

Are you solving the right strategic problem?

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DESIGNING NEW BUSINESS STRATEGIES, producing innovations to grow profits, and developing novel supply chain configurations to achieve cost advantages are just some of the strategic challenges leaders must grapple with to create and capture value. In response, leaders often pull together a diverse team of their most capable executives. It is the collective knowledge of this diverse team that a leader calls upon to respond to strategic challenges and opportunities. Given the high potential of the team, it is surprising that all too often, after expending much time and energy trying to implement a solution to the challenge, it becomes apparent that the team solved the wrong problem.

Solving the wrong problem is pervasive. Research on large U.S. companies found that 75 percent of such high-potential teams ended up solving the wrong problem and eventually cycling back to start over again. Cycling back not only ignites opportunity costs and sparks delays but also contributes to making firefighting a common mode for responding to strategic challenges.

The high frequency of cycling back often is chalked up to the strategic problem being too complex and difficult for the diverse team to come up with a useful solution. Our research suggests otherwise. We maintain that solving the wrong problem is the outgrowth of giving problem formulation short shrift. Team members tend to focus on the elements that directly affect them, rush to offer solutions, get enmeshed in the politics of which solution to support, and consequently spend little or no time on formulating the problem itself. (See the exhibit “Red Flags of the Rush to Solutions”.)

Our research on executive teams and as well as our interactions with many for-profit as well as not-for-profit organizations suggest that comprehensively formulating strategic problems avoids the pitfall of cycling back and helps teams solve the right problem the first time. We discovered that there is a common set of traps that ensnare teams. The traps keep most teams from comprehensively formulating strategic problems by

Red Flags of the Rush to Solutions

Several warning signs signal when a team might be heading down a path that can lead to solving the wrong problem. Watch for:

- A solution appearing early in the team's meeting
- Meetings consumed by debates over competing solutions
- A small number of team members dominating conversation
- Absence of participation in discussions
- Eagerness to adjourn meetings
- Few team members asking “What problem are we trying to solve?”
- Emotional commitment to a particular solution
- Conflict among team members

limiting the information exchanged by team members, causing the team to talk past one another breeding conflict and distrust, and encouraging politically-determined outcomes.

The good news is that the three traps can be overcome so that teams can solve the “right” problem the first time. As an initial step, the team must commit to investing more time than usual to comprehensively formulate the problem before moving onto solving it. While necessary, spending more time on problem formulation is only one piece of the puzzle. Overcoming the traps requires following a process that disciplines teams to overcome limited information exchange, talking past each other, and politics. This article describes the three primary traps that cause teams to cycle back because they solved the wrong problem. It also introduces and describes a *Strategic Problem Formulation Process*, and how to use it, so that teams can overcome these traps and solve the right problems.

Responding to Strategic Challenges

Addressing strategic challenges are the *raison d’être* of the executive suite. Challenges are strategic when they are complex and ill-structured, which means that they have many moving parts and that there is no existing recipe that can be pulled from the shelf to provide a solution. Several decades ago it was not unusual for organizations to face at least a couple of strategic challenges a year. With the quickening pace of product development, global interconnectedness and competition, and changes in the business environment, strategic challenges today are likely to arrive in the executive suite with even greater frequency.

Because no one person is likely to have the knowledge and information needed to work through these strategic challenges, leaders assemble teams of executives who, together, are more likely to possess knowledge and information needed to tackle the challenge. For instance, consider a mid-size firm that provides baked products to supermarkets in the Southeast. The firm faced responding to a severe and extraordinary ice storm that not only shut down supermarkets in three states for days but also shut down the firm’s manufacturing facilities and supply and distribution chains. Their complex strategic challenge was how to jump-start their supply and distribution chains and manufacturing to literally keep bread on the shelves and to stave off a run on food stores. Because of the situation’s complexity, the leader pulled together a team of executives from each function within the firm.

We have explored what typically happens during the initial meetings of these cross-functional teams. The reports are surprisingly consistent in retelling a common sequence of events. Early in the first meeting someone throws out a solution to the situation. Some team members will quickly become devil’s advocates pointing out the solution’s shortcoming and pitch competing solutions reflecting their own priorities, which typically creates much tension in the group. Other team members acquiesce quickly because the issue is of little importance to them.

