

PROBLEM STATEMENTS

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WHAT IS A PROBLEM STATEMENT?

Put simply, a problem statement clearly defines - in a concise but comprehensive way - a key business problem that needs to be solved.

In software development, the problem statement says, “What has to be done” for a project to succeed - to meet the needs of its stakeholders who are external to the development. It does not say, “How that has to be done,” unless those external stakeholders say so. This makes the problem statement become a tool for the development team to envision architectural choices.

The problem statement is a tool for the stakeholders and developers to communicate in concise, plain language, about what tasks are being paid for, and what must be accomplished conceptually for the project to be a success. The problem statement forces all parties involved (including the development team’s leaders), to reach an agreement about what they are doing

Next, we list the characteristics of a problem statement with the SMART Framework by McKinsey & Company.

SMART FRAMEWORK

REMEMBER: A good problem statement should be all of these things. The challenge is to balance being thorough with being concise.



SPECIFIC, NOT GENERAL

Identifying the WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY, and HOW



MEASUREABLE

Without specifying what metrics best reflect "performance," it's impossible to assess whether or not we have progress



ACTION-ORIENTED

Goals have to be actionable to create impact



RELEVANT

The problem statement has to be relevant to the business and their key problem(s)



TIME-BOUND

A specific deadline is needed to motivate people to action, hold them accountable -- this ultimately helps us understand if a project was successful

CREATE AN EFFECTIVE PROBLEM STATEMENT

USE THE 5 W'S + ONE H

- Who
- What
- Why
- When
- Where
- How

FRAME THE PROBLEM STATEMENT AS A GOAL

Some of the best problem statements are simply goals formatted as questions.

A good problem statement aligns the expectations of the client with the team's activities and output.

FORCE THE PRIORITIZATION

Using phrases such as “the most important for the customer” or “the best way” will force the prioritization.



Since problem statements guide much of the problem solving of a project, it is important not to be too narrow or broad with the problem statement.

**THE MOST EFFECTIVE QUESTION IS SIMPLY
“WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO SOLVE?”**

PROBLEM STATEMENT WORKSHEET

W H O: *Who does the problem impact and involve?*

W H A T: *What does the problem impact? What are the drivers of the problem?*

W H Y: *Why is solving the problem important to stakeholders and the business?*

PROBLEM STATEMENT WORKSHEET

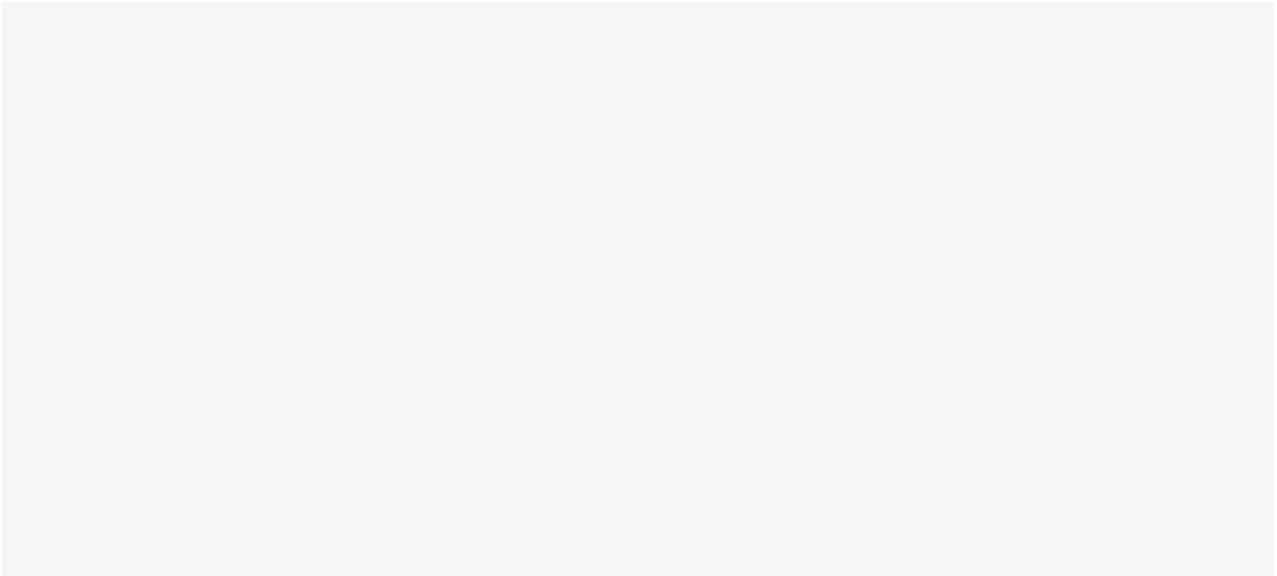
W H E R E: *Where does the problem reside or have impact?*

W H E N: *When did the problem begin? When does the problem need to be solved by?*

H O W: *How was the problem created? How can the problem be solved?*

PROBLEM STATEMENT WORKSHEET

PROBLEM STATEMENT: *Create a rough draft below.*



PROBLEM STATEMENT: *Draft your final version below.*

