



Problem/Opportunity Definition

5Ws & H – the six questions technique

A structured method that examines a problem/opportunity from multiple viewpoints. The process is as follows:

1. State the problem/opportunity using the description ‘In what ways might...?’
2. Write down separate lists of who?, what?, when?, where?, why?, and how? questions that are relevant to the problem/opportunity.
3. Examine the response to each question and use them to stimulate new problem/opportunity redefinitions.
4. Write down any redefinitions suggested.
5. Select one redefinition that best captures the problem/opportunity you are trying to resolve.

Because it is structured, some intuitive thinkers find the approach too rigorous. It is relatively simple to use and can be used in one-on-one situations or with groups.

Outcome checklist

When you want to concentrate on the outcome of a problem, this checklist may help. It also allows you to discover weak links. The process is as follows:

1. Think of the outcome you would like to have. Write it down in the form, ‘*I really want to x...*’
2. Run through the checklist that follows and observe how the outcome changes. When you have completed the exercise, re-write the outcome in the form, ‘*I really really want to y...*’

Stated positively, that is what I really really want rather than what I do not want. For example, if someone states, “*I want less product defects*” ask them, “*What would you rather have?*”

Owned, that is what part does the individual play in achieving the outcome? For example, if someone states, “*We have to improve the business’s performance*”, ask them, “*What part will you play in this?*”

As specific as possible, that is how exactly am I to achieve this? For example, if someone states, “*I need an improvement*”, ask them, “*Who, where when, what and how specifically?*”

Assessable, that is how will I know when I have succeeded? This requires the development of some measurable and meaningful criteria for success. For example, if

someone states, *“I want a successful production line”* as them, *“What will you see, hear or feel when you have success?”*

Achievable, that is do I have all the resources at my disposal to achieve a result? For example, if someone states, *“We’ll start the project tomorrow”* ask them *“What resources do you need to achieve this outcome?”*

Sized right, that is is the outcome too big to manage or too small to bother with? If it is too large, for example if someone states, *“I want to change the business but I can’t”* ask them, *“What part of the business could you change?”* If it is too small to be motivating ask them, *“If you got this outcome, what would it do for you?”*

The checklist can be applied to a wide variety of problems/opportunities. By defining the outcome precisely it is common to find some solutions along the way.

Cognitive mapping

Mapping techniques are useful for handling complexity. A technique that uses “Post-it” notes:

1. Collect relevant information relating to the problem/opportunity definition by writing each separate piece of information on a Post-it note.
2. Spread all the Post-it notes out and group those that seem to belong to each other.
3. Label the groups with a “theme”. Put any remaining Post-it notes into a separate group.
4. Examine the themes. Look for linkages between them. Look also for importance and hierarchy of problem/opportunity definitions, so that you may make a choice for the idea generation phase.

Cognitive mapping can be used for both problem/opportunity definition and solution finding. There are many variations on this theme.