



Empowering Times

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Dear Reader,

In today's age of information overload, sifting through relevant data and making decisions is an arduous task. What if there is a simpler method of making decisions?

Our column **Thinking Aloud** tells you about the KEPNERandFOURIE™ Thinkingwise approach to decision-making and problem solving. **Podium** features **Dr. Mat-Thys Fourie**, who along with Dr. Charles Kepner, developed the systematic approach to problem solving and decision-making. Our book of the month is *'Managing Beyond the Ordinary'* by Charles H. Kepner and Hirotosugu Iikubo. This is a hands-on book with case studies and checklists to help you master the skill of Problem Solving and Decision Making.

Did we just say that we could find solutions to all our problems through this technique? Have a look at this month's caricature by our cartoonist Vikram Nandwani.

We value your opinion. Like always, do let us know about how you liked our April issue. Our previous issues are now available in our archives section or simply [click here](#).

Geetanjali Sharma
Editor, Empowering Times

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THINKING ALOUD



“One of these skills is a structured approach to problem solving and decision-making.”

THE ROAD TO BETTER DECISIONS - Jay

Too often when their staff is not able to complete an assignment, managers are quick to label it as an attitude problem. This is an easy generalization to use and it glosses over a bigger problem – lack of knowledge and skills. On the other hand, there is a tendency to think that motivating employees is a solution to all organizational issues. However, this misses a key point that larger issues often depend on having ‘hard skills’ under your belt.

One of these skills is a structured approach to problem solving and decision-making. Because we have been taking decisions all our life, we often believe that we have become expert problem solvers. Unfortunately, when it comes to business situations such a casual approach leads us to shoot from the hip and cause grave harm to organizational results.

The solution lies in having a correct approach to solving problems. While many have tried to analyze this, Dr. Charles Kepner is widely considered an early proponent of the logical approach to solving problems.

Kepner noted that the biggest mistake is the inability to identify and define the real problem in any situation. Dr. Mat-Thys Fourie collaborated with Dr. Kepner and today the KEPNERandFOURIE™ (K&F) Thinking Wise Approach is considered a world-class method which marries both the intuitive and systematic methods for problem solving and decision making. This approach incorporates the following processes:

1. Setting priorities (PriorityWise)™
2. Finding the real cause (CauseWise)™
3. Finding a Solution (SolutionWise)™
4. Analyzing potential risk of decision (RiskWise)™

While Voltaire said that ‘no problem can stand the assault of sustained thinking’; in the context of today’s business environment, it would be fair to add that with a clear problem definition, and a logical flow to finding causes and solutions, the K&F method is a powerful process tool to equip employees for arriving at better answers for difficult issues. Remember, positive approach and bravado alone will not win the day; you need the right process instruments to enable you to find the right resolutions quickly to enhance business productivity.

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PODIUM

STRUCTURED PROBLEM SOLVING AND DECISION-MAKING :

Interview with DR. Mat-Thys Fourie

Dr. Mat-Thys Fourie, a former fighter pilot, is the co-founder of the KEPNERandFOURIE™ Thinking Technologies. He is an expert in the fields of problem solving and decision-making, root cause analysis, project management and innovation. He has co-authored the book ‘Innovation: The FreeZone Thinking Experience’. Matt is consulted by leading organizations in the world on strategic and operational issues. He is also a frequent speaker in many recognized international forums.

Matt was in India last month and that was our chance to ask him a few questions on the process of Problem Solving and Decision Making. Read on to know more.

ET: What is the essence of Problem Solving and Decision Making (PS & DM) in an organizational context?

MF: The essence is to improve operational effectiveness by reducing the time it takes to solve a problem and improve the success of decision implementations. There are side benefits such as: a common structure to follow, which makes it easier for cross-functional teams to operate as a team and the structure of the processes, which would indicate how to approach a problem.

ET: In what way does structured Problem Solving and Decision Making impact business?

MF: It gives the problem solver the confidence and peace of mind that they are addressing each type of problem in the right way. It also helps them to follow the steps in a way that would make sense to his/her colleagues and that in turn would make it easy for all to contribute to the success of the problem being solved.

While resolving complex issues there is a struggle of whether to take actions first or to find reasons. Structured Problem Solving and Decision Making have certain guidelines, which help you agree on the starting point.

ET: How can business leaders maximize returns from deploying KEPNERandFOURIE™ Problem Solving and Decision Making tools?

MF: By setting certain objectives they would like to achieve in using this methodology. Objectives such as: reducing waste, improving commitment to decisions, reducing the time it takes to solve a problem and/or measuring the number of problems being “upwardly delegated” to managers.

Some kind of metrics should be in place to measure the effects before and after the deployment of K&F Problem Solving and Decision Making tools.

ET: How do you see structured PS & DM different from other established quality or analytical tools?

MF: Most other problem solving tools provide you with the steps on how to solve a problem but not always how to perform these steps. In KEPNERandFOURIE™, we provide the actual technique of how to do a problem statement or how to gather information. Then again, other techniques are grounded in heavy statistical methods and are very rational while most of that could be done through an intuitive approach, which would save the problem solver a lot of time and effort.

ET: What are some turnaround stories from your experience?

“The essence is to improve operational effectiveness by reducing the time it takes to solve a problem and improve the success of decision implementations.”



MF: I will relate two of them -

1. A technical team that could not solve a problem for two months and when asked to define the statement in the KEPNERandFOURIE™ way they took 2 hours to do that. Once they achieved that, it only took another one hour to solve the problem.
2. An IT team struggled to solve a “connection problem” for three weeks and when they started asking the specifically designed KEPNERandFOURIE™ questions, they have realized that they did not have all the detailed answers for it. Once they obtained the answers to those questions, they have proceeded to solve the problem with minimal effort.

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BETWEEN THE LINES

BOOK: Managing Beyond the Ordinary - Charles H. Kepner & Hirotugu Iikubo

This book brilliantly integrates the ‘art’ and ‘science’ of making decisions. In three sections, the book addresses the inputs, processes and the outputs of decision making for extraordinary results.

The authors propagate that collaboration and thinking are critical for high performance and good decision-making starts with a key skill of distinguishing between ‘strategic and ‘operational ‘thinking. Strategic thinking addresses the ‘what’ while operational thinking addresses the ‘how’.

The second section of this book is a fascinating piece on how we need ‘divergent’ and ‘convergent’ thinking to make decisions. The process of decision-making is the basis of all issue resolution. The book details out a four step process for decision-making. This section of the book has many ‘how-to-do-it’ suggestions.

The third and final section of this interesting book is on Outputs - how to apply these tools to achieve results. The techniques and processes of ‘Managing Beyond the Ordinary’ have to become a part of the culture in the organization. Collaboration again is the key skill to make this happen and cultivate the road for extraordinary results.

From case studies to checklists, it is a complete field book for Managers who constantly make decisions. If you need the ‘mathematics’ and the ‘arts’ for making choices, this is a MUST READ BOOK.

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