

PSYCHOLOGY IN WORK AND ORGANIZATIONS

Psychology of work and organizations

There may be some problems that seem inexplicable to us if we use the lenses of the rationality

well-constructed strategies, shared and equipped with all the necessary resources which nevertheless fail

good ideas that are rejected or remain unexplored

unhappy workers behind an apparent good functioning corporate health

mistakes that are repeated as if it is impossible to learn from experience,

people with greater authority who reject or abuse it

people who enthusiastically take a position or make a decision but immediately deny it or disregard it

people and groups who fear changes

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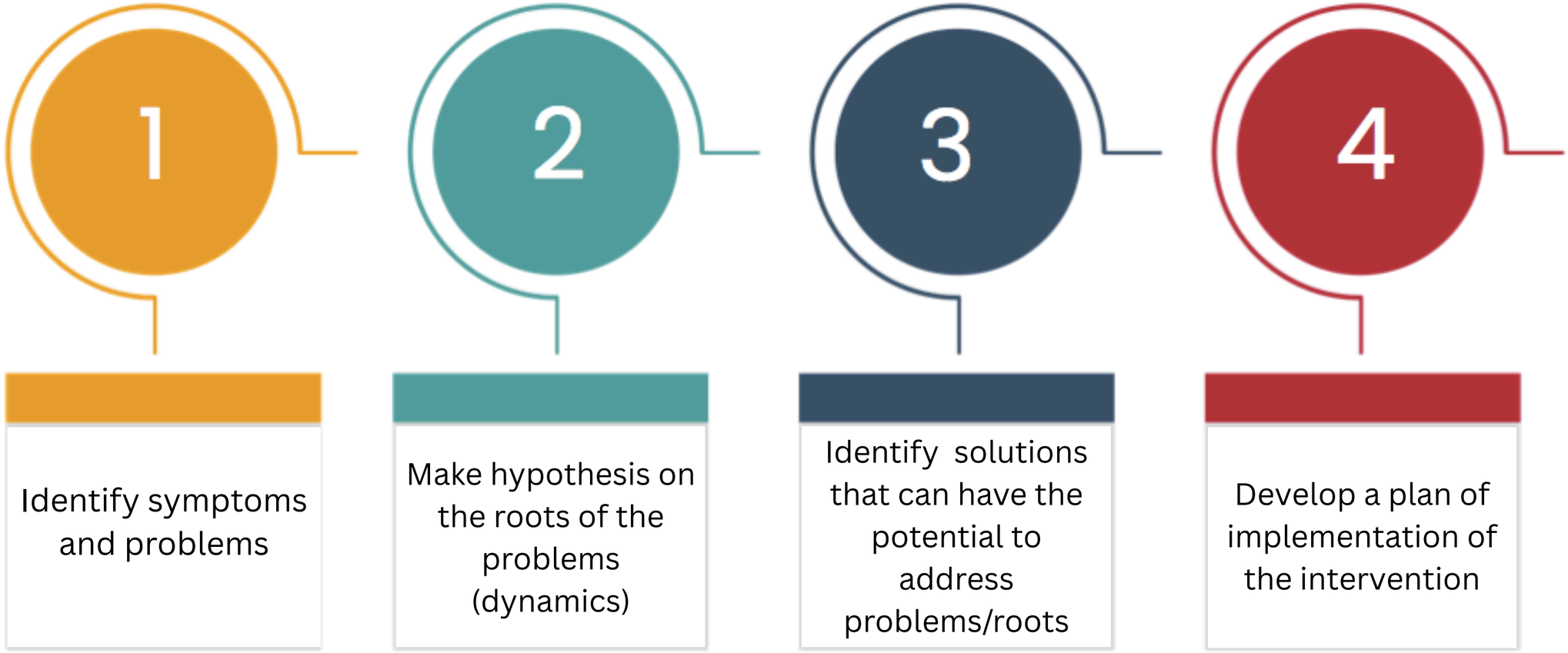

SYMPTOMS AND PROBLEMS

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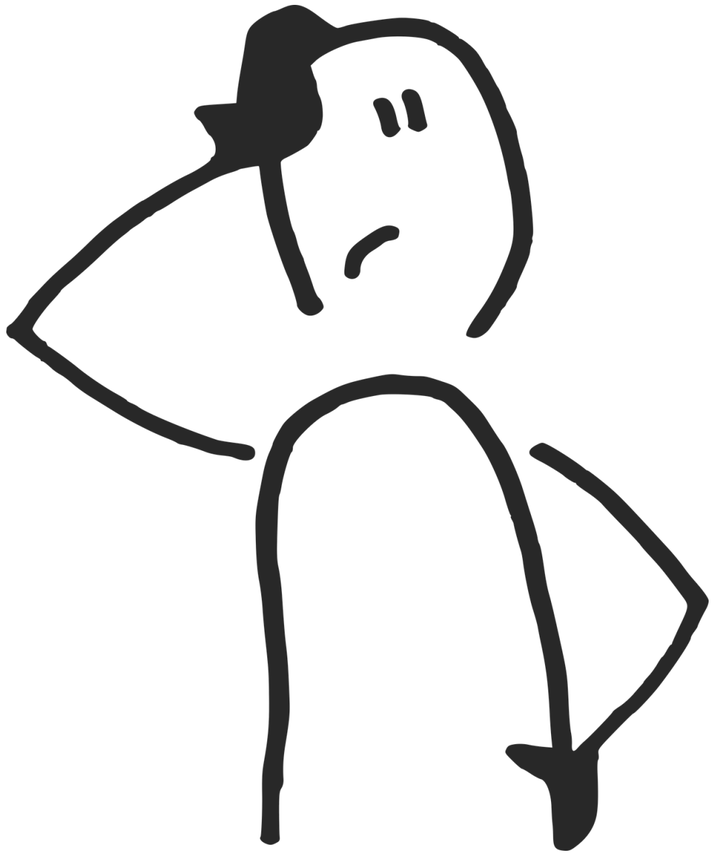
Problems have four properties:

