

Identify Your Problem/Opportunity Statement: Moving From a Wellness-Focused Problem to a Business-Focused Problem

“Support for wellness” is a broad category. Before you look at identifying and involving key stakeholders, it’s helpful to understand the specifics of what you need support for so that you know who you need it from.

Take a minute to brainstorm what you need support for.

Having a clearly identified problem to solve or an opportunity to be captured is the first important step in the collaborative process. Otherwise, you may be gathering a group for collaboration without a clear purpose.

In fact, the only way to know which stakeholders to identify and how to involve them is to have a clearly defined problem or opportunity. We’ll use *problem* as a shorthand here for any situation that you (or your client organization) want to change.

Identifying the right problem is a challenge because each participant may see something different. Recall the parable of the blind men and an elephant:

A group of blind men encounter an elephant for the first time. They begin to learn what the elephant is like by touching it. Each feels a different part of the body, but only one part. They describe the elephant based on their own experience and soon become hostile, suspecting the other is dishonest.

Our complex problems are often like that. None of us can know the whole story alone.

Here are the recommended steps to decide the basis for your collaboration.

1. Write the problem in one simple sentence. This statement should focus on your viewpoint or the wellness problem you are solving. It may take several iterations, but the effort is worth it to get the simplest, most powerful written description of the problem. Keep in mind: The problem should not have a solution embedded in it.

Following are examples of wellness-focused problem statement.

- Wellness resources aren’t being used at the desired level.
- We have lower participation from customer service employees than the rest of the company.
- Wellness does not appear to be valued by leadership.
- Mental health care has been identified by employees as a need, but our resources aren’t being utilized.
- Our stress-management skills are inadequate for the demands of our environment.

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Write your initial wellness-focused problem statement below.

2. Identify the stakeholders who can help you learn more about your proposed problem and how it affects the organization. Use the [Identifying Key Stakeholders](#) part of this toolkit to take a deeper dive into this step. Consider the following:

- Who is impacted by this problem?
- Who may have information to add?
- Who can offer a different perspective than the one I have?

Who initially comes to mind? Write their names below.

3. Engage the identified stakeholders through informational meetings. Ask them questions to uncover other perspectives of your problem. The overall goal is to transform your wellness-focused problem into a business-oriented problem.

Tap into the [thought-provoking questions](#) provided in the toolkit, including the following.

- What does everyone know about the problem?
- What is the level of importance from their standpoint?
- What are the (other) needs that are voiced?
- What has been done before, or what is currently being done?

Capture this information, in writing, where you can keep track of what you learn. Consider sending it back to the person you interviewed to ensure accuracy.

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This document can also be used to keep people on track and orient newcomers to the team’s thinking process. **Aim to get to the root cause of the stakeholder’s problem by asking “why” five times.** As you keep asking, you’re more likely to discover the root cause(s), which may be the **actual** problem that needs to be solved. A great reference for how this works is [here](#).

For example, you may start with the problem of communicating the wellness resources to employees because you want to increase participation rates. Although this is a legitimate problem, it’s only wellness-centered.

The question you then need to uncover is, “Why would this matter to the business?” In other words, how is your problem valuable to the functioning of the organization you work for?

After talking to stakeholders, perhaps you learn that recruitment and retention are a hot-button issues for your organization. It matters to the business due to the cost of filling open positions that have been turned over. If you keep asking why, you’ll uncover the many reasons why that metric matters to your organization.

4. Rewrite your wellness-focused problem into a business-focused problem that is results-driven.

Using what you learned from the stakeholders, rewrite your original problem statement into one that serves the business. Make sure to shift it into a future-focused, solution statement.

For example, instead of solving for the problem of low wellness participation rates, perhaps you can refocus it to say, “Identify the ways wellness impacts recruitment and retention at our company.”

5. Decide which stakeholders need to be a part of creating and implementing the solution to the business-focused problem.

Write your updated, business-focused problem statement below.

Using the [Bringing Stakeholders Together](#) part of this toolkit, decide who would be helpful, collaborative partners.

List these stakeholders below.

