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Welcome to Lean Leadership for Ops Managers, the podcast for leaders in Ops Management who want to spark improvement, foster engagement, and boost problem solving - AND still get their day job done. Here's your host, Leadership Trainer, Lean Enthusiast, and Spy Thriller Junkie, Jamie V. Parker.

Jamie V Parker here and welcome back to our discussion on Enemies to Effective Execution. You can head back to our previous episodes processplusresults.com/podcast and check out our conversations about these other enemies to effective execution. We've already discussed distraction. Complexity and perfection.

Now, these three all relate to the execution problem of essentially moving too slowly. [00:01:00] Distraction, complexity and perfection can cause operations managers to stall out or slow down on their execution pace. They can prevent action forward movement, but moving to slowly is only one execution problem. The truth is that you can also move too fast and then create different execution problems.

Now in the last episode about perfection, I shared three areas that you can explore. If you or a leader on your team are moving too slowly because of perfection. Those are iteration good enough to start and bias for action. The thing is though, that all of these can be taken too far. They can be taken to an extreme and then result in negative consequences.

So this is what we said. This is what, what we said, Hey, let's make sure we remember this. We don't abandon planning in the name of iteration. We don't settle for less in the name of good enough, and we don't become reckless in the [00:02:00] name of bias for action. And that brings us to the fourth Anita, effective execution in the series, and I'm calling it unstructured urgency.

Hey, now wait a minute. You just said we need a bias fraction, but now you're saying urgency is bad. What? That's right. There's some nuance to this, right? I was really struggling to figure out what's the right word to sum up these ideas, and I landed on urgency, but not just urgency. It's broader than that.

It also includes a lack of structure of not being measured in how you problem solve, make decisions, and choose your actions. So I'm calling it unstructured urgency. So let's start with how it shows up. What you may see when this type of execution problem is happening. A leader might solve the wrong problem because they don't pause and take steps to define and understand the problem.

And this happens when really the leader just doesn't know enough to execute yet they need to learn more. Or, um, maybe they, uh, have the ability and capability of learning more, but they don't really know

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how to fully [00:03:00] define and understand what's happening, right? Like they tend to just. Have this history of jumping straight in, right, of being rewarded for just jump straight in.

Or it could be a leader operating with inaccurate assumptions, right? Jumping to conclusions. In fact, I do a lot of work on problem solving, working with operations leaders, and one of the most commonly brought up issues or concerns or pitfalls to good structured problem solving. Is jumping to conclusions or inaccurate assumptions.

This is what gets brought up over and over and over when I'm facilitating kind of scientific thinking, structured problem solving type of work with operations leaders or with continuous improvement practitioners is, um, how do we help people to not do this? The other way it could show up is it could show up as a leader moving ahead without getting the right people involved or not getting insights, opinions, or ideas outside of his own.

And so they're limiting their options or not considering the impact to [00:04:00] other people or not considering the impacts to processes and systems upstream or downstream. So I'm sure there are other ways that this can show up, right? But you're getting the picture here and the question is like, what's the impact, right?

Well, so let's make sure we understand this is bad because when urgency, this, this unstructured urgency takes over. The impact can be things like this a worse result, right? The idea, the plan and the outcome just isn't as good. It'll be rework, and this is a big one. All that lost time, as you and the team have to go back and redo things or an energy drain, specifically the people drama and energy drain, that can happen often because the right people weren't engaged early on.

And that's why this is a problem. This is how this urgency, this lack of structure, this kind of just barreling ahead, can hurt execution. And we all have examples of this happening, right? Like we can all think of the time where it's like, Ugh, we just barreled through. So what do you do? How can you help your operations leaders who are just jumping in and going and [00:05:00] pushing and moving too fast and not considering the right veins and not taking a methodical or measured approach?

The leaders who allow unstructured urgency to prevent effective e execution, Well, we're not gonna dive too deep on this because it's an entire series in and of itself. It's also at the core of a lot of lean focused thinking and lean operations tools, right? So think about PD C A, for example, plan New Check Act, or PDSA plan, due study, adjust only one of those.

The do is the core action part. Planning and studying are the thinking and problem solving parts. The analysis parts even adjust is a mix. It's iteration combined with the thinking and problem solving with

action. So when you think about P D S A, There's actually like it's built in to solve for this unstructured urgency, right?

That's kind of the whole point of it. Visual management is designed to make problems visible so that fewer assumptions need to be made and to make data available so that data can be used in decision making and [00:06:00] problem solving, so you don't have to just jump to conclusions or make assumptions because you can see what is actually happening.

Structured problem solving, whether it's Eight Step or Kata or dmaic, like the thinking behind any of the methodologies, right? Because all the methodologies share. Share some basic core thinking behind it, and that is designed to help problem solvers slow down their thinking, slow down their assumptions, give them a chance to catch when they're making those assumptions.

One of the clients that I'm working with, both of our work together last year was on helping the leadership team across all functions, manufacturing, engineering, planning, sales, finance, hr, everywhere, right, to to better execute on one of their, their principles called Find the facts, but really to better understand current state, to help them stop themselves and help stop each other from jumping straight to what we've always done or what it obviously is, and to consider the facts to look at the data.

