

Finding Order in Chaos – Part 1

If something isn't working in a business, it can feel like chaos as everyone scrambles to solve the problem. Opinions on how to solve the problem start flying around with different people lobbying for different solutions. Often the various solutions put forward don't even solve the problem because not everyone is clear what the problem actually is!

Whether the nature of the problem is in a technical area or another area – like sales or marketing, this happens. And when it does, not much real progress happens.

If we can find order in the chaos, that helps solve problems faster, more efficiently.

So, what's a good way to start? How about *getting everyone on the same page*?

Before, I go into "how", let's briefly go back to childhood. Remember the game "telephone"? One person would whisper something into another person's ear. That person would whisper what they heard into the next person's ear, and so on until the message was passed 1 by 1 from the first person to last. Then, the last person would tell everyone what they had heard, and everyone would laugh because what started as "the sky is blue" ended up at the end of the chain being something completely different...maybe "the cow went 'moo'..."

While that is a child's game, the lesson for adults is that to pass information to others and keep all on the same page, it's critical to write down the problem and not rely on word of mouth.

In fact, I believe this is *vital* for problem solving. Problems can be very complicated and subtle insights often add clarity to what the problem truly is and is not.

The better we understand the problem, the more likely we'll find an on-target solution.

If you are thinking, "this sounds obvious", I fully agree.

Yet, how many times have you been in the middle of the chaos I describe, and you talk to someone who says, "well, I just heard from Mary that the issue is..." Then, you later learn that what Mary really said was something completely different. Or, you learn that Mary had been misinformed by Bill and was merely repeating what she'd heard.

*During chaos, many feel they don't have time to "write it down". I argue that you **don't have time to waste clearing out the clutter** of wrong information. I argue you will save time in the long run if you document the problem. As you learn more about the problem, any documents can be updated.*

So, how can you document the problem and all its subtleties?

There are many ways. For simple problems, a text-filled document, often with images and/or videos to show the problem, may be good enough. However, for very complicated or "multi-level" problems, it can also be useful to "map" the system to show the levels and subtleties and interactions.

In "Part 2" of this article, I outline an approach I call "functional mapping". I've found it effective for getting all on the same page. It is particularly useful for solving technical problems.

*Meanwhile – no matter what you do, **write it down**. We're not kids playing the "telephone game" any more.*