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Thorn Tree: An Intermediary Problem Tree Variant
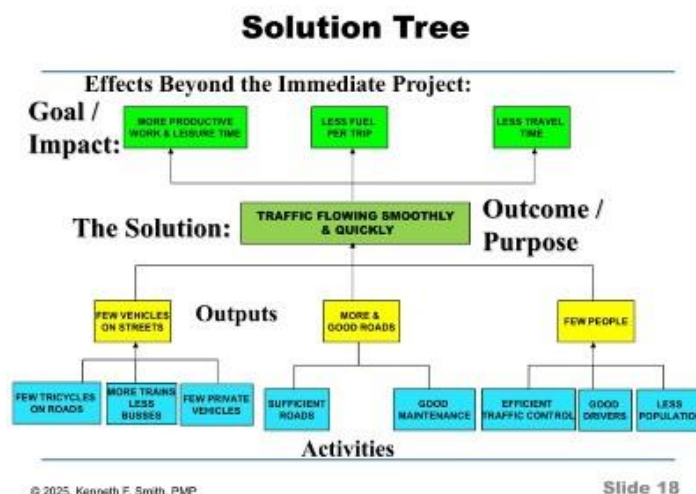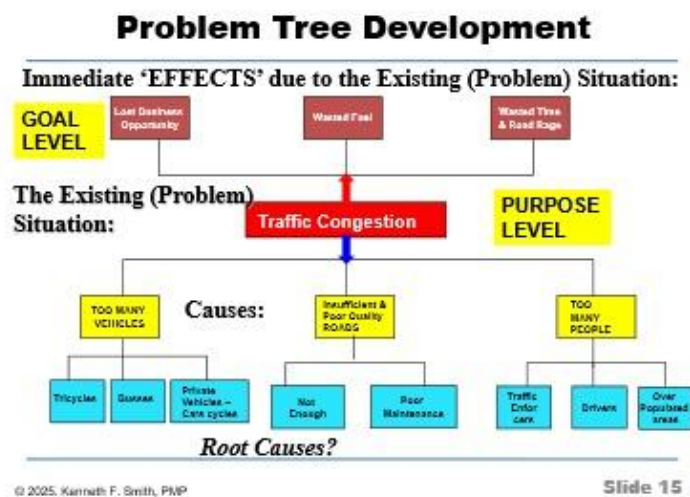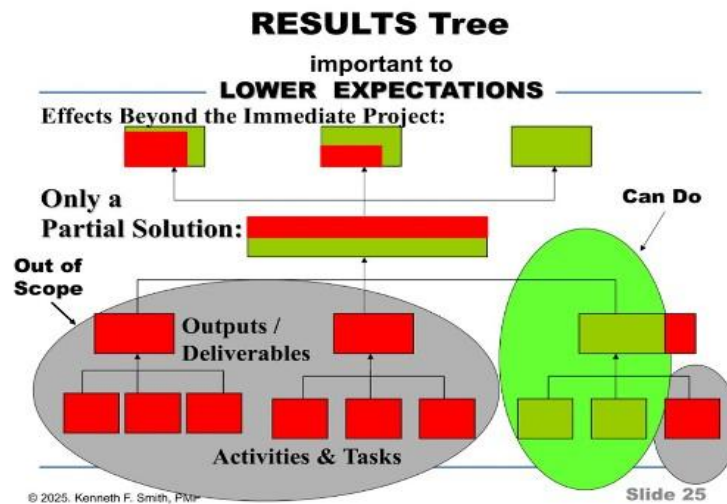by Dr. Kenneth F. Smith
Advisory

The Thorn Tree: An Intermediary Problem Tree Variant[1]

