

Chapter 5 Symptoms

TheSage's English Dictionary and Thesaurus defines the word 'symptom' as "Anything that accompanies X and is regarded as an indication of X's existence".

Another definition is "an indication of the existence of something, especially of an undesirable situation".

Every business operates using a plan of some sort, yet most plans seem to fail. These failures have an 'effect' on every stakeholder and it requires a diagnostician to try to locate the cause of the problem.

The question that the diagnostician must ask is: is the object that they have found a symptom or a cause? This is the subject of this chapter.

Having identified the 15 traps (in Chapter 4) it is now time to examine the symptoms of each in order to identify the cause prior to identifying whether the approach being considered will actually deliver the desired outcomes of the plan.

In other words in keeping with the main theme of this body of work (Dream: Plan: Experience"): What are the major stumbling blocks to experiencing the 'benefits' of planning your dream?

Here are a few symptoms:

- 1) Having a plan simply for the sake of having one
- 2) Unrealistic goals or lack of focus and resources
- 3) Plans are overly complex
- 4) Unforeseen external circumstances
- 5) Project scope inflexible to changes
- 6) Wrong people in the wrong job
- 7) Financial estimates are significantly inaccurate
- 8) No accountability
- 9) Lack of focus

Sources: Forbes; Tempo Blog; OnStrategy; Leap Leadership

I have compiled a list of 28 symptoms which I've documented in the Annexure of this chapter. No doubt there are more, however, the point of my assertion is that every symptom is an indication of a higher level problem and that solution is finding the cause.

Why are these symptoms?

If you examine each of the preceding examples you will find that they are far too implicit. They require further analysis which should uncover the underlying cause which has to be an explicit statement.

For example:

a) A plan fails because it is overly complex

This 'cause' is implicit as the word 'complex' has far too many explanations, hence the statement is a symptom.

b) Wrong people in the wrong job.

This 'cause' is implicit as you will need to examine every capability and how they impact on every job, hence the statement is a symptom.

Tips

In addition to these symptoms there are a plethora of 'tips' on how to plan. These too merely address a symptom and do not offer any real solution nor offer the cause

For example:

- 1) Plan your day using time management techniques. How many people understand time management techniques? This tip alone is a symptom of a deeper malaise
- 2) Include stakeholders in important project conversations. When and where in the project cycle should the relevant stakeholder be included?
- 3) Anticipate project setbacks. How many people understand the anatomy of a project?

See annexure for more examples.

Annexure

Here is a list of 33 symptoms and reason why it is not a cause. I will reveal the causes behind the symptoms and the trap that will be sprung by the symptom in the next chapter. Every sentence is too implicit. There is at least one word that that will cause the sentence to become implicit and hence can never be the cause of the planning failure.

| Analyst | # | Symptom | Reason | |
|-----------------------------------|----|---|----------------|---|
| | | | Word | |
| Forbes researcher | 1 | Having a plan simply for the sake of having one | Plan | Having a plan does not in itself cause the failure. It is what is in or out of the plan that causes this |
| | 2 | Not understanding the environment | Environment | How exactly does the environment cause the failure? It is more to do with how one defines the environment |
| | 3 | Partial commitment | Commitment | Commitment has to do with obligations. How can anyone make a commitment without knowing what the obligations are going to be? |
| | 4 | Not having the right people | Right people | What makes a person the 'right' one? Until all the capabilities of what is required for planning is identified, this will forever remain a mystery. |
| | 5 | 'Shelf life' of the plan | Plan | See 1 |
| | 6 | A 'straight jacket' plan | | |
| | 7 | Wrong people in the wrong job | People | See 4 |
| | 8 | Ignoring reality | Reality | What is reality? Until this is defined explicitly it will always be a symptom |
| | 9 | No accountability | Accountability | See 4 |
| | 10 | Unrealistic (or implicit) objectives | Objectives | What exactly is an 'objective'? |

