ASK – Checklist Step 1:

What is the (assumed) problem to be solved?

	Very clear	Fairly clear	Somewhat unclear	Very unclear
1. How clearly defined is the problem (what, who, when, where, why)?				
2. Is it clear what the organizational consequences of the problem are?				
3. Is it clear how serious and urgent the problem is?				
4. Is it clear what the major cause(s) of the problem could be?				
5. Is it clear what the logic model is?				

Based on the answers to these five questions, you should be able to conclude whether the problem is sufficiently clearly described. When the answers suggest the problem is unclear, there is no point proceeding with the next step. After all, when a problem is unclear – or possibly nonexistent – you cannot solve it, even when you take an evidence-based approach. When the problem is sufficiently clear, you should describe what the problem is, its organizational consequences, its major cause(s), and the PICOC. Use this description as input for step 2, determining whether the problem and (assumed) underlying cause are supported by the evidence.

ASK – Checklist Step 2:

What is the evidence for this problem?

Evidence from practitioners	Yes	Mostly	Somewhat	No
1. Do practitioners agree with the description of the problem?				
2. Do they see plausible alternative causes of the problem?				
3. Do they agree that the problem is both serious and urgent?				

The professional judgment of experienced practitioners is an essential component for determining whether an assumed problem is a serious problem, whether the assumed cause is the primary or root cause, and whether alternative causes are plausible.

Evidence from the organization	Yes	Mostly	Somewhat	No
1. *Do the organizational data confirm the assumed problem?*				
2. *Is there a trend? (Do the data suggest the problem will increase if no action is taken?)*				
3. *Do the data confirm the logic model? Is there a correlation between the assumed cause, the perceived problem, and its organizational consequences?*				

Organizational data can be hard, or quantitative, indicators such as staff turnover, error rates, or productivity levels, but they can also include soft elements such as job satisfaction or attitudes toward senior management.
This type of evidence includes data from governments, international bodies, and industry bodies. Organizational data are essential to identifying relevant problems and determining possible causes.

Evidence from the scientific literature	Yes	Mostly	Somewhat	No
1. *Does the scientific literature confirm the assumed major cause of the problem?*				
2. *Does the literature confirm the logic model? (Is there a correlation between the cause of the problem and its organizational consequences?)*				
3. *Is the evidence generally applicable in the context of the organization (PICOC)?*				

When referring to scientific literature, we mean empirical studies published in peer-reviewed academic journals. In recent decades, a large amount of research has been published on a wide range of managerial issues, such as absenteeism, job satisfaction, improving performance, preventing errors, and motivating employees. Many of these studies also provide insight into the most common causes of these issues. Thus, when tackling these issues in practice, it is important to consult scientific studies.

Evidence from stakeholders	Yes	Mostly	Somewhat	No
1. Do practitioners agree with the description of the problem?				
2. Do they see plausible alternative causes of the problem?				
3. Do they agree that the problem is both serious and urgent?				

Stakeholders are individuals or groups who may be affected by an organization's decisions or practices. Internal stakeholders include employees, managers, and board members. However, stakeholders outside the organization, such as suppliers, customers, shareholders, the government, and the public at large, may also be affected. As with evidence from experienced practitioners, evidence from stakeholders is an essential component in determining whether a perceived problem is indeed a serious problem. Stakeholders are also important to understanding whose support may be needed in solving the problem.

Based on the answers to these questions, you should be able to conclude whether the evidence supports the assumed problem. When the answers suggest that the problem is not supported (or even that it is contradicted) by the evidence, the probability that any solution will effectively address the problem is low, and there is no point proceeding to the next step: the preferred solution.