# Comments on Effective Problem Solving Culture

"Culture is the result of behavioral change over time."

Many organizations struggle with effectively implementing problem solving for several reasons:

1. problem solving is not viewed as a value-added process
2. process ownership for problem solving is not defined beyond someone to manage the administrative aspects, (i.e. tracking of status, accounting for open issues, etc.)
3. time is not specifically nor continually allocated for problem solving; instead, it is an activity that is done "when required"; in fact, problem solving should be an ongoing process if an organization is committed to continual improvement
4. expectations of the outcomes from problem solving efforts are not clearly defined nor connected with organizational goals, (quality objectives); in some cases, when expectations are defined, these may be unrealistic
5. more value is placed on "tribal knowledge" rather than data driven analysis and results, (ISO 9001:2015 quality management principle "evidence-based decision-making")
6. ownership of problems are parsed out to individuals instead of viewing each problem solving effort as an opportunity to increase organizational knowledge and therefore involving the entire organization in the problem solving effort with the core team being the drivers of the effort

To effectively solve problems, organizations must recognize problem solving as a valid process contributing significant value in terms of continual improvement and increase in knowledge. When ISO 9001:2015 specifies "determining and managing the work environment", this includes establishing a culture which supports the success of the organization, which is clearly a management responsibility. Culture by default is NOT a "managed work environment".

One means of understanding current problem solving culture and therefore closing the gap in the desired culture, is the application of the Effective Problem Solving Survey.  The management team can use this tool to assess the current state of problem solving process within their organization and from these results, establish a transition plan to achieve the desired state as reflected in the behaviors described here:

Foundational Principles to Effective Problem Solving include:
1. Treat all employees with trust and mutual respect
2. View problems as opportunities
3. Expose problems early and resolve them using effective problem solving
4. Use problem solving in all functions and at all levels
5. Value the use of effective problem solving
6. Provide necessary support for use of effective problem solving
7. Recognize and reward employees for problem solving

Prior to conducting training in the organization re: problem solving process, methods and tools, it is desirable to establish an understanding of the current problem solving culture and from that information, define expectations and behaviors to support effective problem solving as well as defining the actions of management necessary to enhance the problem solving culture.  A Problem Solving Management Visioning session can be conducted to present the problem solving process, discuss current culture and define the expectations and behavior.

Ultimately, your organization's problem solving process belongs to everyone:
- Executive Leadership
- Problem Owners, (Champions)
- Problem Solvers, (members of the problem solving teams)
- Customers & Suppliers
for effective and lasting improvement results in your business.