The first meeting usually ends with emotions running high, the group partitioned into competing coalitions formed around different solutions, and little agreement on next steps. For instance, the emergency meeting of the baked goods manufacturer quickly devolved into

solutions reflecting only each function's narrow focus. With much discord and limited resources, the team lost sight of, or perhaps never had a comprehensive view of, the complex problem they collectively faced.

In less time-sensitive situations, most executives describe how over the ensuing days and weeks after the first meeting, one coalition is able to garner sufficient political support to move ahead and begin implementing their solution. Those team members that continue to disagree either “wash their hands” of the solution or undermine implementation efforts by continuing to push for the implementation of their own solutions. In many situations, it eventually becomes apparent that although the solution being implemented may solve one symptom of the problem, the root cause remains unaddressed and the team must cycle back to formulation. This familiar cycle can easily play out over and over again at great cost to the organization.

To anchor the problem of cycling and its performance implications we turn to a high profile and well-known team that profoundly impacted the global economy for many years to come. The team of Henry Paulson, Ben Bernanke, and Timothy Geithner and their response to the financial crisis offers a striking illustration of cycling back. While more time must pass before their responses to the crisis can be fully evaluated in the context of history, numerous questions arise about when and whether they solved the right problem.

The first signs of crisis appeared in February 2007, when HSBC and the Federal Loan Mortgage Corporation (Freddie-Mac), which required support from the U.S. Treasury, posted large losses from the U.S. sub-prime mortgage market. Bernanke in May of that year announced that the “growing number of mortgage defaults will not seriously harm the U.S. economy,” implicitly suggesting that the team formulated the challenge primarily as a small problem that was limited to a narrow segment of the mortgage market. The formulation led Paulson, with the backing of President Bush, to create dialogue between lenders, the government, and homeowners to stem the tide of foreclosures.

Although the symptoms were temporarily diminished, the root cause was apparently not addressed as by early 2008 the problem was reformulated as one that had the potential for economy-wide effects. Based on this reformulation, Bernanke argued for stimulating the economy, which ultimately translated in to a one-time tax rebate of several thousand dollars to most taxpayers. Upon reflection, few would argue that the stimulus comprehensively tackled a root cause.

The failure of Bear Stearns, and the signs that failure was imminent for prominent financial institutions such as Lehman Brothers, AIG, and Merrill Lynch led to another substantial reformulation of the problem and thus a fundamental shift in potential solutions. The team now asserted that the entire financial system was in jeopardy. On September 18th, Paulson argued that the meltdown principally was due to a *liquidity* problem within the banking system and requested \$700 billion dollars to purchase firms and assets that were in jeopardy because of the financial crisis. Summing it up, Ben Bernanke stated that “purchasing impaired assets will create liquidity and promote price discovery in the markets for these assets, while reducing investor uncertainty about the current value and prospects of financial institutions.”

Even this reformulation and resulting solution had its doubters and was revisited by the team. In a Wall Street Journal editorial, Charles Schumer, senator from New York, asked if the key issue was a liquidity problem or a *solvency* problem. On the same editorial page Bernanke claimed that the “root of the problem is a *loss in confidence* by investors and the public in the strength of key financial institutions and markets.” Letters to the editor asserted that the problem is still-falling housing prices and individuals defaulting on their mortgages, which were the reasons stated by retired Federal Reserve head Alan Greenspan and FDIC Chairperson Shelia Bair.

The difficulties and recycling exhibited by the Paulson team fit the common sequence of solving the wrong problem. The team tackled a complex and ill-structured problem for which no ready-made solution existed. Beyond the painful worsening of the financial crisis and loss of morale, the cycling indicates that Paulson’s team did not have a clear way of knowing whether they had solved the right problem and instead appeared to be fighting fires one flare-up at a time each of which required repeated cycling back to reformulate the problem.

Getting problem formulation right is pivotal because it is one of the most significant steps to finding a useful solution. Albert Einstein once noted with respect to scientific endeavors—although it is likely true for business endeavors as well—that, “the formulation of a problem is often more essential than its solution...” For instance, formulating the financial calamity as a liquidity crisis suggests infusing capital into the markets. Paulson proposed the bailout because \$700 B “is a number which we think is big enough to calm markets”, which is a solution directly linked to his formulation of the problem. Like formulating the problem as a liquidity crisis, formulating the challenge as one of sub-prime lending, bank solvency, confidence in the financial system, or the bursting of a real estate bubble and still falling home prices, each formulation recommends its own and very different solution. Identifying singular explanations for the crisis likely contributed to repeatedly cycling back to reformulate the problem and stymied a more comprehensive and immediate response, which very likely substantially worsened the financial crisis.

