

# Problem Framing Meeting Guide

## Objective

To get a shared clear understanding about the problem that customers have, and the rationale for why we are focused on solving that problem, so that any solution we make will be more fit-for-purpose.

## Agenda

8% 10 mins	<b>Introductions and set-up</b> State objective of this meeting (above), and clarify how it will help, if (a) <i>We're</i> not clear or aligned on the intent of the project; or (b) <i>they</i> (client/management/stakholders) aren't clear or aligned on the intent of the project.
15% 20 mins	<b>Problem identification</b> Ask everyone to capture what they think the problem is, and then give everyone time to read each others' answers. Then, ask the group to separate what's been captured into: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Goals</b> - Things the business or product wants</li><li>• <b>Problems</b> - Things that are in the way of getting goals done, either for customers or the business</li><li>• <b>Solutions</b> - Proposed ways to fix a problem or achieve a goal</li></ul> People regularly get these confused, so use this time to decide together what to focus on (the rest of this agenda assumes you'll focus on a problem space of some sort).
20% 25 mins	<b>Problem analysis: What and Who</b> Ask everyone to capture and discuss the specifics of the problem (What), and the types of customers (e.g. roles and scenarios) involved in the problem. Some helpful questions to prompt your group's thinking: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What are the specifics of the problem? (Try to weed out business jargon and subjective language)</li><li>• Who is most affected by the problem? Are there particular scenarios that trigger the problem, or make it worse?</li><li>• What are they trying to get done, where this problem is in the way? What hacks and workarounds do they use?</li><li>• What is the impact on each type of customer? What is the impact on our product/service? On our business?</li></ul>
5% 5 mins	<b>Break</b> Get everyone to take a break, and do whatever they need to do, to come back focused.



Great for product or service teams



Recommended 2 hours



Works for in-person, online, or hybrid

12% 15 mins	<b>Problem analysis: Causes</b> Ask everyone to capture, discuss, and dig for insight about the root cause(s) of the problem(s) identified. Why? And why is that? Why are we wanting to solve this? And why now?  If it's a customer problem, what expectations and behaviours do they have that are behind the problem? If it's a product or business problem, what are the underlying factors contributing to the problem? People, processes, structures, expectations, incentives..?
12% 15 mins	<b>Stakeholder analysis</b> A problem statement is like a mini business case; it not only expresses <i>what the problem is</i> , but also <i>why we are wanting to solve it</i> , if you want to influence decision-makers.  Ask everyone to list the various decision-makers and/or stakeholders who will need to know about and/or approve this 'business case'. Then, capture and discuss any different impacts (above) that would resonate more with each stakeholder.
20% 25 mins	<b>Problem statement</b> Based on the problem analysis and stakeholder analysis, ask your group to capture the most important part of the problem space to focus on, and why.  Ask them to each write a problem statement, based on these elements, using this format:  <b>USER TYPE wants to GOAL, but PROBLEM. The impact is USER IMPACT. This is unacceptable, because BUSINESS IMPACT.</b>  Ask everyone to share their version of the problem statement. Discuss commonalities and contrasts. Decide together the most relevant, compelling problem statement, to take into idea generation for possible solutions.
8% 5 mins	<b>Next steps</b> Based on this discussion, who needs to do what, by when? What else needs to be clarified or confirmed? Where will the final versions of these outputs live, so we can all refer to them?



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# Problem Framing Meeting Guide (continued)

## When to run a problem framing meeting

You can run a problem framing session on its own, or as part of a larger meeting or workshop. Use it whenever your group is not clear or aligned on the focus of their work, or for innovation or change management.

