

Problem Solving

With a focus on sporadic problems

An effective & efficient problem solving process

A thorough problem solving expertise is very important to your organisation's operating efficiency as it will result in faster problem solving and in avoiding unnecessary "quick"-fixes and recurring problems. Many problems do not get solved and keep coming back because the real root cause is never eliminated. Traditionally these recurring problems are called "chronical" problems (because they keep coming back) and brainstorming linked with cause-effect diagrams have been promoted in many text books as major tool to try to solve them.

Not all problems are equal!

In practice however, we have encountered many situations where brainstorming did not help to find the root cause. People can only brainstorm about things they experienced, the unknown cannot pop up in their mind and as a consequence is not mentioned in the cause & effect diagram. This is particularly true in situations where an interaction of causes, combined with changes, are involved in the creation of a problem. Brainstorming and cause & effect diagrams lack the capability of detecting and visualizing interactions.

Many problems typically happen from time to time, with problem-free periods in between or they happen at one customer or on one machine and not on another one: we call this type of problems "sporadic problems". Many, if not most, technical problems are sporadic problems.

The right tool for the right problem

Effective problem solving requires the use of the right tools for the right problem. Problem solving mostly boils down to sorting, organizing and analysing data into useful information in order to find the root cause. This process of sorting, organising and analysing data however is very different depending on the type of problem at hand.

Most organizations are familiar with basic problem solving tools such as Pareto analysis and cause & effect diagrams, ... used to address chronic problems. Chronic problem solving is made popular by the success of the Total Quality Management movement and later on, the Six Sigma methodology¹.

On the other hand, solving sporadic problems requires a different set of tools, mostly ignored or only briefly discussed in current training curricula for problem solvers. The fundamental basis of the method is the willingness to "listen to the problem" and its phenomena, rather than starting to brainstorm about what the causes could be. The methodology is based on a rigorous organisation of observed facts, looking for contrasts, peculiarities, differences and changes.

This strict method of sorting, organizing and analyzing facts & observations made it already possible to solve numerous problems in a, sometimes astonishing, fast way. People sometimes spend months working on ... the wrong actions; while spending 2-3 hours on listening to the problem resulted in finding the root cause or at least eliminate 90% of the brainstormed causes and actions. The

¹ See leaflet 'Six Sigma methodology' for detailed explanation.

methodology for sporadic problem solving has a proven track record and is continuously fine tuned with our experiences and lessons learned by applying it.

Stanwick's role in the implementation of an efficient and effective problem solving process in your organisation:

Stanwick has more than 30 years of experience in assisting & coaching companies in different industries in solving business problems and more in particular in using the sporadic problem solving methodology and/or the Six Sigma methodology.

Our approach to problem solving is aimed at getting fast & lasting results by applying the correct problem solving tools and techniques for the different types of problems your business might encounter. With regards to sporadic problems, Stanwick can assist your company in :

- Providing in-house workshop(s) to illustrate the sporadic problem solving method, using a real life business problem at hand.
- Assistance and coaching of problem solvers with methodological expertise.
- Taking over the project leadership to solve some of your arduous business problems.
- Incorporating the sporadic problem solving within a Six Sigma approach

Some recent client engagements in Sporadic Problem Solving:

Bekaert Group, Agfa, Philips, Monsanto.

Stanwick Management Consultants, your partner in organisational & operational excellence.

Stanwick is an independent management consulting firm that supports companies to achieve business excellence by improving their organisational and operational performance. We have offices in Belgium, the Netherlands, France and China.

The aim of our customers, active in industry, as well as in services and public sector, is to excel in bottom-line results, employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction and the impact on society. Stanwick's mission is to help them to achieve these goals through its in-depth expertise, by creating a close partnership and through continuous support to the organisation as a whole.

As a partner on the way to excellence, we develop a tailor-made approach with the appropriate tools together with the customer. We put a lot of emphasis on implementation, leading the process of change and getting sustainable results. We have in-depth knowledge in both organisational and operational excellence.

Our team consists of 35 full-time consultants with very different backgrounds ranging from engineers and psychologists to economists and sociologists.

Contact us to find out how we can support you in your way to excellence.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for discussing how we can help you in your development of an effective and efficient problem solving process. Sample cases and a select set of training modules are available upon request for your evaluation.

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