

# Cracking the Case: To Effectively Problem-Solve, Try Problem-Framing

Many teams rush into solutions without fully understanding the problem they're trying to fix. This often leads to wasted time, ineffective strategies and frustrated team members.

Inspired by the wisdom of Albert Einstein ("If I had an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions"), the E5 approach to problem-framing is a 5-step method that encourages deep exploration before leaping to conclusions.

## Phase 1: Expand Your Thinking (Break Free from Assumptions)

Just like a photographer uses different lenses to capture a scene, problem-framing requires examining the issue from various angles. Here's how to expand your perspective:

- **Frame-Storming:** Unlike brainstorming, which focuses on solutions for a pre-defined problem, frame-storming opens the issue for exploration. It encourages asking "What if...?" and "How might we...?" questions to identify blind spots and challenge assumptions.
- **Diverse Teams:** Assemble a team with a variety of backgrounds and expertise. Outsiders can bring fresh perspectives and challenge established thinking.
- **Break the Frame:** Don't be afraid to eliminate possibilities that initially seem promising. Test and refine hypotheses to ensure a clear understanding of the true problem.

## Phase 2: Examine the Root Cause (Dive Deep)

Now it's time to peel back the layers and identify the core reasons behind the problem.

- **Iceberg Model:** Imagine an iceberg - the tip represents the surface issue, while the hidden layers reveal underlying causes. Use this model to guide your investigation. Start with surface observations, then delve into behavioral patterns, organizational structures and ingrained mindsets that might be hindering progress.

## Phase 3: Embrace Empathy (See Through Others' Eyes)

Understanding how the problem affects different stakeholders is crucial.

- **Identify Stakeholders:** Create a map of everyone impacted by the problem, from customers and employees to investors and suppliers. Prioritize stakeholders based on their influence and involvement.
- **Empathy Maps:** Develop profiles for key stakeholders. What are their thoughts, feelings, and actions regarding the issue? Conduct interviews or surveys to gather authentic data. Analyze the maps to identify pain points, inconsistencies and shared perspectives.

## Phase 4: Elevate Your Perspective (See the Bigger Picture)

Now, let's zoom out and explore how this specific problem connects to broader organizational issues. We can do this by using the Four-Frame Model.

- **Four-Frame Model:** Developed by Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal, this model offers four lenses to view the problem within a larger context:
  - Structural Frame: Examines efficiency, coordination, and alignment of activities within the organization's structure.
  - Human Resources Frame: Focuses on people, relationships, and employee development.
  - Political Frame: Analyzes power dynamics, conflicts, and negotiations within the organization.
  - Symbolic Frame: Highlights the importance of symbols, rituals, stories, and shared values in shaping group identity and culture.

### **Phase 5: Envision the Future (Design Effective Solutions)**

Finally, it's time to translate your insights into actionable solutions.

- **Backcasting:** Define your desired outcome and then work backward to identify the milestones and actions required to achieve it. This ensures your efforts are strategically directed towards a concrete goal.

By following these steps, you can develop a comprehensive understanding of the problem you're facing and design solutions that address the root causes, not just the symptoms. This will lead to more effective problem-solving and better decision-making within your organization.