Traps that Undermine Problem Formulation

What causes teams to solve the wrong strategic problems? Leaders turn to teams in order to tap into a diverse array of information, knowledge, and motivations that can lead to superior solutions. The irony, however, is that research shows it is precisely the existence of this team diversity that sets in motion traps that subvert effective problem formulation.

The traps come from social dynamics that can induce even the best of teams to circumscribe problem formulation and end up solving the wrong problem. We identify three pivotal traps that groups often suffer while addressing strategic problems: the information trap, the knowledge trap, and the motivation trap. The traps are particularly problematic and prevalent during problem formulation. Individually and collectively, the three traps bias, limit, and potentially lead to skipping over problem formulation, resulting, at best, in an incomplete solution, or worse, solving the wrong problem.

The information trap. One promise of assembling a team of executives is that the diversity should allow group members to share their unique information on the many facets of a strategic problem. More information shared among the team eventually should lead to discovering a superior solution. For instance, Paulson's team included senior leaders from the Treasury, the Federal Reserve, and, at various points in time, executives from large banks. Team members likely initially possessed different information about the current state of the financial system and its functioning that, when shared, should have offered a more comprehensive formulation of the crisis.

In reality, research shows that instead of sharing unique information not held in common, a large portion of a group's time is spent communicating common information that everyone already possesses. The information trap arises because it is not always clear what information is useful and needed to characterize and address a complex challenge. As team members begin to share information, only information that is recognized is zeroed in on and discussed further.

The relevance of information that team members don't already know is not easily recognized, which causes members to diminish the importance of unique information or skip over it completely. For instance, because everyone on Paulson's team had a career in banking, studied the banking industry, or regulated banks, it may come as little surprise that most information exchanged among the group also focused on banking even though other information about the crisis, such as on buyers in the real estate market, was important. Exchanging information on banking while diminishing the relevance of other information may have limited the teams' ability to more fully formulate the problem narrowing the set of solutions from which to choose.

The knowledge trap. Another promise of diverse teams is that participants bring varying mental models, perspectives, or experiences to the table that should provide for a more comprehensive understanding of the challenge and lead to a superior solution. For instance, Paulson had years of experience as a deal maker at Goldman Sachs. Bernanke's research career provided him with deep insights about the causes of financial crisis that launched the great depression. Geithner was a career public executive with the Treasury and Federal Reserve Bank of New York. These diverse experiences and knowledge should have enabled the team to look at the crisis from different perspectives providing a more comprehensive formulation of the challenge.

In reality, individuals tend to have tunnel vision anchored narrowly in their own knowledge and perspectives. Learning the perspectives of others and seeing the world through their eyes is more than difficult. For instance, different functional areas and firms may use different words to describe the same concept. Or, they use the same words to describe different concepts. For example, while all team members had banking in common, to what extent was it easy for a former academic, a deal making investment banker, and a career regulator and bureaucrat to communicate complex concepts and integrate their different perspectives? The request for \$700 B from the U.S. government with extraordinarily little guidance on how the funds would be used hints at the possibility that not all perspectives were understood and

incorporated into the proposal. As most executives can attest, talking past each can breed conflict and distrust, which severely narrows and constrains problem formulation as well as finding comprehensive solutions.

The motivation trap. A third promise of teams is that diverse motivations should insure that assorted interests get represented, which should speed implementation once a solution is chosen. For instance, by assembling a team comprised of the heads of the U.S. Treasury and Federal Reserve and the acting President of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, solutions should involve coordinated action from all three agencies.

In reality, diverse motivations that individuals possess frequently morph into one of the most pervasive and problematic aspect of problem formulation, political maneuvering and dominance/acquiescence behavior by group members that narrow and limit solution search and cripple implementation efforts. For instance, group members are often motivated to jump to a solution to receive credit for producing the right answer or because the proposed solution disproportionately benefits themselves or their functional area.

Some team members may have large personalities or more at stake, which cause them to try to dominate the group, while others have little at stake and acquiesce. Alternatively, few are motivated to spend time and effort on the problem and therefore seize the first solution that sounds good. All of these pathologies narrow and limit problem formulation. The motivation trap also amplifies the information and knowledge traps by causing team members to act strategically further stoking conflict and distrust.

