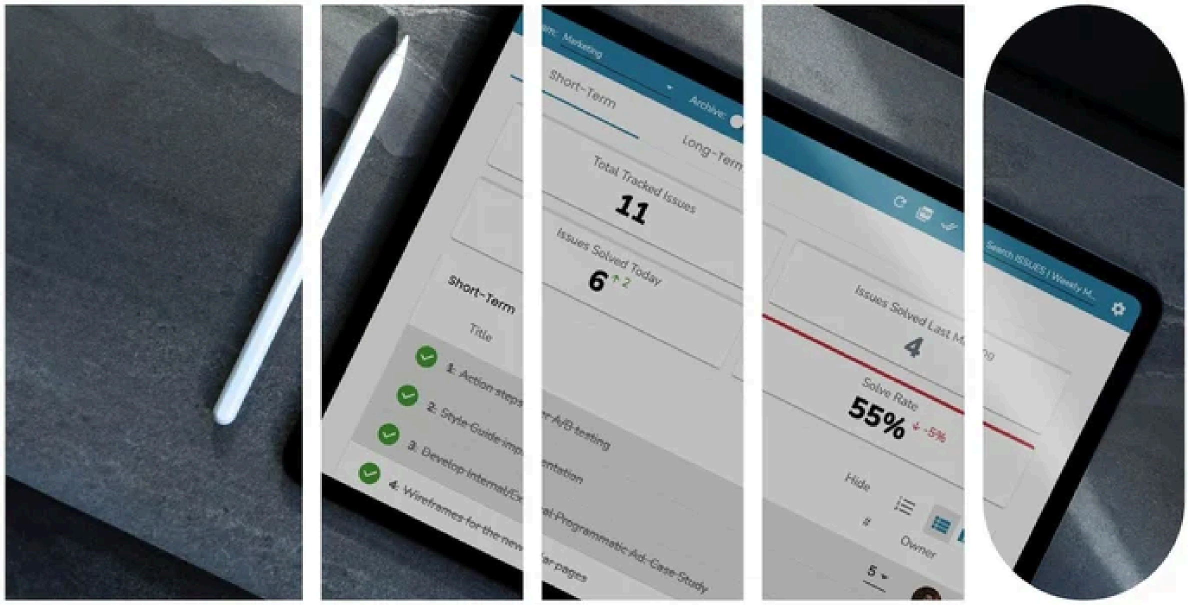

BRIEF

Issues

By Mark Abbott

Introduction

Every organization has obstacles. One of the key characteristics of great companies is actively acknowledging those obstacles and developing solutions.

When people think of Issues, they think of problems, difficulties, or obstacles to address, but Issues can also be ideas, opportunities, or topics to explore. High-trust companies (HTCs) facilitate open and honest conversations between their **stakeholders**, approaching obstacles and opportunities head-on together. Doing so makes a company run better.

Within Ninety, use the Issues tool to Raise, Discuss, and Resolve (RDR) obstacles and opportunities.

Tool Overview

Becoming an HTC doesn't happen overnight, but Ninety's tools provide the increased transparancy and accountability needed to foster a culture of trust.

One of these is the Issues tool. Almost anything in Ninety can be made into an Issue for discussion — just right-click and select "Make it an Issue." By adding discussion topics to the Short-Term Issues list as they come up throughout the week, teams can stay on top of their most pressing problems and opportunities. Team members know Issues will be addressed because the team has committed to address them together during the RDR (Raise, Discuss, and Resolve) section of their **Weekly Team Meeting**.

Once the team decides on a path forward, they can easily convert the Issue into a **To-Do** and assign it to a specific team member. Alternatively, more involved topics can be moved to the Long-Term Issues list to discuss during a **Quarterly** or **Annual Planning Meeting**.

Context

Issues can take on a variety of forms.

A common type of Issue is an obstacle to completing work. Maybe new software is needed, there's a disruption in the production process, or there's been a miscommunication between team members. The goal is to neatly identify the core of the Issue and the parties involved, discuss potential solutions, and then agree on one that reopens the gates of work.

Issues can help information flow through the team. Anyone can create an Issue to spread information to the entire team or request information from someone else. If a new initiative requires team buy-in, this is an excellent opportunity to present it through an Issue and confirm everyone is on the same page.

There are two time frames for Issues: Short-Term and Long-Term. We handle Short-Term Issues during the RDR section of Weekly Team Meetings. Generate most of these Issues over the week, outside the designated meeting time. Ideally, they're created in real-time, as the Issue is occurring. That way, we're less likely to forget the details.

We discuss Long-Term Issues during Quarterly or Annual Planning Meetings. Issues discussed during **Quarterly Planning Meetings (QPMs)** and **Annual Planning Meetings (APMs)** Quarterlies fall into two categories: significant issues requiring a lengthy discussion or candidates for future **Rocks** or Goals. We carry over many of these Issues from the **Vision tool**, where company Issues that didn't make the cut this quarter are stored.

It's common for Short-Term Issues to get "upgraded" to Long-Term Issues. The Issue may be too significant or essential to discuss during a shorter meeting, or we may need to take steps might to resolve it. No matter the reason, it's wise to tackle these more significant, long-term issues during a Quarterly or Annual Planning Meeting.

Core Disciplines of Great Issues

1. Prioritize Issues during each meeting to use the team's time wisely. Decide what absolutely must be talked about today and what can wait. **Ninety's ranking system** — 5 for most important and 1 for least — is an excellent way to organize this.

2. Capture Issues in real-time. This helps report as much information as possible.

3. Use the keep/kill/combine method to discuss Issues. Consider: What needs to stick around? What can be made into a To-Do or simply marked off? What Issues are similar and warrant discussing together?

Hopefully Helpful Hints

When creating an Issue, a good rule of thumb is to provide enough information so the team can still work through and understand the Issue later on, even in the absence of the original poster. The Issue still exists, and because the team has a clear explanation of the Issue in the description section, they can still RDR. Working through an Issue with limited information often leaves the onus on one person to explain what's going on, hindering group discussion. Group effort is what makes a company powerful.

That information is also essential to provide context if the Issue is still floating around a few weeks after creation. It happens to the best of us. Even the writer can forget the details surrounding the Issue. With a solid description, they can remember what they were trying to convey.

We have the power to share Issues across different teams. Sometimes, an Issue can only be resolved with input from another team. Providing all the information the other team needs to RDR the Issue is critical. Otherwise, they're left scratching their heads, and we waste time trading the information back and forth. With the right information, the other team can resolve the Issue or add the additional information needed and send it back.

Takeaway

Mastery of problem-solving creates a powerful company, but it's not something that happens overnight. It takes repetition to create an environment where people are confident that shared problems almost always turn into shared solutions. We need to train new team members that Issues aren't taboo. When we have a High-Trust Company where team members feel they have an open forum to air out and resolve their Issues, the friction that prevents amazingly productive work slips away.

What's next? Visit the **90u Library** or **try Ninety today**.

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