- **Deeply rooted** and thus are hard to be diagnosted
- Caused by **long-standing personality characteristics** that resist to change and to the recognition of the need to change
- Centered on **emotionally sensitive issues**
- **Amplified by the system** of the organization



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Three major types of clinical configurations and potential intervention questions

- **At the individual level (connected to the work object) →** The more complex the work object is [e.g., in healthcare or social care organizations], the more likely it is that obstacles, difficulties, and impasses will arise—mobilizing varying degrees of psychological suffering. Professionals are called upon to contain extreme emotional experiences that can create short-circuits in the mental apparatus for thinking thoughts—attacks on thinking, acted-out functioning, and operational responses mark the breakdown and immobilization of each individual's capacity for mentalization. At risk are also the experts' professional ideals and identifications.



Stress
Burnout
Work addiction / Workaholism
Disinvestment (withdrawal of commitment)
Deviant behaviors
Enacted aggression / Acting-out aggression

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Context:

- Example: Nurse in a pediatric oncology unit

Dynamics:

- Exposure to suffering, helplessness, and ethical conflict
- Development of emotional defenses (detachment, cynicism, over-activity)
- Breakdown of thinking and emotional processing (loss of mentalization)



Consequences:

- “Operational” functioning replaces reflective thinking
- Risk to professional ideals and identity
- Feelings of emptiness, inadequacy, guilt

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- **At the group/device level →** The second type of intervention question concerns deep dissent, power rivalries, and theoretical or ideological antagonisms. These dynamics give rise to a pathology within team relationships, manifesting as an inability to cooperate and collaborate. Professionals are no longer able to constitute themselves as a working group and cannot elaborate or implement projects. Forms of suffering associated with the breakdown of relational bonds emerge.



IIndividualism
Ideological battles
Bureaucratization
Power (coalitions, exclusions, manipulations)
Non-constructive conflict
Destructive competition
Disinvestment in leadership

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Context:

- Multidisciplinary addiction center team (educators, psychologists, doctors)

Dynamics:

- Conflicts over clinical vs. relational vs. medical priorities
- Subgroup formation and loss of shared purpose
- Distrust, tension, and blocked communication

Consequences:

- Team unable to plan or act collaboratively
- “Paralysis” of the collective work function
- Emotional exhaustion and relational suffering

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- **At the institutional level →** The institution is experiencing a crisis that undermines its framework, as well as its imaginary and symbolic foundations. Values, ideals, projects, and modes of functioning and organization are attacked or stripped of their meanings. It is the structure of the whole that must be activated and collectively reworked. However, in this case, it is necessary to distinguish between developmental and transformative moments, specific critical episodes, and long-standing institutional pathologies.



Breakdown of symbolic framework (loss of sense of belonging, collapse of motivation, loss of meaning in work)
Abandonment of projects / poorly executed projects
Unclear roles
Lack of communication

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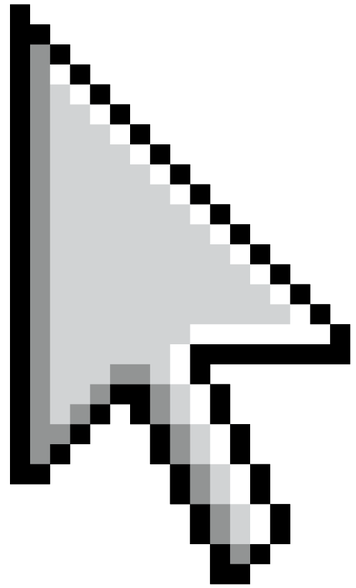
Context:

- Medium-sized tech company under new management

Situation:

- New leadership imposes strict control and performance culture
- Decision-making becomes opaque and top-down
- Original values (innovation, collaboration, creativity) lose relevance



Dynamics:

- Employees feel loss of identity and belonging
- Cynicism, mistrust, and disengagement increase
- The company’s symbolic and organizational foundations are weakened

Key Idea:

- This is an institutional crisis, not a personal or group issue
- Requires collective rethinking of mission, values, and organizational culture

ROOTS OF THE PROBLEMS

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There may be a chain of problem to symptom: the same phenomenon can be both a symptom and a problem.

Usually different nature:

Symptoms: declining profits, poor sales, loss of market share….

Problems: may underline the symptoms: improper allocation of resources, vague or rigid strategies

Roots of the problems: neurotic executives, dysfunctional fantasies, defective interaction modes…

