

Assignment Guide: Problem Statement

Description

Draft 2 Problem Statements, each describing a problem in an actual organization that you want to address throughout the course. This can be a professional problem, an issue that needs a solution, a new idea for a service, product, program, or something else you want to pursue. The scope or flavor of the problem/challenge can be anything, as long as it fits within the criteria below. If you are pondering more than one idea, you may draft and submit more statements and use this process to help decide among them. Use the resources below to help you, including looking ahead at future assignment guides and reviewing the criteria for identifying suitable problems, templates, examples and strategies to help you brainstorm if you run into roadblocks. **Create the Statements on one page, single spaced, in Microsoft Word format using 12-point, Times or Times New Roman font.** You are welcome to use your EDUC 619 problem statement as one of the Statements, though a recommendation is to distill it into fewer words, almost in a manner that resembles a 10-second pitch. How few words may you use to signal the problem to someone that is sufficiently interested to read or listen to it?

Start with End in Mind

An important step in this assignment is to review the syllabus and the other assignment guides for the course. This will help give you a sense of where the course is going and what you will be doing with the problem situation that you select. Be sure to review all of the assignment guides, and pay close attention to those related to the Problem Challenge, which includes two activities that you will carry out in your context.

Criteria for a Suitable Course “Problem”

An important part of the process in writing a problem statement is identifying an appropriate problem. Review the criteria and key questions in the table below to help you identify problems that you may want to try to analyze creatively

Criteria	Key Questions
Mission-critical	Is the problem hindering your unit (or department, team, group) from achieving its goals?
Observable	Does your problem or issue involve behaviors, practices or activities that you can observe and describe?
Significant	Is the problem producing negative consequences that need to be addressed? Is it causing someone discomfort? Is it something that captures your emotions, e.g. is it making you angry, sad or confused?
Manageable	Is the problem within your scope of influence? Can you give it regular attention during this course?
Interesting	Is it a problem that’s interesting to you? Would you enjoy working on it? Does the prospect of solving this challenge make you happy or excited?

Problem Statement Language

If helpful, use the following prompts to help you begin to create Problem Statements. This is a starting point. You can elaborate and expand and play around with your statement as much as you wish and need to. The following language is meant to help you make sure you have some of the basics. Consider that you need not use the exact same language: find your own words and phrases to describe the problem you identified, but keep it succinct!

The context of this problem is the *[unit, department, team]* of *[company, organization, school, agency]*. The specific problem I am focusing on is *[describe the problem in terms of observable behaviors, patterns, phenomena, etc. – what people are doing and saying]*. This may be a problem because it is causing/leading to *[consequences or effects of any detectable outcomes/evidence]*. This problem is significant because it seems to interfere with the ability of the *[unit, group, team, organization]* to achieve *[desired goals that are not being met]*.

Examples

I am currently working as a nurse at a concussion clinic on a military base. The problem I am focusing on is our clinic's inability to successfully promote our services and raise awareness about concussion treatment to our military personnel. This failure to properly reach out is a problem because a direct consequence is that approximately 80% of the concussions that occur on base currently go untreated. This problem is significant because it obstructs the ability of my clinic to provide critical early treatment for military personnel who have experienced concussions.

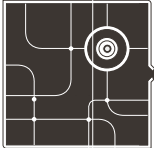





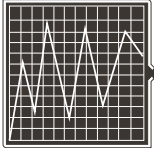

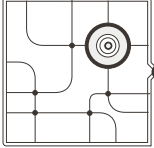

I am currently working at an education technology start-up as a new project coordinator. The specific problem I am focusing on is that my company does not have an effective internal communication strategy as part of its project management approach. I know that our poor internal communication is a problem because it has resulted in staff grumbling, miscommunications among project members and unnecessary confusion and delays. This problem is very significant because it is obstructing the ability of my unit to execute high quality projects and maintain a positive work environment.

If You Get Stuck

If you need help generating or visualizing possible problem situations, consider using one or more of the three strategies described below: Problem Definition Worksheet, Problem Mapping and Storyboarding. (The pages below are excerpted from *Design Thinking for Social Innovation: Toolkit 2014*, a course manual for Social Innovation Design Lab, a course in the USC Marshall School of Business)

IF YOU GET STUCK: PROBLEM DEFINITION WORKSHEET

Use this to find and define the issue

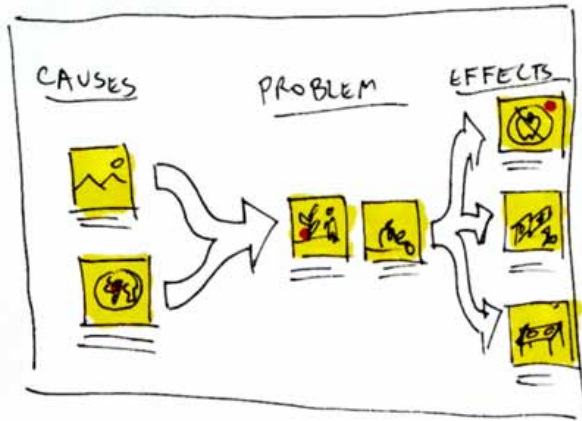
	<p>What is the issue?</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 80px;"></div> 
	<p>Who is it a problem for?</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 80px;"></div> 
	<p>What social/cultural factors shape this problem?</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 80px;"></div> 
	<p>What evidence do you have that this is a significant problem?</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 80px;"></div> 
	<p>Can you think of this problem in a different way? Can you reframe it?</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 80px;"></div> 

Source: Kimbell and Julier, 2012. The Social Design Methods Menu

HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM

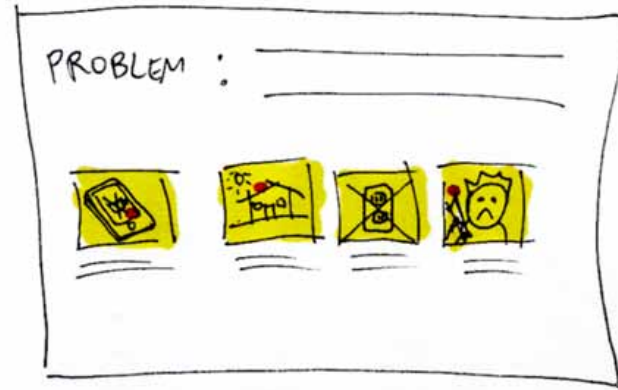
Storyboarding and problem-mapping are two related strategies to visually communicate and analyze the problem.

