What Is The Last Step In The 7 Step Military Problem Solving Process

Introduction: Why the Final Phase Defines Success in Military Decision Making

In the high-stakes environment of military operations, the difference between mission success and failure often hinges on a structured, repeatable approach to complex challenges. For decades, service members across all branches have relied on a specific framework to break down problems, analyze options, and execute solutions with precision. This framework is known as the **7 step military problem solving process**, a methodical approach taught at every level from basic training to senior service colleges. While each of the seven steps contributes to the overall effectiveness of the process, one question consistently arises among students and practitioners alike: **what is the last step in the 7 step military problem solving process**? Understanding this final phase is not merely an academic exercise; it is the key to closing the loop between planning and actual results, ensuring that lessons are captured and future performance is improved.

The military problem solving process is designed to eliminate guesswork and bias, replacing them with a logical sequence of actions that leads to sound decisions. From identifying the root cause of a tactical issue to selecting the best course of action, each step builds upon the previous one. However, the last step—often rushed or overlooked in civilian settings—holds unique significance in military culture. It represents the commitment to continuous improvement, accountability, and the rigorous evaluation that separates effective leaders from those who simply move on to the next task. In this article, we will explore the entire process, focus deeply on the final step, and explain why mastering it is essential for anyone who wants to apply military-grade decision making to their own professional or personal challenges.

An Overview of the 7 Step Military Problem Solving Process

Before we answer the central question of **what is the last step in the 7 step military problem solving process**, it is important to understand the full sequence. The military uses this structured approach to ensure that no critical element is missed and that solutions are both practical and sustainable. The seven steps are as follows:

1. **Step 1: Identify the Problem.** Clearly define what needs to be solved. This involves gathering facts, separating symptoms from root causes, and writing a clear problem statement.
2. **Step 2: Gather Information and Identify Assumptions.** Collect relevant data, analyze the operating environment, and list any assumptions that must be made due to missing information.
3. **Step 3: Develop Criteria.** Establish the standards by which potential solutions will be judged. These criteria typically include feasibility, acceptability, suitability, and completeness.
4. **Step 4: Generate Possible Solutions.** Brainstorm multiple courses of action without immediate judgment. Creativity is encouraged at this stage to ensure a wide range of options.
5. **Step 5: Analyze Possible Solutions.** Evaluate each option against the criteria developed in Step 3. This step uses tools like risk assessment, wargaming, and comparative analysis.
6. **Step 6: Select the Best Solution.** Choose the course of action that best meets the criteria and offers the highest probability of success. This decision is documented with clear rationale.
7. **Step 7: Implement and Evaluate the Solution.** Put the chosen plan into action and continuously monitor its effectiveness. This is the step we will examine in detail.

Each step is interconnected, but Step 7 is where theory meets reality. Without it, even the most brilliant solution remains untested and unproven.

What Is the Last Step in the 7 Step Military Problem Solving Process? A Deep Dive into Step 7

To directly answer the question: **what is the last step in the 7 step military problem solving process**? The seventh and final step is **Implementation and Evaluation**. In military doctrine, this phase is often called "Evaluation and Feedback" or "Assess and Adapt." It involves executing the selected course of action while simultaneously monitoring outcomes to ensure the solution is working as intended. This step does not end when the plan is put into motion; rather, it continues throughout the execution phase and often extends beyond it to capture long-term lessons.

The Two Pillars of Step 7: Implementation and Evaluation

The final step rests on two equally important pillars. The first is implementation, which requires detailed planning for execution. This includes assigning tasks, allocating resources, establishing timelines, and communicating the plan to all stakeholders. In a military context, this might involve a platoon leader issuing an operations order, a logistics officer coordinating supply movements, or a staff officer tracking key milestones.

The second pillar is evaluation, which is the systematic assessment of whether the solution is achieving its intended effect. Evaluation answers questions like: Are we meeting our objectives? What obstacles have emerged? Have any assumptions proven false? This is not a passive observation; it is an active process that uses metrics, feedback from subordinates, and situational awareness to make real-time adjustments.

The Role of the After Action Review (AAR)

A critical component of Step 7 in the military problem solving process is the **After Action Review** (AAR). This is a structured debriefing that occurs after a mission, exercise, or significant event. The AAR is not a critique session; it is a professional discussion that focuses on what happened, why it happened, and how to improve. Participants openly discuss successes and failures without fear of reprisal. The AAR directly supports the evaluation aspect of Step 7 by capturing lessons learned and translating them into actionable changes for future operations.

The AAR typically follows four simple questions:

- What was the intended outcome?
- What actually happened?
- What caused the difference between the two?
- What will we sustain or improve next time?

By institutionalizing the AAR, the military ensures that the last step of the problem solving process becomes a continuous loop of improvement rather than a one-time event.

