

Spotlight: Diagnose – Get to the problem, fast

When you ask a consultancy to help, naturally you want them to get on quickly with fixing the problems that made you pick up the phone.

But equally, you need to make sure they really understand what problems they're trying to fix - and that they're solving the real problems, not just treating the symptoms. You also need to be confident that you all agree on the problems and how to solve them, and that you're pulling in the same direction.

The most effective way to work with you to get a clear view of your initiative's overall strengths and areas for improvement may be the **Rapid Assessment**. This works very well when you're looking for an overall perspective, and need to ensure that the 'big picture' is solid.

However, in many cases you already know that there are specific problems and need a fast start on solving them. When that's the case, what's the most effective way to get on with fixing them?

What's really the problem?

Almost certainly, it's clear that something isn't working. Deadlines are regularly missed; there is constant noise about poor quality; costs are over-running; revenues are falling short.

Those are serious, but they often aren't the underlying problems – typically they are the visible results of other problems. For example, it's very hard to "fix" poor quality, e.g. by more testing; you need to know why it is poor in the first place, and deal with those root causes.

You probably don't have the time to dig into it all yourself, and anyway it isn't where you should be spending your time. Your colleagues are also busy, and may be too close to the situation to see it clearly. But you need to act, and fast.

So what do you do?

Our 'Diagnose' approach: get to the essentials fast, then act

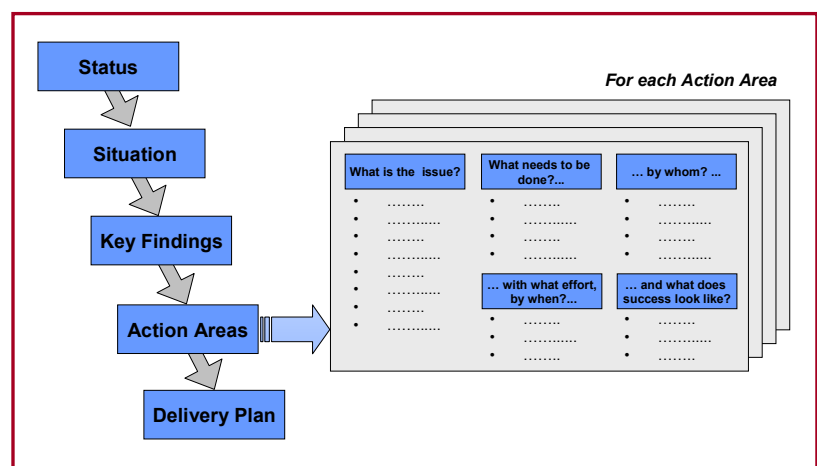
We work collaboratively with you to develop, quickly, a thorough, clear and agreed understanding of the current situation and challenges, and a solid basis for moving forward. Typically this takes around 2-4 weeks, but it may need as little as 1 week.

Of course, you will recognise a lot of the findings but an objective, fresh pair of eyes is often very valuable in developing a clear 'single set of facts' and a way forward around which everyone can unite.

What do we typically do?

A focussed, action-oriented exercise, starting with known key issues

- Assess the situation, working closely with your key people
- Lay out and agree the essential facts
- Identify the key underlying problems - the 'Action Areas'
- Develop a practical, clear approach to addressing each of these
- Bring back to you, quickly, a plan of action for approval.



An example: Surprises, clarity and a way forward, inside a week

Alongside a specialist consultancy, we were asked to look at a large IT programme which was seen as 'failing' – significantly over budget, behind schedule, constantly missing deliveries, and with a very unhappy end customer. Surely, we were told, the programme simply wasn't getting the job done.

Working closely with Programme and Business leadership, we quickly dug into the situation and it became clear that the underlying problems were much more specific:

- Constant scope changes from the customer meant that there was no 'single view of the truth' on scope, plans or budget*
- Customer-supplier governance was not working effectively, meaning that confusion and argument were obscuring good progress on day-to-day delivery*
- Finally, too much time was being spent on managing customer relations, distracting from tight control of internal delivery.*

These were not the expected answers but, because they were developed collaboratively and backed up by solid analysis, they were quickly accepted by senior management.

We developed specific action plans to address the issues, and proposed a 6-week delivery plan (client-led, supported by us) to put the changes in place. This was agreed and implemented, significantly improving delivery effectiveness and, perhaps more importantly, transforming the programme's reputation from 'failing' to 'achieving a huge amount'.

And finally.... the initial review, from starting to agreed implementation plan, took less than a week.

How do we approach it?

- We use straightforward methods, usually based on discussions with your key people backed up by reviewing key documentation and drawing on our extensive experience
- We only go into enough detail to move forward – the key is to start addressing the issues **quickly**
- We aim to be very **clear** about the underlying problems – it's essential to treat the problem, not the symptoms
- We work **collaboratively** and build on what you already know – we work together, not as 'external audit'
- This is **action-minded**, and about looking to the future, not how the problems arose in the past
- Finally, we never assume that we'll be part of any next steps – although we often are, it depends on what the next steps are and whether you want us to be involved.

How much effort does it typically involve?

- c.1-2 people over 2-4 weeks, but can be as little as 1 week.

We don't claim for a moment that we're the only people offering something like our [Diagnose approach](#). We do believe, though, that our way of doing it is a powerful combination of speed, clarity, collaboration and a focus on action.

In short: when you know you have problems, this is a very powerful way to get to the root causes and start fixing them, fast.

For more information about Houghley Ltd: visit us at www.houghley.co.uk; contact us at enquiries@houghley.co.uk; or phone us on +44 (0) 845 604 2335.