



ARE YOU SOLVING THE RIGHT PROBLEMS?

ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEMS are complex, with multiple contributing factors and stakeholders. Determining whether we are solving the right problems is an important consideration when setting strategic goals for an organization.

One article published in the Harvard Business Review by Thomas Wedell-Wedellsborg showed that surveys of 106 C-suite executives who represented 91 private and public-sector companies in 17 countries indicated that a full 85% agreed that their organizations were bad at problem diagnosis, and 87% agreed that this flaw carried significant costs.

Often, the problems we face are symptoms of a larger underlying issue. If we dig deeper, cognitive and emotional biases can push us to solve the wrong problems by influencing the way we process and interpret information.

Cognitive biases are systematic errors in thinking that can lead us to make irrational decisions and judgments. Examples of cognitive biases that can impact problem-solving include confirmation bias, which is the tendency to seek out information that confirms our pre-existing beliefs, and framing bias, which is the tendency to interpret information based on how it is presented or framed.

Emotional biases, such as the tendency to be more focused on short-term gains over long-term outcomes, can also impact problem-solving. For example, the sunk cost fallacy, which is the tendency to continue investing in a project or decision simply because we have already invested resources, can lead to a focus on the wrong problem if we are unwilling to cut our losses and change course.

In addition, emotional biases can impact the way we prioritize problems, with emotionally charged issues often being given more attention and resources than projects that are objectively more significant.

Here are some steps to take to avoid cognitive and emotional biases when trying to solve the right problem:

1. Recognize your biases: The first step is to become aware of the cognitive and emotional biases that you may be prone to. Educate yourself on common biases and reflect on which ones you may be susceptible to.

2. Seek out diverse perspectives: Engage with people who have different viewpoints, experiences, and backgrounds than your own. This can help you see the problem from multiple angles and reduce the impact of your biases.

3. Challenge your assumptions: Question your assumptions and beliefs about the problem. Use reframing techniques. Consider alternative explanations and hypotheses and be open to changing your perspective.

4. Gather data and evidence: Seek out objective data and evidence to support your decision-making. Use metrics, research, and other objective sources to inform your decisions.

5. Use structured problem-solving frameworks: Use problem-solving frameworks such as design thinking, root cause analysis, or SWOT analysis to structure your thinking and approach the problem in a systematic and objective way.

6. Take breaks and practice self-reflection: Taking breaks and practicing mindfulness or meditation can help you clear your mind and avoid getting stuck in cognitive or emotional biases. Self-reflection can also help you stay focused on the right problem.

7. Collaborate and communicate openly: Encourage open communication and constructive feedback to help you stay on track and solve the right problem.

As Peter Drucker pointed out, there's nothing more dangerous than the right answer to the wrong question. If you are a leader who wants to improve problem solving and decision making, please contact us to learn more about the "Intuitive Decision Making" Workshop. ●




ABOUT JOE

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