Problem Mapping:



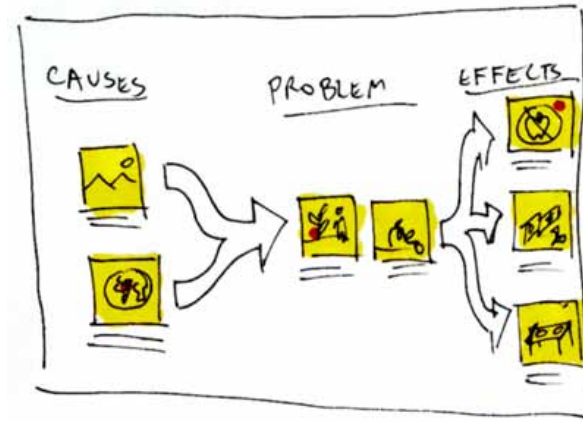
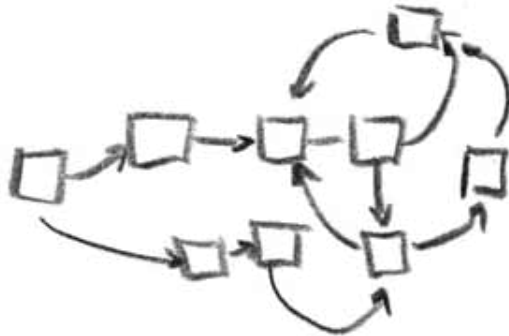
Problem-mapping focuses on the broader context and system of a problem, its root causes, and its long-term effects.

Storyboarding:



Storyboarding (like a comic strip) is a step-by-step illustrated narrative that focuses on a person's experience of the problem.

PROBLEM MAPPING



Create a problem map for your 2 selected problem statements (as illustrated in the drawings above):

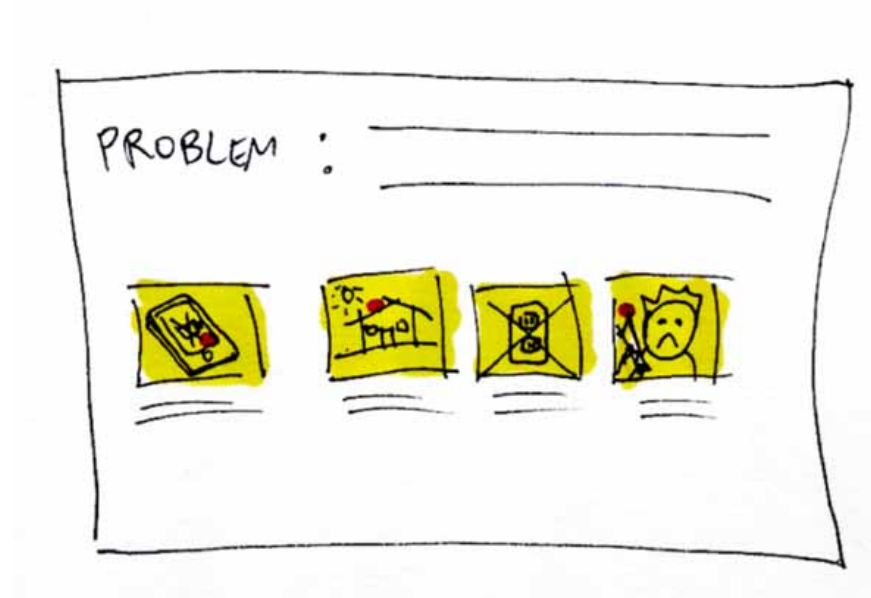
- _On Post-It notes, sketch and write captions for all of the players that are connected with the problem, as well as the problem's causes & effects.
- _As you go, arrange post-its on large paper. Draw arrows to show the relationship between different elements of the problem, such as cause & effect.
- _Repeatedly ask “what are the root causes of this problem?”, and “what are its effects?”.
- _Stick 3 red dots on your map to identify the worst pain points for the community.
- _If you need to, re-write or edit your problem statement.

Supplies: Post-It notes / markers / large paper - at least 18”x24” / dot stickers

PRO-TIPS

There may be even broader effects than you imagine, and seemingly unrelated root causes. (For example, for the challenge of washing clothes without consistent access to water, one of the broad effects is that kids can't go to school unless they have a clean uniform, and one of the causes is that clothes get dirty frequently because the roads are unpaved.)

STORYBOARDING



DUE _____

For each problem, create a storyboard:

- _Write a 2-phrase summary of the problem you are seeking to address on the top of the page.
- _Draw 4-6 rectangles on a piece of 11x17 paper (or draw each frame on a Post-It).
- _In the rectangle frames, draw a storyboard (like a comic strip) of the problem from the user's perspective.
- _Include captions and/or thought-bubbles to narrate the problem in the first person.

PRO-TIPS

Just storyboard the problem, not the solution.
Refer to Storyboarding 101 exercise.

