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## **Problem Definition**

**Never more important to get it right**

- 1. Why Do Problems Need Definition?**
- 2. What Questions Should You Be Asking on the Client-Side?**
- 3. Don't Leave Key Data out of Sight & out of Mind**
- 4. The Importance of an Independent Agency Partner**



## **Introduction**

Is the man in this opening image going to land safely? Did he prepare properly and make an informed quality decision to jump in this failing light after checking the hazard out fully, or did he just go ahead in a rush at that time, as it seemed the only choice?

Like the man in the opening image is about to, corporate initiatives can fall short without proper preparation and information; and as a result, incur cost and time to rectify. Which could have been better spent on meeting/realising objectives. One wonders how the man in this image felt when the better option of a nearby footbridge was visible in the morning light.

The last 2-3 years have already seen customer behaviour becoming more fragmented and Covid-19 has added another layer of complexity into business decisions. Whether you are working client or agency-side, commercial success ultimately requires everyone to find mutual ground and to make the best decisions possible. But how can you achieve this?

This short post shares our observations and experiences over the last 2 decades about successful problem-definition and how **insight engineers** can help you to harmonise your commercial objectives to achieve in-market success.

### **1. Why Do Problems Need Definition?**

Before starting to work immediately on the apparent solution, most successful organisations have learnt to stand back first and invest time and effort to improve their understanding of their problem and associated objectives. As Einstein once said, *“A well-defined problem is 90% solved”*. But, do you sometimes find you are on a completely different wavelength to the other people you work with? Agreeing on a clear problem definition with colleagues can be extremely challenging - different people, in different disciplines and positions of responsibility, with different motivations and pain-points, will often focus their thinking on disparate solutions.

Research evidence helps everyone get on the same wavelength, neutrally. Carefully curated insights can create a strong narrative on the feelings and inclinations of your target market in management level discussions, bringing stakeholders together within a common language. And especially when this information & insights are part of a structured problem definition process. This framework helps clients to avoid relying on the past, gut feel & intuition or the strongest opinion, and helps plot the best course of action, especially in times of business pressures.

When the world has just fundamentally changed, it is logical that a fresh attitude and new input is needed to make decisions for solutions in the post Covid-19 situation. The importance of harmonising your objectives and defining your problem with the right questions has never been more important to get right.

### **2. What Questions Should You Be Asking on the Client-Side?**

A good client-side project manager will constantly look to improve their understanding of a problem and more importantly **which decisions need to be made** and **what information is needed to assist in these decisions**. The inputs that start this necessary comprehension stage relate to the familiar 5Ws – Who, What, Where, When and Why. Here are the initial 10 questions, logically ordered, that our clients start asking of themselves: -

- 1) Why do we need this project, what is it really all about?
- 2) What decisions do we need to make – and when?
- 3) What information is needed to assist in making these decisions?
- 4) What information do we already have? And where are our information gaps?
- 5) What are the implications of what we already know?



- 6) What are we going to do with this information?
- 7) What are the business critical decisions which we need to take to avoid delays or mistakes?
- 8) What actions or changes to our proposition are needed to move forward?
- 9) When are the critical milestones for the board?
- 10) What could affect our planning – by country, target group, distribution channel, seasonality?

Some of the most insightful questions for the business strategy then relate to *What if* and *How*: -

- What if the information gathering and analysis phases do NOT confirm what we expect?
- What if the motivations & needs of our customers differ (e.g. by country)?
- How will we identify the shape of the best outcome(s)?
- How do we think we can go-forward realistically with the resources available?
- How should we measure the future ROI (tangible/intangible) from this project?
- What if we were to price X differently?

### ***3. Don't Leave Key Data out of Sight & out of Mind***

The importance of an initial information discovery stage cannot be over-stressed. This is something insight engineers will conduct for you. Even well-resourced multi-nationals tend NOT to have a single repository of easily accessible knowledge. Many times, over the last 2 decades we have been told the company does not know much on a topic, only to then discover that the area has been touched upon in multiple commissioned surveys and paid for external subscriptions. Beyond internal research & fiscal data, great information sources can be your CRM data and wider SEO Analytics.

Hence, documenting what sources the company has that measure the topic, sector, country, customers, target groups, purchase channels and influencers, is a really helpful start-point – especially within the context of the key questions above, as then your business has a cogent set of evidence clearly aligned to the initiative.

This 'taxonomy' process also identifies gaps for the current business challenge issue - for example, where there is good knowledge in a country but not in others – what type of information is NOT yet collected and not yet known. At its worst this stage confirms if any new primary research is required and justifiable. And where there are gaps, our desk research partner in India often supplements with Government Statistics and Worldwide secondary data searches.

### ***4. The Importance of an Independent Agency Partner***

It is hard to think objectively and see the wood from the trees when you are within the organisation. And client-side personnel often do not have the time to work through and distil information when shepherding the many moving parts in a project and this problem definition process internally. An external agency therefore provides additional capacity and helps to keep you from getting bogged down in all the detail.

A good agency should also bring a fresh perspective to your topic, inputting from experiences in other sectors and helping you to avoid mistakes by identifying the relevant information, motivations, triggers, cultural watch-outs, differences, etc. The agency role should be to help you harmonise, or even unlearn, cherished beliefs and support you in getting people onto the same page. A good way to provide positive energy and harmony is from a structured creativity workshop, with the team agreeing on the revealed directions as in the picture below: -



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## **Wrap up**

Whether you are client-side or working at another agency, the value of a systematic approach to defining your problem and the routes ahead, will help you make the best customer-centric decisions in alignment with the end objectives. Ultimately, success then requires the right core team working towards the shared vision and the identified success factors to drive sales. And to revisit the 5Ws as you progress; changing your plans if conditions change.

**insight engineers** are used to being part of such initiatives for future pipeline and sales. We work regularly, internationally, on understanding customer behaviour and response to concepts, ideas and propositions. Your tricky B2B and B2C questions are our calls to action. Beyond quality, speed and value, our role is to be a strong partner in the team, helping you to deliver on your objectives. We find a problem definition process, such as the one in this paper, always enhances the chances of success. Working well together, a project team will normally ask the right questions and turn resulting information into profitable wisdom. Wouldn't it be great to be in such a team in the future saying, *"Without us, X would not have existed"*?

To people who have not worked with us before, let's talk. Nobody loses from opening a dialogue.

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