



Harry Franzheim—an HR/OD Practitioner for over 30 years—has published this newsletter to bring you careful insight into reducing costs and unlocking employee potential.

AT ISSUE

Do you ever ask why the same problems at your company recur again and again? Instead of fighting fires with quick fixes, fireproof your company by getting to the root cause of the problems.

Fire Fighting or Fireproofing?



Pull for Quick Fix



HR Fact:

A business culture that emphasizes data and analysis for solving problems versus one that uses gut feel and intuition will more accurately identify root causes. But a culture that emphasizes both will see more permanent solutions to its problems. Leaders need to become more deliberate and disciplined, and resist the urge to just put out the fire as quickly as possible.

Think about life in your organization. Does it seem that you are constantly putting out fires? Does it seem that problems that were supposed to be “solved” have recurred over time? Do you find yourself a little worn out from all of this? Do you think that the employees are a little skeptical about all of the added work they have taken on, all in the name of “continuous improvement”? If this sounds familiar, you’re not alone, and the reason for this may be very simple, but not as simple as the solution.

Having recently “profiled” 53 leaders for a client company using the Myers Briggs Type Indicator, including several feedback sessions, we revealed a pattern. The pattern may be part of the cause of ineffective problem solving (problems that keep coming back). I say “may be” and “part of the cause” because we have really limited analysis, just some hunches.

When problems continually recur, it would seem that the root cause of the problem has not been accurately identified. There has been activity that looks like problem solving but really is just symptom solving. Symptoms are the manifestations of other, usually larger, system problems. Failure to adequately find and work on the root cause problem will result in the recurrence of the same symptoms. Usually, and

So Many Symptoms



in general terms, every organization has three or four root cause problems that spawn hundreds of symptoms. Not identifying

those underlying root cause problems and attempting to resolve the symptoms is exhausting and can breed cynicism as new policies, practices, and programs are rolled out by senior leadership.

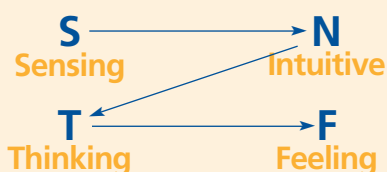
Some organizations find the act of symptom solving very satisfying as leaders spring into action, take no prisoners, look for the culprit, and slap countermeasures in place—all in haste—to be able to report at the morning management meeting the swift activity that took place. Some CEOs only want results and don’t really want to hear about the process. In those environments it is easy to confuse activity with results.

So what is it about organizations that routinely would rather fight fires and not search for root causes? Perhaps it is part of the collective DNA. Perhaps it is part of their collective personality profile! Using the Myers Briggs Type Indicator we can identify preferred personality styles and their related

behaviors. For example, an Extravert tends to talk his way to making his point, while an Introvert will sit quietly formulating his thoughts before opening his mouth. Another example: someone who prefers to gather data using his senses rather than his intuition will likely focus on the practical and not the theoretical. And the MBTI offers lots of examples that demonstrate preferences and resulting leadership behaviors.

In particular, the two dichotomies of the MBTI that are of interest in relation to problem solving are the S-N and the T-F functions. The MBTI identifies preferred

Organizational Strengths For Problem Solving



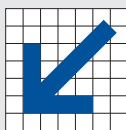
The Problem Solving Process

1. Collect and analyze data.
2. Consider all possible causes.
3. Brainstorm possible solutions.
4. Select the best plan.
5. Manage the changes.

cognitive and judging styles. The cognitive or data *gathering* metric suggests that people will rely either on their five Senses (S) or on their Intuition (N). The data *judging* metric suggests that people make decisions by Thinking (T) or by Feeling (F). A simple problem solving process includes five steps. The entire process requires the effective use of the two dichotomies S-N and T-F. The model suggests that on any given problem, **Step 1** should be data collection and data analysis. The "S" part of the first dichotomy leans in the direction of data collection and data analysis. **Step 2** of the simple model is to consider all of the possible causes for the problem. And **Step 3** is to brainstorm pos-

TIP FOR KEEPING

Costs Down.



Learning how to reduce variation, complexity, and waste in a system will uncover the sources of quality issues. When quality improves, costs will come down. Doing things right the first time is cheaper than doing things over. Errors in a system are usually the result of overly complex processes or a lack of discipline in following a process. Leaders must be experts at process improvements and in auditing the standard work of the employees.

TIP FOR KEEPING

Productivity Up.



Standardized work is key to improved productivity. This means finding the best known methods, training employees to those methods, and then auditing them to see that they are following the standards. Without standardized work, employees will burn their creative juices just doing the basics of their jobs. When employees get "creative," they are likely to introduce variation to the process. By definition, a process should yield a predictable result. Creativity and predictability don't mix. Customers like predictability.

sible solutions. The "N" preference leans in favor of doing steps 2 and 3. **Step 4** involves selecting "the best" alternative plan of action. The "T" preference leans toward using rational thoughts and nonemotional decision making. Finally, **Step 5** of the simple model is managing the change that the solution may cause. Managing change

usually involves anticipating the impact on the people affected by the change. The "F" preference leans toward the feelings of others in making decisions.

Unintentional Blindness

In theory, then, a team that is well balanced and effective in using all four preferences of the two dichotomies would be more likely to become proficient at solving problems permanently. This would be true because they would have taken the time to collect and analyze the data, used theory and explored possible causes and alternatives, selected a countermeasure, and then effectively rolled out the changes to the workforce.

As we went through each workshop with the leaders and uncovered this pattern (many "S" and "T," fewer "N" and "F") and compared it with the problem solving model, there were many "aha" moments in the room. There were many people who recounted stories that supported this notion of fighting symptoms and not real root causes of problems.

Solutions Require Changes

Solving problems permanently requires changes to the way things are normally done. Leaders need to resist the urge for quick fixes, and they need to learn to ask "why" five times to drill down closer to the root cause. Putting countermeasures in place requires new policies, practices, and processes. Employees that understand why these changes are being made will more likely follow the new policies. Moreover, those employees that were engaged in the problem solving process will gladly execute the changes.

The Bottom Line

Avoid the Quick Fix!
It Can Backfire.
It Can Be Addictive.
It Can Be Blinding.



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