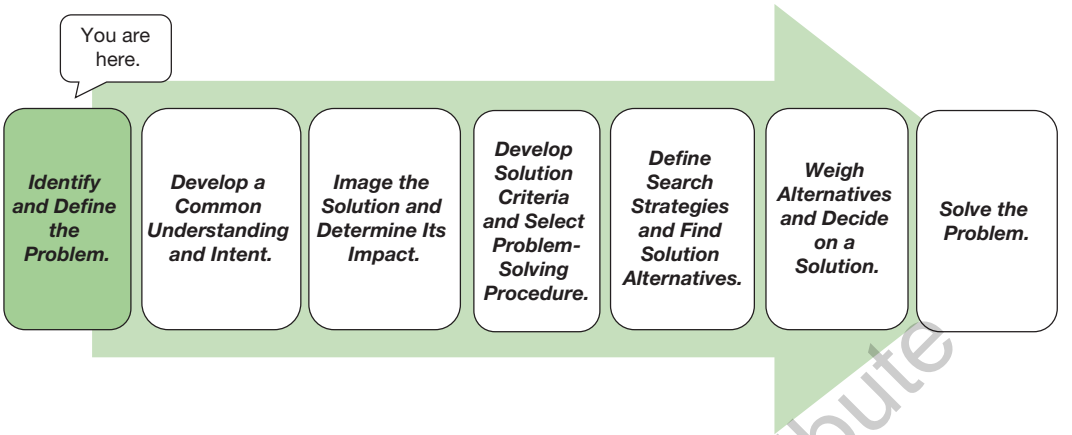


CHAPTER 2

Identify and Define the Problem

A problem well stated is a problem half solved.

—Charles Kettering (1920–1947)

Most workday events and interactions happen without becoming problems, issues to solve. The majority of these situations are recognized, analyzed, and solved routinely. Difficulties arise when the results expected or required from an interaction do not materialize. A disconnect occurs. "That didn't work." "That didn't turn out the way it should have." What is the next course of action? How can the situation be rethought and reconfigured to produce the intended result? This is the point where a problem is recognized.

As stated in Chapter 1, a formal problem-solving process is "*a conscious act where an individual or group chooses to engage in a rational process of inquiry to examine, analyze, deliberate, and make a reasoned decision to address a situation in need of resolution.*" This chapter addresses the first step in that process, identifying and defining the problem. The chapter describes the four tasks required to build a sound definition of the problem. It also describes some of the common errors made that prevent a problem from being correctly identified and defined.

When a situation is recognized as a problem, it triggers a new awareness. Reflective leaders stop and take a hard look at what occurred. What does it represent? Is it an opportunity or a threat? How powerful is it? Where is it coming from? Who does it concern? Who

can address it? How much do we know about it? Leaders, good at problem solving, know making a quality decision begins with properly identifying the problem.

Being observant and reflective are the secrets to successfully finding and identifying problems in schools. Successful leaders problem solve by walking around. They find time to be present in their schools. A very important element of being present is looking and listening for the disconnect. Being present requires the leader to be reflective. Know what should be. Look and listen to discover what is. Look for the difference. Be proactive. Try to find problems before or as they occur. Reflecting on workplace actions is simple; just ask these two questions: What is happening? What should be happening? The answers provide the information necessary to identify potential problems.

Sounds simple, but the proverbial devil is indeed in the details. The following describe some of the major mistakes made that prevent problems from being discovered and defined.

Foibles and Fumbles When Defining a Problem

This Is the Way We Always Do It

In most school settings, the staff's handling of workday problems is on autopilot. They tend to do what has been done before. Here is a simple example. A number of faculty members are complaining that regular schoolwide meetings are taking too long. When reviewing past agendas, a vice principal finds departmental oral reports occupy a third of the meeting time, lasting an hour or more. Analysis shows placing this information online seems a better option. When recommending the adjustment to the leadership, the request is denied. "It's a tradition, and we like it the way it is," was the response. Problem not solved.

In many cases, the strategy of "this is the way we always do it" can work. In cases where it can't work, the old fix is sometimes applied anyway. More often than not, a solution chosen in this way is so misaligned that it results in a bigger problem. In the case of the long-meeting problem, not only was there a failure to address the problem, the length of the schoolwide meeting, but maintaining the status quo probably angered a number of faculty members and discouraged the vice principal from pursuing problems in the future.

I Got It. I Got It. I Missed It

Sometimes, leaders take the superstar approach; they rush headlong into solving problems before really having a grasp of the situation. The administrator is eager to serve. A prominent parent complains that Teacher X is giving far too much homework. The administrator tells the

parent the teacher will be talked to, and the homework burden will be reduced. Oops.