It is difficult to know precisely what went on in Paulson's team meetings. Nonetheless, it may be revealing that many of the partial solutions implemented in 2007 and 2008 were principally executed by one government agency or another. More coordination across agencies did not occur until much later in the crisis and even then agencies like FDIC were not included on the team. Consistent with the motivational trap, a variety of reports intimate that Paulson may have played a dominant role in structuring several of the proposed solutions, like the request for \$700 B.

Avoiding the Traps

What can leader do to avoid these traps? Our research and experience suggests that the most effective approach is a structured group process. In this section, we describe a particular process—the Structured Problem Formulation Process—that we have successfully used with numerous for-profit and not-for-profit enterprises. First, let's look at the commitments necessary for launching our process and the details of its 8-steps and then discuss how these steps keep teams from falling into the information, knowledge, and motivation traps. We also provide a case study of how our Strategic Problem Formulation Process enabled an organization to solve the right problem.

Launching the inquiry. Our process has eight steps, a *framing phase* with a series of four steps designed to promote discovery of a comprehensive set of correlated symptoms and a

formulation phase with a series of four steps designed to comprehensively formulate the problem. Before engaging the process, executives must do three things.

The process works best with a facilitator. While the facilitator does not have to be a consultant hired from outside the firm, the facilitator must be neutral and support the process. Our experience suggests that a little training in facilitation as well as in the details of the process can go a long way in supporting the comprehensive formulation of strategic problems.

To begin the process, leadership and the team must commit to it. Because the process is likely to be different from typical approaches to confronting strategic challenges, team members may initially be uncomfortable with an unfamiliar process and can easily revert back to their established routines for running meetings. Initial commitment to the process also gives the facilitator the ability to help the team adhere to the process.

Another necessity is for executives provide an initial symptom with which to anchor and launch the inquiry. (See exhibit “What is a symptom?” for a definition of a symptom.) For instance, an organization desiring to increase its growth rate might identify an initial symptom as “Our ‘breakthroughs’ are few and far between.” A firm facing poor operating performance may launch its inquiry with the observation that “Our quality is lower than the competition’s.” With the three pre-conditions met, the inquiry can be launched.

Framing the Problem. Step 1: The first step in framing the problem is to gain collective agreement from the team on the ground rules. The ground rules prohibit bringing up and discussing any cause or solution during the framing phase because such discussions can trigger political responses, conflict, and distrust. Thus, our ground rules help to avoid the motivation trap. Adhering to the rules, however, is easier said than done because people are so used to jumping to solutions. Here, the use of a facilitator is especially indicated.

Step 2: In this step the team works to locate a *web of symptoms*—a comprehensive set of symptoms that is correlated with the initial symptom that launched the inquiry. To locate the web, we employ a process we call the modified Nominal Group Technique (mNGT). Using the mNGT requires all team members to first silently write down all possible symptoms they believe are correlated with the initial symptom. Data and vignettes that can be called upon to support the correlation also should be noted.

What is a symptom?

A symptom is an indication or piece of evidence of a disorder or opportunity. For instance, low profit growth is a symptom of an underlying problem situation but it is not a root cause. Many other symptoms might be correlated with low profit growth. In much the same way a physician searches for a comprehensive list of symptoms before determining the causes, so too does our process search for a comprehensive set of symptoms before searching for root causes. A challenge is not to confuse a symptom with a cause. A cause is a mechanism that generates the symptom. Distinguishing causes from symptoms is critical to avoiding information, knowledge, and motivation traps.

Once written down, the facilitator asks each team member in a round-robin fashion to reveal and discuss one symptom on their list. The discussion pivots on whether the proposed symptom indeed is correlated to the initial symptom that launched the inquiry. Discussion is prompted by asking: “*What data supports or rejects the correlation to the initial symptom?*” and “*How can we determine the inclusion or rejection of the proposed symptom in our current*

inquiry?” The round robin discussion continues until everyone’s list of potential symptoms is exhausted.

The use of the mNGT reduces the likelihood of all three traps. For instance, writing down correlated symptoms commits individuals to sharing information and knowledge they think might be relevant. This written commitment increases the likelihood that unique information surfaces and reduces the likelihood of acquiescence. The round robin discussion of symptoms also reduces potential dominance by committing to each and every team member the opportunity to voice and explain their information and knowledge, which levels the playing field.

