



Success Lies Beyond Problem-Solving

By Rob Statham

Our organizations are staffed with highly skilled problem-solvers, however, there are times when quick fixes merely mask the underlying causes of issues that can lead to future incidents. We must recognize when it is necessary to go beyond surface-level problem-solving and delve into the root causes to prevent similar problems from arising.

The key to organizational success is uniting talented individuals to work as a team toward a common goal. While this may sound straightforward, adding more people often increases complexity, derailing our path to success.

Many organizations have established robust management systems and employ highly skilled individuals. They have also clearly defined their vision and goals. Unfortunately, success is not the word that best describes their outcomes, instead, the challenge is real and they are often struggling. Why is that? They have fallen into a common trap: they overlook Latency, which significantly contributes to their challenges. Latency refers to aspects of our work culture and the way we are that cause problems and require change.

The organization often focuses too intently on its systems and prioritizes its structure over the individuals within it. As a result, the people in the organization suffer and do not value or trust each other, leading to poor communication at best. Employees in these circumstances tend to follow orders instead of raising issues that need to be addressed to achieve the organization's goals. Identifying the problem is challenging because it is intangible; it's not a matter of fixing equipment or updating procedures. The real issue lies in the way people behave and interact with one another.

The culture gradually shifts deeper into a blame-oriented mindset. This undermines trust—the foundation of all healthy relationships—and creates a sense of shame and fear. People become reluctant to engage in anything that could be associated with failure, which leads to a reluctance to learn, a reluctance to improve things for fear that their efforts might not succeed. As a result, it often feels safer to do nothing.



The entire organization reacts as though knee deep in quicksand, and the frustrating reality is that no single person can resolve this issue, regardless of their authority. It requires a majority who recognize the problem and agree on how to tackle it. This process demands trust, a rare quality in many environments. Trust, by definition, involves taking a risk by relying on someone else. It necessitates a shift in mindset—from blame to understanding and from adversarial relationships to trust.

It is essential to demonstrate the benefits and importance of trust and respect in enhancing performance across the entire organization. This becomes easier when relationships are prioritized over financial gain. However, when relationships rank low on the list of values, fostering such ties becomes nearly impossible. Many organizations often undervalue their people, which is evident in their relationships with contractors.

This magnified view illustrates how people are treated within organizations. When individuals are made to feel that their value is less than others, they will often perform according to those diminished expectations. Why would they trust or take risks for a response that does not honor or value them? Is the relationship within your organization valuable enough that you are willing to experience failure (pain), learn from it, and grow together? For many, the answer is a resounding no. They shy away from the idea of failing in order to come back stronger.

This is similar to how everyone learned to ride a bike. As children, we embraced failure, but as adults, we often believe there must be a better approach. We introduce multiple people and constraints, then expect to hop on a unicycle with a square wheel for the first time and win a race. This notion is absurd - and it is the elephant in the boardroom. Yet, organizations continue to seek ways to improve human performance without first treating people with honor, trust, and compassion, even though this could lead to enhanced performance.

In this environment, individuals can begin to trust one another and function as a cohesive team. The true strength of any organization lies in its unity, not just in the talents of its individual members. It's about coming together to achieve a common goal; the organization itself receives the recognition, not the individuals.

The question that arises is: "How do you address this issue?" The most common response is to stop treating people poorly. Value them, open up lines of communication, and lead by example. While these suggestions sound good, the results often tell a different story. It's a dilemma to understand what needs to be done but feel uncertain



about how to achieve it. This is likely why you are still reading this. Although these solutions are valid, the problem is more complex than any directive or leadership example can resolve. The issue involves every single person within the organization, which means that the solution must also involve everyone in the organization.

When people believe that others need to change, it contributes to the ongoing problem. It's not just management that requires change; everyone—management, supervisors, and staff in the field—needs to change. Given human nature, most groups tend to think that it's the other groups that need to change, not themselves.

The first step is to make the problem visible, and this requires the effort of everyone involved. How can this be achieved? By using a process that shows each individual within the organization how they contribute to the problem and identifies ways they can improve. This is where Latent Cause Analysis (LCA) becomes important. It guides individuals through the process of understanding how they can address their part of the issue. People need to recognize their own contributions rather than blaming others.

As mutual respect grows, trust is built, creating a safe environment to learn from failures. When individuals acquire the skills taught by Latent Cause Analysis, noticeable improvements can occur. This methodology provides a thoughtful and constructive approach to uncovering hidden causes that affect workplace culture. Implementing Latent Cause Analysis can lead to a significant shift from a mediocre work environment to enhanced performance, requiring only a minimal investment of time and resources.

Building your organization on a healthy culture is akin to constructing a skyscraper on a deep, solid foundation. It's crucial for success and longevity.



"What we ignore grows, and what we condone multiplies."