BLOG #3

Is Wishful Exploratory Surgery YOUR leadership decision making Style?

5 ways to recognize complex systemic business problems/opportunity and be more effective!

Would you let a surgeon perform exploratory surgery on YOU if the surgeon had no idea what was wrong? How about if the surgeon had operated on you several times in the past and yet you still had the same problem? Yet as leaders we perform surgery every day on problems that we do not understand and can only describe by pointing out the symptoms. Does poor morale cause poor customer service OR does poor customer service cause poor morale? I know your answer is YES, but more importantly I hope you recognize that poor customer service and poor morale are not the real systemic problems. They are symptoms of the system … only the tip of the iceberg.

There are systemic causes or factors that foster the symptom called *poor customer service* and likewise there are systemic causes for poor morale. If you try to "fix" poor customer service or poor morale without understanding these systemic causes, you are performing exploratory and reactive decision making. The two are of course interrelated.

It is complex systemic challenges facing transactionally handicapped leaders than unfortunately results in ineffective decision making. Making decisions by focusing on and trying to prevent the symptoms often causes more problems than it solves. So how do you recognize complex systemic business problems/opportunities? Well, the good news is that they have some common characteristics.

What are the common sense characteristics of a complex business problem? Well there are several:

1st, the problem has been around for a while, sometimes for years.

In most organizations, complex systemic business problems are not new. They rear their symptomatic heads with regularity despite our best event driven problem solving efforts. Often these symptoms show up at the most inopportune times and with regularity. For example, think about the systemic challenge of having multiple conflicting priorities. This is not a new problem and/or opportunity but leading a team with multiple #1 priorities that conflict can result in the symptoms of poor performance, misalignment of efforts, poor morale and eventually poor customer service to name just a few symptoms.

2nd, leaders have implemented solutions to "fix" the challenge or problem, yet despite their best effort, over time, the fix fails and the problem persists.

How much time and money did your company spent in the last couple of years trying to fix, for example, problems impacting customer service, quality, productivity or poor communications? Yet despite our best efforts and intentions, have you really resolved the problem or do you find the problem continues only with different symptoms? We know from experience that fixing the symptom is a fix that will fail!

3rd, in trying to resolve the symptoms, leaders unintentionally fall into the blame game.

How much did blame passing and defensive posturing cost your company last year? How many e-mails and how much time was spent trying to CYA and avoid being blamed? For example, when a product launch gets delayed, do you as a leader try to understand the systemic causes for the delay or do you unintentionally begin by blaming this group or that department or worse yet, a member of your team or even your customers?

4th, it is usually not a technical problem but rather one that involved people.

At the core of almost every complex systemic business problem are people with all of their unique behaviors and emotions. I guess it should be common sense, but people with their individual and sometimes conflicting personalities make things much more complex and systemic. A linear robotic assembly line does not have morale issues but an unaligned, dysfunctional leadership team can really make things complex and dynamic, and not in a good way!

5th, the problem is multidimensional.

 It is *like a spider's web touching and impacting a number of people and departments.* The problem or opportunity can be like a virus infecting and impacting a number of people and departments. Oh, there may be time delays, but decisions made in engineering can have a systemic impact on production, customer service and even finance. For example a systemic problem with on-time delivery will over time impact every department and every leader in your organization.

Trying to resolve any complex systemic business problem by addressing the symptoms is really a waste of leadership time and effort. I know some leaders brag about being willing to take action and have no problem making decisions. They actually think that they are good at resolving complex business problems that they do not even take the time and discipline to understand. Is wishful exploratory surgery your decision making style?

Our practical and pragmatic 2 to 3 day leadership seminar "Resolving Complex Business Problems" has helped many leaders like YOU avoid wishful exploratory surgery type decision making.

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