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Continuous Improvement Associates Crisis Syndrome Recovery

We Need to Avoid and Escape Here are recovery approaches to move to a long-term focus.



How to escape the crisis syndrome?

When individuals or organizations act to relieve problem symptoms, but fail to address fundamental solutions, it leads to **The Crisis Syndrome**: addiction to "the quick fix."

In fact, the approaches for organizations to escape an addictive cycle and transition from a short-term to a long-term focus parallel those that help individuals. Figures 1 & 2 show added structure to oppose individual and organizational addiction, respectively.

Treat the System

Modern addiction therapy uses **family therapy** (structure in olive), treating the family unit is treated as a whole, not just the "identified" person. Similarly, for performance problems in organizations, we must move from optimizing the parts to optimizing the whole, a major theme of **systems thinking** (see boxes: "What is systems thinking?" above & "Organizational Success & Failure" on reverse). We can evolve from "blame the person" to "blame the process" to "blame the system" to simply "eliminate blame," it's unproductive and activates defensiveness, a powerful barrier to learning.*

Aversion Therapy

Aversion Therapy delivers immediate **negative feedback** (e.g., patients take Antabuse to cause sickness after consuming alcohol); addicts immediately experience negative consequences (structure in red), opposing a drug's positive impact on **perceived quality of life**.

In organizations we can convene a **firefighting postmortem** immediately after each firefighting episode to raise awareness of the negative side-effects of the "quick fix." A group can determine what might have prevented the fire and also examine the potential negative consequences of the firefighting effort. They can make the needed changes or

What is systems thinking?

Seeking to understand system behavior by examining "the whole" ... instead of by analyzing the parts.

Impact of Dynamic Complexity

"One reason that many people become addicted is that they rarely experience the worst consequences of their behavior soon enough to override the pleasure." "Addiction, A Whole New View," *Psychology Today*, 10/94

add them to a list of pending candidate projects. This need not be unpleasant, if done without blame using the ground rules for effective groups.**

Behavioral Shaping

We can **reward abstinence & improvement** (structure in green). Organizations can learn to measure the real "health of the system" and not depend on feedback from symptoms. We can **reward problem prevention** based on exponential improvement progress.†

Brief Intervention & motivational Interviewing

Properly designed very **brief treatment** can be highly successful against even moderately severe addictions. To illustrate, a "treatment group" got counseling & Antabuse and a "control group" got a brief self-help manual and was told to go home, read it and do their best. The control group did just as well. Handing out the manual motivated the control group, despite expectations it would not. "The addicts changed and moderated their drinking. Simply giving them the manual, saying to



