The following is an explanation of some of the main blocks that exist under each category heading.

A. Perceptual blocks

Perceptual blocks exist when we are unable to clearly perceive a problem or the information needed to solve it effectively. They include:

1. Seeing only what you expect to see

To recognize situations we look for patterns of key features which we have learnt by experience represent a particular situation. If the key features ‘fit’ we assume the situations are the same. This often obscures the true nature of a problem, either because we exclude relevant information (because it isn’t a key feature or didn’t occur in the past), or include information simply because we assume it is there.

For example: perception about an individual.

2. Stereotyping

In recognizing situations we automatically apply labels (like door, machine, laziness) which can prevent us seeing all the features of the situation. Often we don’t look beyond the obvious. For example, if someone isn’t working as hard as we would like and we apply the label ‘lazy’ to that person, we might overlook the possibility that boredom with monotonous work is the problem, and not laziness.

B. Emotional blocks

Emotional blocks exist when we perceive a threat to our emotional needs. These needs differ in type and strength from person to person but include needs for achievement, recognition, order, belonging and self-esteem. The emotional blocks include:

1. Fear of making mistakes or looking foolish

This block becomes more severe in the presence of colleagues of a different rank to our own. With those who are more senior we imagine that we will be thought inexperienced or immature. With those more junior we want to protect our image as being knowledgeable and experienced.
C. Intellectual blocks

Intellectual blocks exist when we don’t have the necessary thinking skills to find a successful solution, or are unable to use them effectively. They include:

1. Lack of knowledge or skill in the problem solving process

2. Lack of creative thinking

3. Lack of knowledge or skill in using the ‘Language’ of the problem

If a problem involves a language that we cannot understand or cannot use, such as specialist jargon or statistical analysis, we will not be able to tackle the problem effectively. Similarly, we may use an inappropriate language, such as trying to find an error in accounts by describing the situation verbally rather than analysing it mathematically.

D. Expressive blocks

Expressive blocks exist when we do not have the knowledge or skills necessary to communicate or record ideas in the ways required. They are caused by an inability to ‘use ‘languages’ effectively, such as words, drawings, mathematics, scientific symbols, and so on. They include:

E. Environmental blocks

Environmental blocks, which exist when the social or physical environment hinders our problem solving, include:

Management style

The way in which we are managed can influence both our attitude to problem solving and the freedom we have to create and implement ideas. For example, if our ideas are dismissed constantly with comments such as ‘No, it wouldn’t work because ...’, or ‘No, we’ve tried it before and it didn’t work’, we soon give up trying.