Dr. Kenneth F. Smith, PMP

The classic Problem- Solution- Results Tree technique has been my go-to and mainstay over the past 30 years for conducting and supporting Pre-feasibility and Feasibility analysis during the Initiation Phase of the Project Management Process. In considering a potential project, the 'cause-effect' relationships of a situation are succinctly displayed metaphorically for varying conditions pertinent to each stage for rapid review, presentation to, and understanding by disparate audiences. For example:
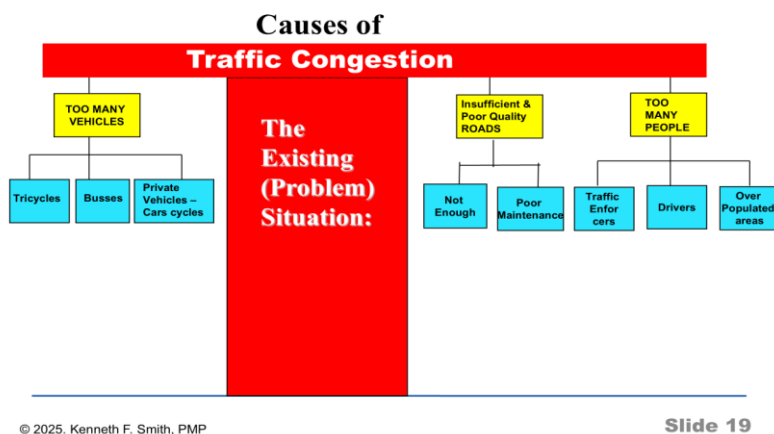

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Nevertheless, abridging the metamorphosis from Problem to Solution Tree stage by the usual broad-brush approach of 'assuming' unlimited power, authority & resources -- before curtailing them with reality -- is often viewed with askance. However, while doing little or nothing for presentation to ultimate audiences, I have found that problem perception of – and interactive discussion by -- analysts is enhanced by uprooting the Causes in the Problem Tree and inverting them into an intermediary stand-alone graphic plant – i.e. a 'Thorn Tree' -- for want of a better term.

This perspective improves problem visibility for much more focused discussions. More creative individuals may want to improve the graphic by realistic tree depictions, depending on the number and extent of the issues.

[NOTE: *Despite my aversion to AI's factual analysis & questionable judgements, I have discovered its artists capabilities converting ideas, analogies and metaphors into meaningful pictures are incredible.*]

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About the Author

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Initially a US Civil Service Management Intern, then a management analyst & systems specialist with the US Defense Department, Ken subsequently had a career as a senior foreign service officer -- management & evaluation specialist, project manager, and in-house facilitator/trainer -- with the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Ken assisted host country governments in many countries to plan, monitor and evaluate projects in various technical sectors; working 'hands-on' with their officers as well as other USAID personnel, contractors and NGOs. Intermittently, he was also a team leader &/or team member to conduct project, program & and country-level portfolio analyses and evaluations.

Concurrently, Ken had an active dual career as Air Force ready-reservist in Asia (Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Philippines) as well as the Washington D.C. area; was Chairman of a Congressional Services Academy Advisory Board (SAAB); and had additional duties as an Air Force Academy Liaison Officer. He retired as a 'bird' colonel.

After retirement from USAID, Ken was a project management consultant for ADB, the World Bank, UNDP and USAID.

He earned his DPA (Doctor of Public Administration) from the George Mason University (GMU) in Virginia, his MS from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT Systems Analysis Fellow, Center for Advanced Engineering Study), and BA & MA degrees in Government & International Relations from the University of Connecticut (UCONN). A long-time member of the Project Management Institute (PMI) and IPMA-USA, Ken is a Certified Project Management Professional (PMP®) and a member of the PMI®-Honolulu and Philippines Chapters.

Ken has two KENBOOKS: 1. Project Management PRAXIS which includes many innovative project management tools & techniques; and describes a "Toolkit" of related templates, and 2. MUSINGS on Project Management -- a compilation of contemporary concerns in project planning, monitoring & evaluation, with some tools & techniques suggested for their solution. Either or both books are available from Amazon, and their related templates are available directly from him at kenfsmith@aol.com on proof of purchase.

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