

## **Are you solving the right problem?**

### **What is the purpose of this article?**

- 1) This article enables a discussion about whether you're solving the right problem with the greatest impact on your business.
- 2) The audience for this article includes: investors, the board of directors, CEOs, and C-Suite.
- 3) This article applies to all companies, ranging from pre-revenue through to long established global companies.
- 4) This article does not provide tax, legal or financial advice.
- 5) You must do your own research and fact-based analysis using current and relevant information.
- 6) AI did not write this article. 100% human written.

### **What are the critical learnings in this article?**

- 1) A problem is a symptom (something observable) which has a negative impact on your company.
- 2) You need a solution which addresses the cause of the symptoms.
- 3) A cause explains why the symptom is occurring e.g. a fire in the building is causing smoke to pour out the windows.
- 4) A root cause is a cause, which if addressed by a solution, means the problem will never occur again.
- 5) The fundamental root cause is always people.

### **What is the structure of this article?**

Symptoms > Problems > Causes > Root Cause > Fundamental Root Cause

### **What is a problem?**

- 1) A problem is a symptom (something observable) which has a negative impact on your company.
- 2) A symptom occurs when what is observed is not what is expected. The observation may be by a human, sensor, or AI making an observation based on complex analysis of data. Some examples of a symptom are: smoke coming out of building windows. The observation may be measurable e.g. last quarter sales 20% below target.
- 3) A decision is made whether or not the symptom is a problem. It is not a problem for me if the morning temperature is 2 degrees lower than I expected. It may be a problem for your company if last quarter's sales were 20% below target.

### **How do you decide if a symptom is a problem you may need to correct?**

- 1) You have criteria to define if a symptom is a problem.
  - 2) These criteria may include the impact on your company, employees, your shareholders, and society.
  - 3) The impact may be in the next month, or 10 years from now.
- Your company will have lots of problems. You won't solve all of them, because many will have little impact.

### **Do you need a solution to the problem?**

- 1) You need a solution which addresses the cause of the symptoms.
- 2) You do not need a solution to the problem.

### **What is the cause of a problem?**

- 1) A cause explains why the symptom is occurring e.g. a fire in the building is causing smoke to pour out the windows.
- 2) A cause can only be determined after investigation i.e. is the smoke due to an electrical fire, a broken natural gas line burning, a smoke bomb, a blocked fire place, etc.

### **There can be a hierarchy of causes and solutions.**

- 3) There can be a hierarchy of causes e.g. the fire was from a broken natural gas pipeline, the break occurred due to failures in installing the pipeline, etc.

### **What is a root cause?**

- 1) A root cause is a cause, which if addressed by a solution, means the problem will never occur again. E.g. checking the natural gas pipeline for other defects to make sure there won't be future natural gas fires. Turning of the natural gas pipeline may correct the immediate symptom but does not prevent future natural gas fires.

### **What is always the fundamental root cause?**

- 1) The fundamental root cause is always people. E.g. who were the people who approved the process for selecting design engineers and installations firms for a poorly designed and poorly installed natural gas pipeline.

### **Are you focused on the right symptoms?**

Have you identified symptoms which could cause major problems for your company in the next 3-5-10+ years?

- 1) It's easy to focus on short-term symptoms showing that your company is currently in trouble.
- 2) It's hard to identify symptoms and address causes to prevent your company from getting into trouble in the future.

### **What will be your challenges?**

- 1) Measuring the symptoms and determining their impact.
- 2) It is easy to focus on symptoms and causes rather than root cause. It is difficult to overcome the cognitive and psychological barriers.
- 3) Understanding the cause-and-effect relationship between symptoms, causes and root causes.
- 4) In today's inter-related systems world, there may be a large number of inter-related symptoms and root causes. One symptom may have multiple partial root causes, and a single root cause may impact multiple symptoms.
- 5) The fundamental root cause of people talent is often impossible to address, especially when changes are needed to the board of directors, CEO, or C-Suite.

### **What are your next steps?**

- 1) Define the words/concepts you're using, in a glossary. I've seen major confusion when the same words mean different things to different people.
- 2) Create your own framework for analyzing symptoms and documenting problems, causes, and root causes.
- 3) Identify symptoms indicating current problems
- 4) Define symptoms which would identify future problems
- 5) Always include the fundamental root cause of people.
- 6) Define the decision-making criteria, especially the criteria for launching project(s) to address a symptom.

### **What further reading should you do?**

Is your company planning to fail? Koor and Associates

<https://koorandassociates.org/avoiding-business-failure/is-your-company-planning-to-fail/>

What is learning? Koor and Associates

<https://koorandassociates.org/creating-business-value/why-have-your-minimized-your-talent/>