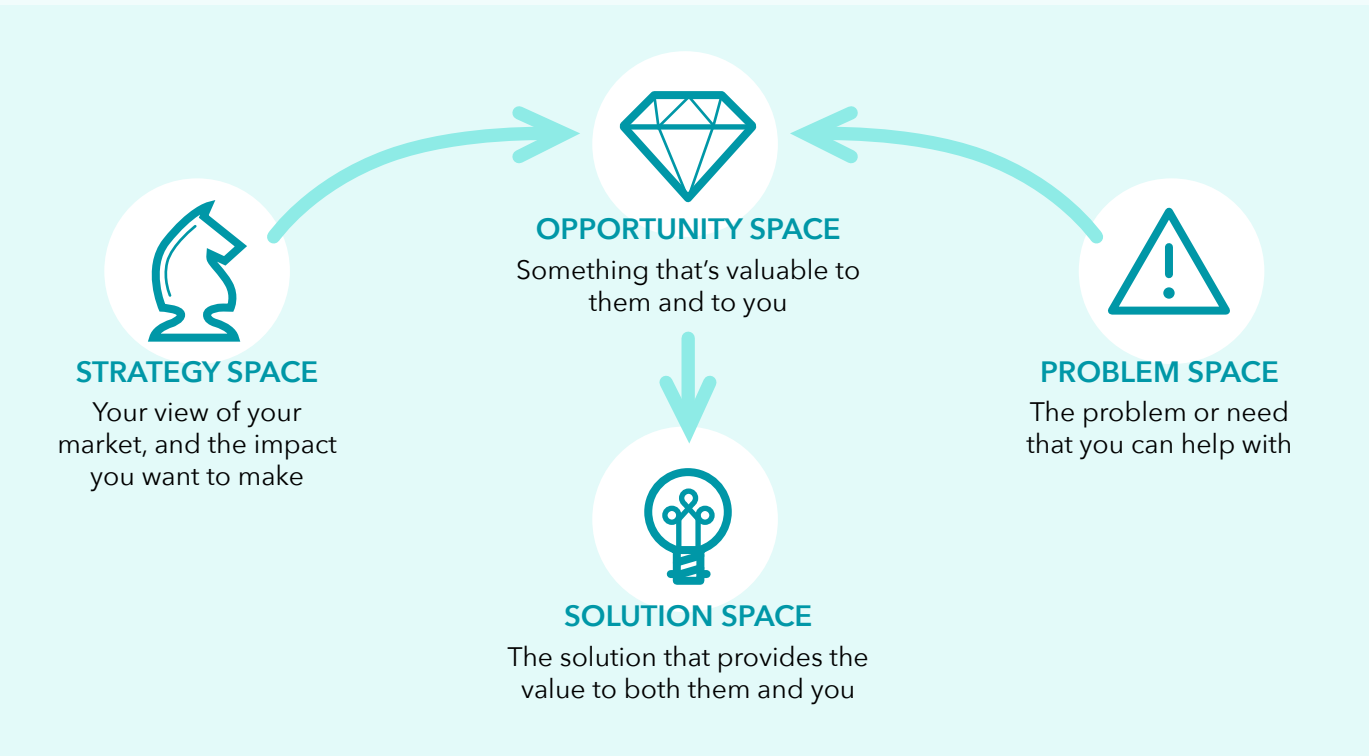
Problem framing is part of the **discovery process** (rather than the delivery process), i.e. deciding on *the right thing to make/do* before deciding on *how to make/do the thing right*. The agenda in this guide is based on the following logic:

An opportunity is something where you can use your capabilities to solve a genuine problem, and make a desired impact.

The impact you want to make depends on whatever outcomes are important to you or your organisation (e.g. profit, staff satisfaction, team productivity, student success).

To help the best opportunity emerge, you will need to know *who* to focus on (which types of customers, users, staff, students, community); *what their goals are*; and *what problems they have* that prevent (or get in the way of) those goals.

Once you have that opportunity defined (and problem framing is a big part of this), then you will be much better set up to generate more successful ideas and solutions.



If you are meeting with clients or prospects, problem framing is also a very effective part of the briefing (or 'reverse briefing') process.

## Who to invite

If you are working in an agile fashion, you'll want to include the whole team in your problem framing session. That way, everyone shares in generating insights and arriving at conclusions together, rather than finding out after it's done. It's also important to include people who are knowledgeable about the business goals, and the types of customers you are focused on.

## Preparing, and generating outputs together

Help everybody who is coming to your problem framing session to prepare by asking them to read up on any latest customer research available. If there is any information available about the project's intent, previous retrospective outputs, ask your group to read this material as well.

Problem framing (and reframing) can get complex. It's best to capture all thoughts and ideas and map out your conversation (either on a physical whiteboard or digital canvas), rather than try to rely on memory. As a suggestion, try using this map below.

Your outputs should be a map of your problem space, plus one or more problem statements.