Step 3: Having explored the potential correlated symptoms identified by the team, Step 3 calls for formally writing down the team’s collective web of symptoms, documenting support for the inclusion of each symptom in appendices. It is crucial that the team reaches consensus not only on the web of symptoms but also the wording of the document.

Reaching consensus on the document mitigates the traps in three ways. The document reduces the potential of talking past each other—the knowledge trap—because consensus forces team members to verify that they have a common understanding of the symptoms and the language that describes them. It also serves to subdue the motivation trap by generating a common motivation among the team members—eliminate the symptoms—without the knee-jerk reactions that come with premature discussion of solutions. Finally, with a consensus-based document in hand, any later attempt to politically steer discussions toward a solution that addresses only some of the symptoms (or none at all) is transparent, exposed, and much easier to confront and rectify, which limits the emergence of politics and power plays later in the process, that is, the motivation trap.

Step 4: Distribute the web of symptoms document to a broader set of stakeholders and ask them to evaluate the comprehensiveness of symptoms. In particular, ask the stakeholders to either verify the inclusion of symptoms in the web or provide data or vignettes that would reject or recommend a symptom’s inclusion. It is critical that the verification be based on data or real vignettes and not on opinion. The team must revisit, discuss, and revise the consensus-based document based on any new information and knowledge that they receive from others.

Reaching out to a broader community outside of the team reduces the possibility of “group think” that can emerge from acquiescence created by the motivation trap. It also provides a check on the extent to which unique information or knowledge may have been missed by the group because of information and knowledge traps.

Formulating the Problem. *Steps 5-8.* The four steps of the formulation phase essentially repeat Steps 1-4 with one main exception. While introducing and discussing solutions remains prohibited, the “don’t discuss causes” rule is eliminated in Step 5 so that the team identifies all possible causes—root causes—for one, some, or all of symptoms. Step 5 retains the rule, however, of prohibiting discussion of solutions.

The mNGT in Step 6 therefore asks for the discovery of root causes instead of symptoms as in Step 2. The consensus-based document of Step 7 focuses on documenting the set of causes along with data and vignettes to support the inclusion of the cause, instead of the symptoms as in

Step 3. And, in Step 8, the consensus-based document of causes is shared with a broader set of stakeholders with any comments being discussed and evaluated. (See exhibit “Strategic Problem Formulation Process” for a summary of the process).

Solving the Problem. Our eight-step process improves the comprehensiveness of strategic problem formulation by overcoming the information, knowledge, and motivation traps that ensnare strategic problem solving efforts. With a more comprehensive formulation the right problem is more likely to be found along with a more comprehensive solution that addresses all of the symptoms and causes. For an illustration of how one firm used this process to respond to their strategic challenge, see exhibit “How an International Consumer Products Organization Formulated Their Strategic Challenge.”

An obvious aspect of our process is that it does take time for teams to work through the process. Indeed, the fastest we have been able to implement each phase with an organization is half a day. By taking the framing, formulation, and solution phases together, the fastest the process can be executed is probably within a day and a half. But even this estimate does not take into account the need to give stakeholders time for responding to the consensus-based documents. We have found that it is useful to spread out the phases so that the team has time to reach consensus on the documents summarizing the web of symptoms and causes and to give stakeholders a chance to respond to them.

While its length may cause some concern about using the process, we have discovered several factors that compensate for the time spent on problem formulation. Executives report that comprehensively formulating strategic challenges helps solve the right problem the first time, thus eliminating cycling back, which is very costly and time consuming. As Ben Franklin made famous, an ounce of prevention (solving the right problem) is worth a pound of cure (repeated cycling back and firefighting).

Just as important, the process speeds implementation efforts. Implementation is mostly likely to be smooth when team members were initially drawn from those units ultimately involved in implementing solutions. Thus, the reward for spending more time on formulation is that it not only increases the likelihood of coming up with a solution that solves the right problem the first time but also accelerates implementation efforts once a solution has been found.

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Getting strategic problem formulation right is decisive, as it is one of the most significant determinants of the value your team can create. An incomplete formulation can lead to solving the wrong problem and inviting implementation difficulties as stakeholders question a solution’s validity and legitimacy.

