

Defining the Problem



What's the type of issue?

Decision (I must choose between options)?

Diagnostic problem (something is underperforming and I need to understand why)?

Design problem (I need to create a new approach or system)?

Delivery problem (we know what to do, but execution is failing)?

Executive Problem Statement	Example
What decision must be made	We need to decide whether to invest in X
by whom	
by when	by Q3
to achieve what objective	in order to improve Y
under what constraints	given budget and operational constraints



Symptoms vs. Objectives

Symptoms are what you observe.

Objectives are what you are trying to maximize or protect.

Symptoms (facts or observations):

- Metric A declined
- Stakeholders are dissatisfied
- Process feels slow or fragile

Objective (singular, prioritized):

If you have more than one primary objective, rank them.

- Increase profitability
- Reduce risk
- Improve speed
- Improve quality
- Preserve optionality



Define Decision Criteria Before Considering Options

Ask: “What would make a solution ‘good’ or ‘bad’ *before* I know what the options are?”

Common Criteria

Financial impact

Strategic alignment

Speed to impact

Organizational complexity

Reversibility (ability to undo)

Risk exposure



What Is *In Scope* and *Out of Scope*

This is where clarity reduces overwhelm.

In scope	Out of scope
Time horizon	Adjacent issues you are explicitly parking
Teams or functions involved	Constraints you are accepting as fixed
Geographies, segments, or products	

State the Key Unknowns

Avoid brainstorming questions. Instead, list what you *do not know that materially affects the decision*.

Examples
True cost of implementation
Elasticity of demand
Internal capability gaps
Stakeholder willingness to adopt

Choose the Right Level of Rigor (80/20 Rule)

Ask:

- Is this reversible?
- Is this high-stakes or low-stakes?
- Is speed more valuable than precision?



“So What?” Test (Sanity-Check)

Ask:

- If we solved this perfectly, what would actually change?
- Who would act differently tomorrow?
- What decision becomes easier or possible?



Write the Problem on One Page

1. Problem classification
2. Executive problem statement
3. Objective
4. Decision criteria
5. Scope boundaries
6. Key unknowns