

Problem Clarification Tool



Step 1: Individual or small group worksheet

Instructions: Provide your responses to the questions below. You may not be able to answer all questions in your first attempt, but the questions will help you analyze your problem or opportunity.

- 1. Is this a problem or opportunity? A problem is an issue that is preventing you, your team, or your organization from achieving your goals and objectives. An opportunity is an initiative that will help you, your team, or your organization achieve a goal or improve organizational effectiveness. Explain your answer below.**

Provide your response below

- 2. Why is this a problem or opportunity? Consider if there are any events or conditions tied to this problem or opportunity that provide useful context.**

Provide your response below



- 3. Who does this problem affect (individuals, teams, customers, etc.)? How many different groups inside and outside the organization are affected?**

Provide your response below

- 4. How does this problem affect business processes? Which ones does it affect? Are those core business processes that are vital to operations or more minor processes adjacent to the organization's central services and/or products?**

Provide your response below

- 5. To what extent does this problem affect how you do your work or your core identity as an organization? How does this affect your "reason for being" or mission?**

Provide your response below

6. What would you like to change?

Provide your response below

7. What would you like to stay the same?

Provide your response below

8. What would the result be if this problem were resolved or if this opportunity were maximized? What are the expected organizational and individual benefits?

Provide your response below

9. What is the risk or impact of not resolving this problem or maximizing this opportunity?

Provide your response below

10. Once you work through these questions and are ready, create a statement that fully describes this opportunity or problem.

Provide your response below

Step 2: group discussion

Instructions for facilitator:

1. Start off the discussion by describing how the goal of this group discussion is to identify and isolate the problem, opportunity, or change of focus. Tell group participants that the outcome will be a well-defined problem statement, and that this exercise will also help them start understanding the rationale for the change and its impact.
2. Draw out three horizontal sections using a physical or virtual whiteboard. Label the first Current State, the second Impact, and the third Desired State.
3. Ask the group to share their rough idea or topic of the change (e.g., new application roll-out, new policy, process, or procedure, or new structure). Verify that the participants agree with the general topic. If they do not agree, ask the participants to share their ideas and do not progress with the exercise until the group agrees on the general topic.
4. Once the group has chosen a problem, challenge, or need, focus your impact on that problem exclusively. One point of this exercise is to isolate one problem or change to start. If necessary, separate each problem, challenge, or need and conduct the exercise separately.
5. Ask each participant to individually write down their perspectives on the Current State, Impact, and Desired State using the questions below.
6. Once everybody has responded to the questions on their own, have each member in turn offer an idea about the topic. Concentrate on the Current State first, as the Current State must be clear before proceeding. During this stage, other participants should refrain from commenting, listen carefully, and build on each other's ideas. Record all ideas on the chart. Continue until the group has exhausted its ideas on Current State topic.
7. Discuss and clarify the ideas once all ideas have been reviewed. You will help drive consensus or should employ a voting technique if there are differences in opinion about the final responses to the questions (see the Group Decision-Making Framework for guidance on reaching consensus or using voting techniques). Repeat this for the Impact and Desired State sections.

8. Summarize the information. Work with the group to write a concise description of the current state of the problem. Next, have the group develop one or two sentences that summarizes what it would be like if the problem were solved, or the change fully implemented (i.e., the desired state). Ensure this desired state is realistic and attainable and consider what indicators will demonstrate that they have achieved that vision. Lastly, have the group create a statement that describes the impact of the problem.
9. Review the three summary statements with the group and make sure all group members endorse the summary statements. Together, these three statements will form an overarching problem statement. If there is more than one problem or opportunity, develop a summary for each one to be able to address each individually.
10. Document the problem statement. This statement will provide the basis to prepare for and manage change. It will help steer actions and enable building buy-in for change.

Current State:

- What is the presenting need or problem?
- What change are we trying to make?

Impact:

- What impact does this issue have or will have on our organization, program, or team?
- What will happen if we do not address this issue or make changes to our operating environment?

Desired State:

- What is the desired outcome?
- How and why will this change help us to improve organization performance?
- What will happen because of this change?