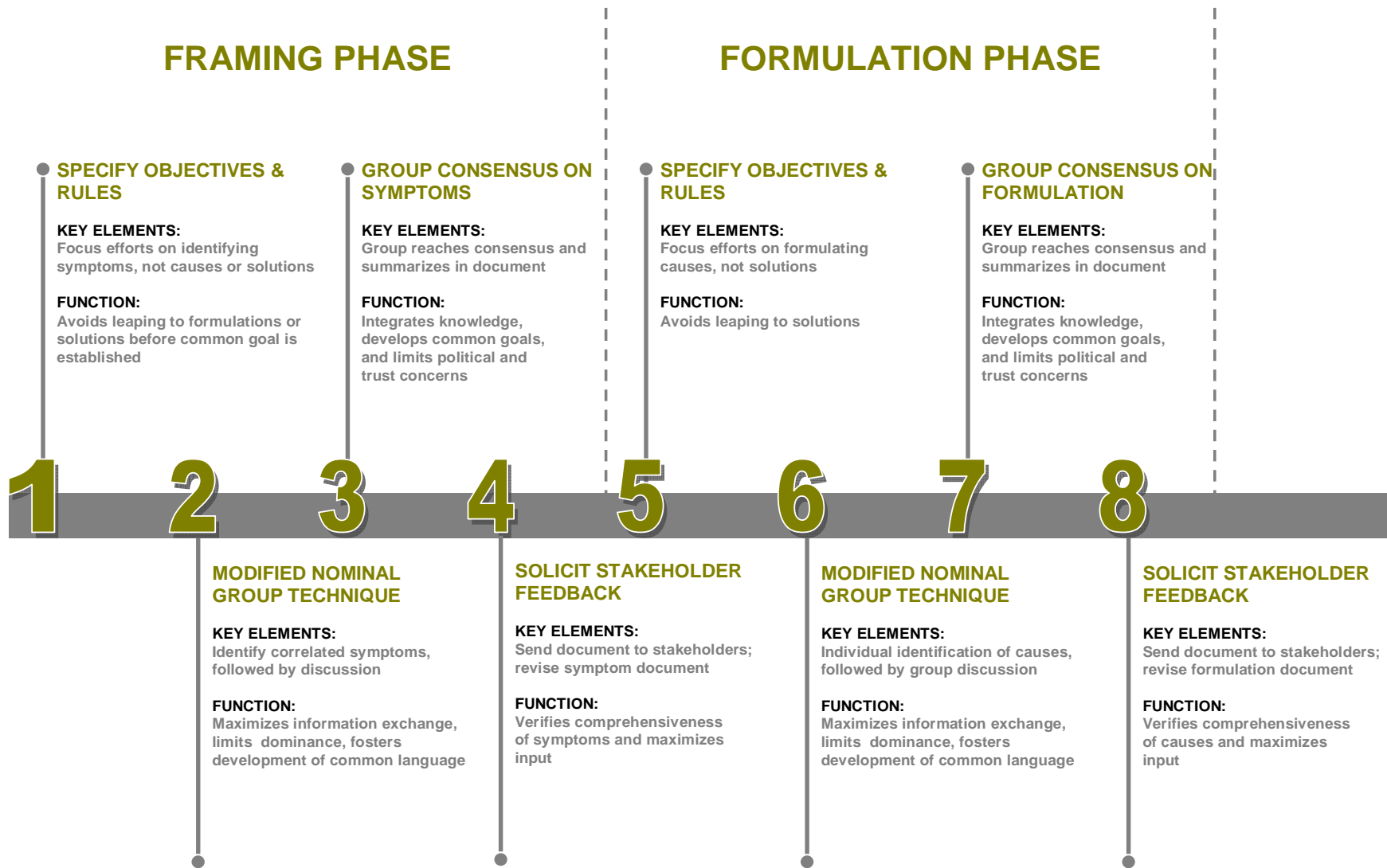
When should you use the Strategic Problem Formulation Process? We recommend reserving the process for those challenges that are complex, ill-structured, and important to your organization. The process is unlikely to justify its opportunity cost for those challenges that are relatively simple or for which a ready-made solution knowingly exists.

It is important to emphasize that implementing the process does come with its challenges. Launching the inquiry does require making a commitment to the process and choosing the team with an eye toward both information and knowledge needs and also later implementation efforts.

We have implemented the process with several organizations and learned that the process is workable for groups up to about 15 people in size. Beyond this threshold, we have found it useful to run groups in parallel, sharing the consensus-based documents on symptoms and causes across the groups for feedback before moving on to the next phase. No matter the size of the team, selecting a neutral facilitator who reinforces the process steps and its rules will pay handsome dividends.