To slow themselves down just a tad, and even without nailing all the rest of [00:07:00] structured problem solving steps, just this one step of understanding this current state of finding facts of differentiating between facts, sources, assumptions, that just this work has really transformed the conversation's, collaboration and problem solving capabilities of the leadership team.

I mean, I can't tell you how many times we've, I've been sitting in a conversation that they're having about a problem and someone has shared, oh, that's not what I thought it was gonna be. I, I was sure it was gonna be something else. And it turns out it's not. And so the fact that they can see that now is, makes them better problem solvers, even without having a full structured problem solving, um, you know, kind of capabilities built yet.

Right. So you've heard this before, even if you have not really practiced a lot of lean, you're not really into that P D S A type of stuff, right? You've, you've heard these quotes before, right? Like, um, a Abraham Lincoln saying, you know, gimme six hours to chop down a tree, and I'll spend the first hour sharp, uh, first [00:08:00] for sharpening the ax.

Or the quote, I think it's, it's attributed to different people, both Charles Cuttering and and John Dewey. But you know, something that goes along the lines of a problem well defined is a problem half solved.

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This is kind of what we're talking about here. So if you've seen unhealthy urgency or lack of structure, create these execution problems for your operations leaders.

Here are some questions you may want to reflect on or engage in dialogue about. Ready? Let's go through a handful of questions here. What structures exist to help us think, problem, solve, and choose our actions, right? These could be formal structures, like eight step problem solving, but they could also be informal structures.

I don't want you to limit yourself to just formal structures, so what structures exist to help us think, problem, solve, and choose our actions? What structure, formal or informal, might help us plan and choose effectively [00:09:00] and timely? How do we currently differentiate between facts versus assumptions? When decision making and problem solving, and how effective are we currently?

So how do we currently differentiate between facts versus assumptions? When decision making and problem solving, and how effective are we currently? How do we ensure that we don't move too fast or skip steps? What might a pause point look like? How do we ensure we don't move too fast or skip steps? What might a pause point look like?

What set of questions could we ask to help us consider the right things before we jump straight to execution? What set of questions could we ask so that it can help us consider the right things before we jump straight to execution? [00:10:00] And how might we partner or provide support for leaders who have a tendency to jump too fast?

How might we partner or provide support for leaders who have a tendency to jump too fast? So these are not like, you know, some magic questions, but they are some potential questions that you might want to engage in dialogue. I'm actually working with a client right now and one of the things that they're working on is decision making and how they, uh, make decisions.

And we went through some activities, uh, working with their executive leadership team and then kind of that, that mid-level senior leader leadership team, working with all of them to identify where are the, what are the types of decisions or the categories or types of decisions that either we need to get better at making, we need to be able to make more timely or.

We need to develop other capability, [00:11:00] other people's capabilities in better making those decisions. And then they went through and they identified what are kind of examples of those types of decisions. And then what are, how do they make them right? What are the factors that they're considering? What are the.

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What's the thinking going on in their brain? So if you're the executive and this gets escalated to you about what should we do about A, B, C, then how are you deciding? And obviously not on like every single individual scenario, but when, when is a decision like this? Right. These types of decisions, I'm thinking about A, B, C, and D.

What are the things you need to do when you're making that decision? I need to do one and two. Who are the types of people you need to engage? I need to engage this function and this function. Right? So being able to pull that out of their collective brains and essentially they're in the process of making and building out a kind of a playbook, if you will.

That's not gonna be, you know, some [00:12:00] manual if this, then that. But it is gonna be this guide that they can use in developing people's decision making capabilities in their organization. And as I'm, you know, seeing the outcomes of this come out, I see a lot of value in what they're doing. So, We talked a little bit here about this whole unstructured urgency and how if we move too fast, right?

If we just move too fast and we don't consider the right things, then it can create these negative impacts, potentially a lot of reap, it could potentially create a lot of rework, a lot of wasted energy. And before that, we talked about kind of moving too slow and what's. Interesting to me is in working with operations executives and leaders across the country, across industries, across roles, I see both moving too fast, this unstructured urgency happened, and also moving too slow because of distraction, complexity or perfection.

And in fact, the same leader [00:13:00] could exhibit both types in different scenarios. Like it's not even just. A per, you know, like a personality type, right? Or not even personality, but a, um, how you're wired type, right? So if you follow disk, it's not just like, oh, high DS move too fast, high Cs move too slow. There can be some tendencies that can create that in general, but it doesn't mean that's the case in every scenario, right?

And for someone like me, I'm a high c i d, so I got 'em both. Sometimes I'm moving too slow and I'm rushing and I'm barreling through and or moving too fast, right? Barreling through moving too fast, and sometimes I need to have every single detail researched and, and figured out before I can take action so I can fall on both of those.

Ends of the spectrum. So here's my question for you, is think about these four enemies to effective execution we've talked about so far. Distraction complexity, complexity, perfection, and unstructured urgency. Which ones are you seeing to be most disruptive in your own work? [00:14:00] Distraction, complexity, perfection.

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Unstructured urgency. Which ones are you seeing to be most disruptive in your own work? What about with your team and what about in your organization? And when you reflect on that, what would you say is your one best next step? Let me know. I'd love to hear what you're experiencing. And remember, you can find show notes and past episodes@processplusresults.com slash podcast.

Until next time.