots" of the Challenge Tree, and then the consequences, which become the "branches". This process can be facilitated in several ways adapted for PoAS, ensuring a structured and visual environment that promotes clarity and understanding.

Individual with Post-it: Participants write on post-it the causes and consequences that they individually identify. This allows them to focus on their ideas in an autonomous and tangible way, reducing the anxiety that comes from an open discussion.

Discussion and Grouping: After collecting ideas on post-it notes, participants meet to discuss and group similar notes. Using visual aids such as tables or large sheets of paper can facilitate this process, allowing you to easily organise and recognize emerging themes.

The questions are adapted to ensure active and meaningful participation of PoAS:

Does this represent the context? Make sure that each cause and consequence is well contextualised in the central problem.

What are the most significant causes and the most relevant consequences? Focus on the clearest and most direct relationships between the roots and branches of the Challenge Tree.

What are the possible solutions or intervention options? Explore together possible strategies or changes that could mitigate the causes or modify the identified consequences.

What decisions have been made and actions agreed upon? Record the conclusions and agreements reached during the discussion to clarify next steps.



Final step / Conclusion:

Participants review the completed Challenge Tree diagram to verify the coherence and logic of the identified cause-and-effect relationships. Make sure the flow of thought is clear and understandable for all members of the group, including PoAS. This structured and visual step helps consolidate understanding of the problem and its implications.

5. Debrief

After completing the exercise, it is essential to conduct a debriefing session to ensure that all participants understand the process and results. The debriefing should be conducted in a structured, clear and inclusive way, taking into account the specific characteristics, difficulties and needs of PoAS.

Presentation of diagrams:

If the participants have been divided into smaller groups, each group explains their own challenge tree diagram. They should outline how the discussion took place, explaining the main points and ideas that led to the content of the diagram. It is helpful to use visual aids to aid understanding.

Other groups are invited to provide feedback. For autistic people, it is important that this feedback is structured, respectful and focused on constructive aspects.

If working with a single group, the professional summarises the findings and discussion, using the main ideas and points collected in the separate sheet as a guide.

Summary and comparison:

The practitioner summarises the exercise, emphasising similarities between the diagrams and highlighting any significant differences. This helps consolidate understanding and highlight commonalities and differences clearly and visibly.

Bias awareness:

The professional must be aware of the risks of prejudices, judgments, blame, etc., which may emerge explicitly or implicitly during the exercise. It is important to approach these issues with sensitivity and openness, asking participants to reflect on when these elements emerged, how they felt about them and how they relate to their context. This helps promote a safe and inclusive environment.

Questions for participants:

- Ask participants what happened during the exercise, paying particular attention to discussion points and root cause analysis for not reaching agreement.
- Ask each participant to give feedback on the activity: how they felt before and after about the problem, about their group mates, etc. This can be facilitated with the use of visual rating scales or other alternative modes of communication.

Ask participants to highlight a “take-away” or lesson learned. It is helpful to use visual aids to help participants reflect and share their lessons learned.

Converting to Objective Tree:

After the exercise, the practitioner can help participants convert the challenge tree into a goal tree. This is done by reframing each of the problems into desirable positive outcomes, as if the problem had already been addressed. This step helps transform root causes and consequences into solutions or root goals for change, providing a positive and proactive perspective.

6. Specific materials

- You will need to have
- Flip chart, whiteboard or large paper;
- Sticky notes or cards
- Tape or pins
- Pens, pencils, etc...



7. Tips and Tricks for use Inhouse

- **Structured communication:** Ensure all instructions and explanations are clear, concise, and visually supported. Use visual aids such as diagrams or charts to enhance understanding of the exercise objectives and process.
- **Preparation and familiarisation:** Before starting the exercise, provide participants with an overview of the Problem Tree methodology and what to expect. Allow time for familiarisation with materials like sticky notes and templates.
- **Individual work approach:** Begin with individual brainstorming using post-it notes. This approach allows PoAS participants to organise their thoughts independently and reduces anxiety associated with open discussions.
- **Facilitated group discussions:** Guide group discussions carefully, using structured facilitation techniques. Ensure everyone has opportunities to contribute by using turn-taking strategies and visual cues to signal when it's their turn to speak.
- **Visual organisation:** Utilise large paper or a whiteboard for visual organisation of ideas. This helps in grouping and categorising causes and consequences effectively, making complex information more manageable.
- **Encouraging active participation:** Encourage PoAS participants to share their ideas and perspectives comfortably. Provide reassurance and positive reinforcement throughout the exercise to build confidence in their contributions.
- **Flexibility and support:** Be flexible in adapting the pace and structure of the exercise based on participants' needs. Offer support as needed, such as clarifying instructions or providing additional time for processing information.

8. Tips and Tricks for use In-Company

- Establishing a supportive environment: Create a supportive and inclusive atmosphere where all participants feel valued and respected. Emphasise teamwork and collaboration to achieve common goals.
- Role clarity and expectations: Clearly define roles and expectations within each group. This helps PoAS participants understand their responsibilities and contributions, reducing uncertainty and anxiety.
- Using visual aids effectively: Maximise the use of visual aids such as charts, diagrams, and templates to facilitate understanding and engagement. Ensure these materials are accessible and comprehensible to all participants.
- Managing group dynamics: Monitor group dynamics closely to ensure all voices are heard and contributions are acknowledged. Address any potential conflicts or misunderstandings promptly and constructively.
- Encouraging reflection and feedback: Incorporate structured debriefing sessions to reflect on the exercise outcomes. Encourage PoAS participants to share their thoughts and feelings about the process, using visual rating scales or alternative modes of communication if needed.
- Promoting learning and growth: Focus on lessons learned and actionable insights from the exercise. Help participants translate findings from the Problem Tree into practical goals and strategies for improvement.
- Sensitivity to individual needs: Be attentive to individual needs and preferences throughout the exercise. Adapt your approach to accommodate sensory sensitivities or communication differences, ensuring a positive and productive experience for all.

Example of a challenge tree template:





9. On-line version

The exercise is not easily adaptable to an online context, although discussions can take place in an online setting using video-conferencing, this will not generate the same benefits as in an face-to-face setting, as on-line communication is less rich in non-verbal communication elements and their transmission. In any case, if needed, it should be done only with one single group moderated by the professional (and not using smaller groups).

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