| Analyst | # | Symptom | Reason | |
|----------------------------|---|--|----------------|---|
| | | | Word | |
| Tempo Blog | 1 | Unrealistic goals or lack of focus and resources | Goals | What exactly is a 'goal'? |
| | 2 | Plans are overly complex | Plan | How is a plan formulated? |
| | 3 | Financial estimates are significantly inaccurate | Estimates | Identifying a cost or an income stream needs to be precise. Not understanding what artifact attracts a cost or generates an income is the problem |
| | 4 | Plans are based on insufficient data | Data | What exactly is 'data'? |
| | 5 | Inflexible/undefined team roles and responsibilities | Team | What capabilities are required by which team member? |
| | 6 | Staffing requirements are not fully understood | Staffing | Who does what and when and to whom and what? |
| | 7 | Project scope inflexible to changes | Project | How is a project brought into existence? |
| OnStrategy | 1 | Unforeseen external circumstances | Unforeseen | Due to bad planning perhaps? |
| | 2 | Lack of understanding among those involved in developing the strategy and what they need to do to make it successful | Strategy | Who determines what a strategy is? |
| | 3 | The strategy itself is flawed | | |
| | 4 | Poor match between the strategy and the core competencies of the organization | | |
| | 5 | Lack of accountability or of holding the team responsible | Accountability | Who is accountable for what? |

| Analyst | # | Symptom | Reason | |
|---------------------------------|---|---|----------------|--|
| | | | Word | |
| Leap Leadership | 1 | Lack of Alignment Between Strategy, Objectives, Vision and KPIs | Alignment | Are the artifacts being aligned fully understood? |
| | 2 | Lack of Discipline | Discipline | What are the capabilities that require discipline? |
| | 3 | Lack of Accountability | Accountability | Who is accountable for what? |
| | 4 | Lack of Head Space | Head space | What does this really mean? |
| | 5 | Lack of Courage | Courage | |
| ReliablePlant | 1 | Lack of focus | Focus | Focus on what? |
| | 2 | Lack of energy/resources | Resources | The confusion between energy and resources |
| | 3 | Lack of understanding | Understanding | What needs to be understood? |
| | 4 | Lack of accountability | Accountability | Who is accountable for what? |
| | 5 | Lack of follow up | Follow up | What are the precise steps? |
| | 6 | Lack of flexibility | Flexibility | Flexible about what |

Tips

Here is a list of 20 tips which could themselves result in becoming a symptom of planning failures. It does not take a genius to use search engine to identify as many tips as possible. The real issue is: what problems are likely to be caused by using the tip?

| Tip | Word | Reason |
|---|--------------|---|
| Plan your day using time management techniques | Plan | What exactly is being planned? How many people understand time management techniques? |
| Plan Your Planning | | |
| Make a one-page plan | | |
| Include stakeholders in important project conversations | Stakeholders | When and where in the project cycle should the relevant stakeholder be included? |
| Align Key Players | Players | Who or what is a 'player' and what is expected of them? |
| Anticipate project setbacks | Project | How many people understand the anatomy of a project or where projects come from? |
| Know your limitations as a project manager | | |
| Keep current with the latest project management trends | | |
| Define your projects | | |
| Give your projects a start and end date | | |
| Stay focused on the details | Details | What are the details? |
| Evaluate your processes | Process | What process is used and when? |
| Use a Tool | Tool | What tool do you use and when? |
| Adjust Often | Adjust | What needs to be adjusted and when? |
| Add New Tasks Regularly | Task | Who determines what task is necessary and when does that task need to be performed? |
| Establish The Critical Path | Path | Who and/or what determines the path? |
| Be Iterative | Iterative | When is it necessary to repeat a step? What are the steps? |
| Establish Costs | Costs | What is being costed? What about income streams? |
| Control Scope Creep | Scope | Where does the scope come from? |
| Share It | It | What is the 'it' and with whom is 'it' shared? |