

Identify, Isolate, Solve, Document

Identify, Isolate, Solve, Document is the core problem-solving sequence of the Malone leadership method. It defines leadership as the disciplined correction of consequential problems rather than the performance of concern, the production of commentary, or the accumulation of personal recognition.

The sequence is designed to convert observation into institutional knowledge:

Identify → Isolate → Solve → Document

Each stage corrects a common failure in leadership. Identification prevents action against the wrong problem. Isolation prevents symptoms, distractions, and secondary disputes from consuming the response. Solution prevents diagnosis from becoming permanent discussion. Documentation prevents successful work from disappearing with the individual who performed it.

Identify

To identify a problem is to define the actual condition requiring correction.

Many problems are first encountered through symptoms: declining performance, public conflict, institutional exclusion, financial loss, political weakness, community disorder, or repeated personal failure. A leader must look beneath the visible event and determine what condition is producing the pattern.

Identification asks:

- What is happening?
- Who is affected?
- What harm is being caused?
- Is the condition isolated or recurring?
- Is it personal, structural, institutional, political, economic, or social?
- What evidence or experience supports the diagnosis?
- Why does the problem deserve priority?

Poor identification produces wasted effort. A leader may respond to public anger rather than the condition causing it, blame individuals for institutional failures, or select an ideologically convenient explanation instead of the operative one.

Correct identification gives the problem a stable name, scope, and strategic significance.

Isolate

To isolate a problem is to separate its operative cause from surrounding noise.

Serious problems rarely appear alone. They are mixed with personalities, emotions, historical grievances, administrative procedures, competing explanations, and unrelated failures. Isolation identifies the part of the system that must be changed for the outcome to improve.

Isolation asks:

- What mechanism produces or sustains the problem?
- Which actors possess relevant authority?
- What resources, dependencies, or vulnerabilities are involved?
- Which facts belong within the present scope?
- Which issues require separate treatment?
- What is a root cause, and what is merely a symptom?
- What can be controlled directly?
- What must be anticipated but cannot presently be controlled?

Isolation does not mean ignoring context. It means preventing complexity from becoming an excuse for inaction.

The leader reduces the problem to a manageable operational unit without falsely simplifying its nature.

Solve

To solve a problem is to produce a practical correction that materially changes the condition.

A solution must go beyond explanation, awareness, protest, aspiration, and symbolic action. It must identify the desired outcome, assign responsibility, provide resources, establish procedures, and create a method for measuring whether the condition improved.

Solving asks:

- What must become true?
- What must stop?
- What must be built?
- Which person or institution must act?
- What sequence of action is required?
- What resources and authority are necessary?
- What resistance or failure should be anticipated?
- How will the solution be tested?
- What standard will determine success?

Solutions may take the form of institutions, laws, programs, procedures, training systems, funding mechanisms, alternative pathways, political campaigns, or defensive controls.

The preferred solution is not merely the one that produces immediate relief. It is the one that creates durable capacity and reduces the likelihood that the same problem will have to be solved again from the beginning.

Document

To document is to preserve the problem, method, authority, execution, results, errors, and lessons for institutional use.

Documentation converts personal judgment into inheritable knowledge.

Without documentation, successful work remains dependent upon memory, personality, informal relationships, or oral explanation. Success may be forgotten, distorted, repeated inefficiently, or lost during leadership transition.

Documentation asks:

- What problem was identified?
- How was it isolated?
- What solution was attempted?
- Who authorized and executed the response?
- What resources were used?
- What worked?
- What failed?
- What rules or principles were derived?
- Can the method be replicated?
- What should successors preserve, revise, or avoid?

Useful artifacts include:

- doctrine;
- charters;
- regulations;
- procedures;
- reports;
- case records;
- financial records;
- implementation manuals;
- training materials;
- archives;
- revision histories;
- trusts, endowments, and succession instruments.

Documentation is not separate from leadership. It is the final stage through which leadership becomes durable.

The Sequence as a Leadership Standard

The sequence distinguishes several levels of contribution.

A commentator may identify a problem.
An analyst may isolate its mechanism.
An organizer may mobilize a response.
A leader solves the problem.
An institutional leader documents the solution so others can preserve and scale it.

The complete sequence is therefore required for institutional-grade leadership.

A person who identifies without solving may increase understanding but leave the condition unchanged. A person who acts without isolating the cause may waste resources. A person who solves without documenting may produce a temporary victory that disappears after departure.

The governing rule is:

A Malone leader shall identify material problems, isolate their operative causes, implement practical solutions, and document the resulting methods and lessons for institutional use and succession.

Relationship to Malone Doctrine

Identify, Isolate, Solve, Document also governs doctrinal production.

A problem is identified and placed within the appropriate doctrinal container. Its mechanisms and scope are isolated. A practical response is designed. The response is then documented through the authority hierarchy as axioms, principles, maxims, rules, procedures, articles, schedules, commentary, and implementation guidance.

The sequence converts lived experience into organized doctrine and converts doctrine into institutional action.

Its governing principle is:

Leadership is demonstrated through the durable correction of consequential problems.

Identify, Isolate, Solve, Document is therefore both a leadership method and an institutional production system. It ensures that problems are understood accurately, addressed practically, and preserved as accumulated power rather than temporary achievement.