Why Step 7 Is the Most Critical Phase of the 7 Step Military Problem Solving Process

Many people assume that Step 6—selecting the best solution—is the climax of the process. However, experienced military leaders understand that a plan is only as good as its execution. Without diligent implementation and rigorous evaluation, even the most carefully selected solution can fail. Here is why Step 7 deserves special attention:

1. It Validates the Entire Process

Step 7 is the only phase that provides concrete evidence of whether the preceding six steps were done correctly. If the solution fails during implementation, it forces a reexamination of earlier assumptions, criteria, and analysis. This feedback loop is essential for organizational learning.

2. It Accounts for Dynamic Environments

Military operations rarely unfold exactly as planned. The enemy adapts, weather changes, and new intelligence emerges. Step 7 allows leaders to adjust their approach in real time, making it a dynamic rather than static conclusion. Flexibility is built into the final step.

3. It Builds Accountability

The evaluation component of Step 7 creates a culture of accountability. Leaders know that their decisions will be assessed, not to assign blame, but to improve future performance. This encourages thoroughness in earlier steps and honesty during after action reviews.

4. It Preserves Institutional Knowledge

Documenting what worked and what did not creates a repository of lessons that benefits the entire organization. New leaders can learn from the experiences of their predecessors without repeating mistakes. This is how the military continuously improves its problem solving capability over time.

Applying the Last Step to Real-World Military Scenarios

To fully grasp **what is the last step in the 7 step military problem solving process**, it helps to see it applied in a realistic context. Consider a company commander tasked with securing a village during a stability operation. After working through Steps 1 through 6, the commander selects a solution that involves increased patrolling, engagement with local leaders, and the establishment of a checkpoint.

In Step 7, the commander does not simply issue the order and wait. Instead, he or she:

- Briefs all squad leaders on the specific tasks and timelines (implementation).
- Establishes reporting requirements to track patrol activity, civilian interactions, and incident rates (evaluation metrics).
- Conducts daily huddles to discuss progress and emerging issues.
- After one week, the commander leads an AAR to assess whether the checkpoint is reducing threats or creating resentment among locals.
- Based on feedback, the commander adjusts the checkpoint schedule and adds a civil affairs component to improve relations.

This iterative cycle of implementation, evaluation, and adjustment is the essence of Step 7. It ensures that the solution remains relevant and effective even as conditions change.

Common Pitfalls to Avoid in Step 7

Understanding **what is the last step in the 7 step military problem solving process** is only half the battle. Equally important is knowing what can go wrong during this phase. Here are some common mistakes that undermine the

effectiveness of Step 7:

Lack of Clear Metrics

Without measurable criteria for success, evaluation becomes subjective and unreliable. Leaders must define what "good" looks like before implementation begins.

Confirmation Bias

Leaders who are emotionally invested in their chosen solution may ignore negative feedback or explain away failures. Step 7 requires intellectual honesty and openness to being wrong.

Skipping the AAR

In the rush to move on to the next mission or problem, teams sometimes skip the after action review. This is a lost opportunity for learning. The AAR should be considered a mandatory part of every completed cycle.

Treating Evaluation as a One-Time Event

Evaluation should be continuous, not just a final check at the end. Regular assessments throughout the implementation phase allow for timely corrections.

How the Military Problem Solving Process Differs from Civilian Models

Many civilian problem solving frameworks—such as PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) or DMAIC (Define-Measure-Analyze-Improve-Control)—include a final step focused on evaluation and control. However, the military version places a stronger emphasis on the **After Action Review** and the cultural expectation of honest self-assessment. In the civilian world, post-mortems are sometimes conducted but are often rushed or avoided due to political sensitivities. The military, by contrast, institutionalizes the last step as a non-negotiable professional obligation.

Another difference is the military's focus on **commander's intent** during Step 7. Even as leaders evaluate outcomes, they remain guided by the broader purpose of the mission. This prevents them from becoming overly fixated on minor metrics at the expense of the overall objective.

Practical Takeaways for Leaders and Teams

Whether you serve in the military or work in a corporate environment, the principles behind Step 7 are universally applicable. Here are three actionable takeaways:

1. **Build evaluation into your implementation plan from the start.** Do not wait until the project is complete to assess whether it is working. Identify key performance indicators and schedule regular check-ins.
2. **Foster a culture of psychological safety.** Encourage team members to speak openly about failures and near-misses without fear of blame. This is the foundation of an effective AAR.
3. **Document everything.** Keep records of what was tried, what results were achieved, and what lessons were learned. This creates a knowledge base that will serve you and your organization for years to come.

Conclusion: Closing the Loop for Continuous Improvement

So, **what is the last step in the 7 step military problem solving process**? It is the combined phase of **Implementation and Evaluation**, a purposeful and ongoing effort to execute the chosen solution while rigorously assessing its effectiveness. This step transforms problem solving from a theoretical exercise into a practical tool for achieving real-world results. It ensures that the