



Hello

We hope that you are keeping safe and have your eyes on future horizons while taking care of business each day. We've been inspired by our experiences so far in the CV-19 crisis to share some ideas. Here goes!

In today's world the only true competitive advantage is the ability to learn faster than your competitors. (Management academic Peter Senge)

A positive to emerge from the CV-19 crisis is that it has created a massive learning laboratory. About ourselves, our people, our processes! Our ability to learn. And to apply novel solutions. As coaches and consultants, our key role is to help clients explore, understand, and LEARN. Deliberate, intentional learning **separates the leaders from the followers**. And it's less common than you might think.

In a series of connected articles, we want to encourage thinking around three topics. Root cause analysis and learning, solutions focus, and empowerment.

Best wishes. Keep safe
Tony & Helen

1 of 3: Root Cause Analysis and Learning

In management theory three of the most basic rules go back to Henri Fayol in 1916. And they are as valid now as 104 years ago. Fayol's words in italics:

1. *Accountability and responsibility*. Staff should only be accountable for results over which they have uncontaminated control;
2. *Unity of command*. Staff should only be accountable to one manager.
3. *Unity of direction*. Don't require staff to decipher ambiguous instructions (which relies on 2. above).

We want to reflect upon Number 1 and share learning from our recent CV-19 experiences. Holding staff accountable for only results they have control over is so important it's even one of the essential steps in designing KPIs. We talk about accountability being UNCONTAMINATED. Often the cause of a problem is far removed from the effects.

Contaminated accountability has always been a problem. And the current crisis seems to have exacerbated it. Because people are stressed and anxious, they are more impacted. And simultaneously, and probably for the same reasons, some managers seem to be more prone to doing it.

The point? Do not punish or criticize your staff for results that are impacted by other managers or departments results. In somewhat more colourful language, one manager recently said to us: *"I'm sick of my boss kicking my butt for a problem that happens in another department."*

On the surface this might just appear as irritating, but it's much more than that. First, it is quite possibly the most potent thing a manager can do to disempower their staff. Second – and it's the

real motivation for us writing this piece, it's a roadblock to organisations and managers' **learning**. They are destined to repeat the experience over and over – because the root cause is not identified and accurate solutions applied. The symptom gets attacked not the underlying root cause. The net result is the problem keeps recurring. The question *“What can we learn from this, so we don't have to experience the pain again?”* is never answered.

So, what's the solution? Largely it's a matter of DISCIPLINE:

- Stop and think before blaming your managers or staff for a poor result;
- Consider what factors may be outside their control that affect the results you are concerned about; and
- Apply proper root cause analysis, learning and solutions focus.

Root Cause Analysis is a structured way of digging deeper into problems to find the real cause and [why](#) it's happening. We are surprised at how infrequently proper analysis of problems takes place – in the absence of which, finding accurate solutions is largely reduced to guess work.

You may choose to investigate yourself. But in the interests of empowerment, here's our recommendation. When there is a performance problem, start with this simple request: *“Can you please provide me with an understanding of the causes of this performance issue and propose an accurate solution.”*

This is not, as a rule, terribly difficult when proper tools are applied, but it does require a high level of trust (both ways) and a culture free of blaming. And you, as the more senior manager must be prepared to listen with an open mind, pushing aside your preconceived notions and biases.

Then and only then will learning take place, proper solutions be found, and an empowerment culture promoted.

There are plenty of root cause analysis tools available and we'll talk about those in a later piece.

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