Solving the right problem has largely been an art instead of a science. Indeed, it may have been the absence of research on problem formulation that may be blamed for the endemic recycling of most teams and organizations. Adopting the Strategic Problem Formulation Process offers an important shift from of an art to more of a science for solving the right problem.

Strategic Problem Formulation Process



How an International Consumer Products Organization Formulated Their Strategic Challenge

A successful international consumer products division of a global corporation faced a strategic challenge. Over the prior decade, division profits achieved steady but moderate profit growth largely by renewing its established products. The division was known for having a stable and dedicated workforce and maintaining an extraordinary high level of capacity utilization with plants as well as with people. Yet this successful division was handed a new corporate dictate to more than double its growth rate.

When asked how they would achieve this growth, senior executives were flummoxed. Increasing innovation was obviously the path forward but how to shift the organization's gears and accelerate was not clear. "In the past we've tried everything to increase our rate of innovation" responded one senior leader in exasperation. Prior attempts of introducing a suggestion box, creating a business development group, providing awards for innovators, as well as other changes, had little effect on moving the needle. And, initial discussions with many managers indicated no agreement on either the causes that inhibited a faster innovation rate or a course of action to accelerate it. Management's challenge was complex and unstructured and certainly strategic, not only for the organization but also for its leaders. How could they find a way to respond to the dictate?

Instead of their typical approach, which was to discuss the challenge only among its most senior executive team, the leadership adopted our Strategic Problem Formulation Process. Given prior attempts to increase the rate of innovation, initial expectations about finding new solutions were not high. Indeed, the division president indicated that "I don't think much will come out of this activity but it might be useful to stimulate thinking among my managers." The division's leadership committed to following the process.

Several parallel teams were assembled of five to eight members. Team composition was intentionally chosen to be diverse bringing together managers from marketing, sales, operations, research and development, and human resources. The five symptoms division leadership felt may be connected to limiting their rate of innovation were: "Our 'breakthroughs' are few and far between," "We hire people like us," "We don't create cross-functional career paths," "We get paid to do the same thing year after year," and "Our work environment feels tradition bound and visually unexciting." Each team was assigned one of the five initial symptoms.

Although the teams launched their inquiries with different initial symptoms, they were stunned to learn that all teams essentially discovered a nearly identical web of symptoms. Similarly, the teams arrived at nearly identical problem formulations. For instance, one group was assigned the symptom of "Our 'breakthroughs' are few and far between." The left column of Figure 1 identifies the web of symptoms this group arrived at during the framing phase. The right column describes the causes the group found during the formulation phase. Arrows in Figure 1 highlight the complex nature of these inter-relationships. Almost every symptom is generated by multiple causes. The complexity suggests that implementing solutions that address one or even several causes may not eliminate the symptoms. Because of the complexity found in Figure 1, executives realized how prior attempts to become more innovative were, in retrospect, piecemeal and unlikely to achieve success on their own.

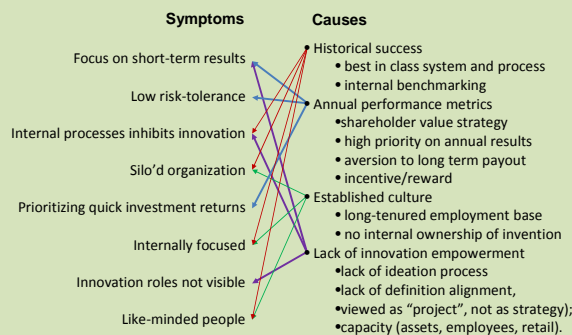


Figure 1: Complex mapping of causes to symptoms

With a comprehensive formulation in hand, the teams brainstormed solutions capable of addressing the identified symptoms and causes. Although the formulation process is designed for framing and formulating problems, the teams used the same process for discovering solutions. Every solution was evaluated by assessing whether the solution addressed one or more causes and therefore whether it would eliminate the symptoms. While the solutions are proprietary to the consumer products division, leadership offered a couple of observations about the value of the process.

Where the division president had "tried everything" to increase innovation and initially thought not much would come out of the process, in hearing the teams' solutions he immediately committed to implementing about 80% of the solutions recommended. Moreover, he promised to launch two new teams to study how to follow through with the remaining recommendations because implementation issues remained. A benefit unanticipated by management was that the process lead to a group of managers who were engaged and ready to accelerate implementation because the solutions were not just management's, but their own.