

THE CREATIVE GORILLA #110

You must ensure everybody involved in tackling a situation understands it. This is essential if you wish to find a long lasting solution...

Ensure People Understand the Situation...

"It was some relief for Morse to recognise the fair countenance of reason once more, and she greeted him serenely when he woke, clear headed, on Monday morning and told him that it would be no bad idea to have a quiet look at the problem itself before galloping off towards a solution." Colin Dexter, author in "Service of all the Dead" Chapter 12



'Spot the Problem'

Are you tackling the right problem?

In an Internet chat room recently I noticed an elderly lady had posted a problem she wanted help with. Essentially, she wondered what she could do next in her life to give it some more challenge. (Which I agree is more of an opportunity than a problem).

Very soon, up popped a response from a contributor advising her to take up painting "because that's what my grandmother did".

All credit to this respondent for contributing and I am sure they had a positive intent but... already someone had come up with a solution and we knew little about the situation, other than the lady was elderly.

Yes, it may well have been exactly the right answer, but equally it may have been completely wrong.

This reminded me so much of what often happens in organisations, "Here are some symptoms of a problem;" "Aha, here's a solution we used before on a similar issue"; put it in to action and voila! The problem reappears a few weeks later with different symptoms. Managers scratch their heads and wonder why they are fire fighting.

SO

If you review different methods for tackling problems, you will see that they all include a stage that encourages people to explore a problem to define the true challenge. For example:

- Creative Problem Solving at its simplest: Explore problem, Generate ideas; Evaluate; Take action
- Syntetics: Identify the problem; Gather information about it; use trigger questions and strategies to generate ideas

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Even in the [Solutions Focus Approach](#), (click here for an article explaining this), where we do not look for causes of problems, we still explore the situation so that we can define a Platform to move from. So, if you want to tackle a situation and find a long lasting solution, you need to understand it better.

[Min Basadur](#) in his book “The Power of Innovation” (sadly not available on Amazon) has some powerful questions to understand a situation (I have abridged the wording slightly):

- What do we know about this situation?
- What don't we know we wish we knew?
- Why is this situation a problem for us?
- What have we already thought of or tried?
- If we resolve this problem, what will we have we don't have now?
- What might we be assuming that we don't have to assume?

ACTION

As an individual or an organisation, it is useful to have a range of models for tackling situations and all of them should include a stage to explore the situation more. Think about a situation you are dealing with currently. Have you explored it sufficiently?

TO CLOSE

I don't normally close with a quotation but this one from Albert Einstein is very apt as it explains the importance of exploring a problem a defining the challenge

“If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on the solution, I would spend the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask. For once I know the proper question, I could solve the problem in less than five minutes.”
So even if you don't want to believe me, have faith in Albert.

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