Thoughtful leaders stop and think. Remember Alexander Pope's admonition back around 1711, "Fools rush in, where angels fear to tread."

The Sky Is Falling

All school problems are personal at some level. When confronted by a problem, a human's first reaction isn't rational; it's emotional. Rather than addressing the problem straightaway, the inexperienced administrator succumbs to the initial feelings of fear, anger, or dread and reacts from an emotional place. The response is neither rational nor reasonable. Typically knee-jerk reactions, these responses are generally clumsy and defensive. Such responses do not identify the problem rationally and usually create additional problems. Emotional reactions create emotional responses, not rational ones.

Too Hot to Handle

Some problems that surface can be potential career enders, expose human error or incompetence, or demonstrate organizational ineptitude. Dealing with such problems is always uncomfortable and disconcerting. However, a grievous error is made when the problem is not addressed in a straightforward, honest fashion. Some leaders find ways to hide the problem. Others find ways to reframe the problem to divert attention from the real issue. Solving a problem under fake pretenses allows the problem to fester unabated. The seasoned leader knows that when difficult problems arise, real leadership requires doing the right thing regardless of its consequences.

Consider this example: An assistant principal has the town mayor's son in the office. A teacher found the young man in possession of six ounces of marijuana and reports he was caught while trying to sell it. Just as the assistant principal is about to address the problem, the phone rings; the mayor is on the line. The problem just got bigger. It's time to do the right thing.

Ignorance Is Bliss

A principal is deep in thought. This series of workshops has to get it right. Her administrative assistant enters with a pile of papers in his hand. The evaluative reports for three major federal projects are due in four days. Looking up, the principal says, "Thanks for the reminder; you can fill them out. I can't be interrupted. I am sure you'll do a great job."

This leader is seeing this problem as what one friend called "administrivia." Administrivia problems are either ignored or handed off by

choosing to be oblivious to the situation. In such cases, these leaders do possibly the worst thing a leader can do—nothing.

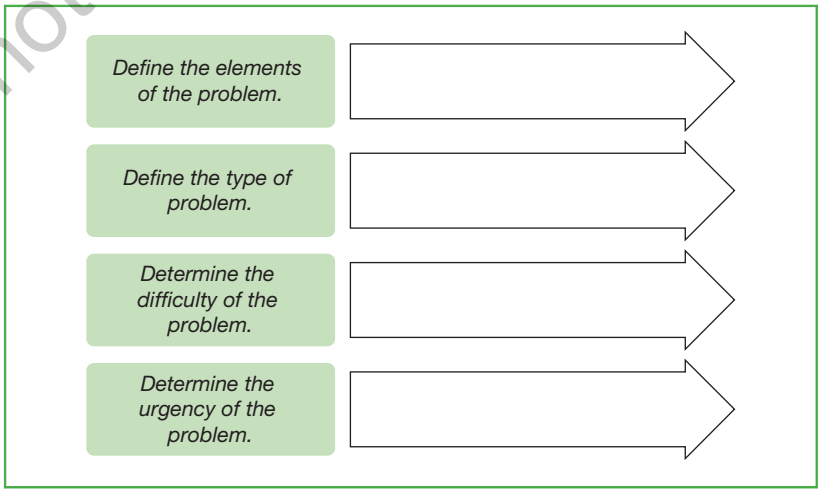
Other leaders lack the expertise to address certain issues. Rather than asking for help, they muddle their way through the problem and hope it goes away. Such behaviors either allow the problem to move freely in the organization, becoming far more serious, or at best, they are ineffectively dealt with. If leaders snub an issue, simple problems become complicated ones. Skipping a problem delays the inevitable more difficult situation. Successful leaders know they are responsible for all school problems, regardless of their type or origin. They are also aware when they don't have the expertise to address the problem, and they find that expertise. Collaboration is an essential part of problem solving. Delegation is as well. However, remember when a task is delegated, the responsibility still remains with the leader. Not knowing what you don't know is not bliss but a potential threat.

While the previous discussion highlights some more common and troublesome errors made when confronting and identifying a problem, many others could be included as well. A surefire way of avoiding these errors and omissions is to use the following four-step procedure when identifying and defining a workplace problem.

Putting It All Together: Defining the Problem

A good problem definition is composed of four parts, a description of the situation, its type, its level of difficulty, and the urgency to solve it.

Figure 2.1 Defining a Workplace Problem



As shown in Figure 2.1, building a sound problem definition is not complicated. It begins by describing those things that make up the problem's particulars. Once described, the problem's type is identified, be it a deficiency, improvement, opportunity, or new venture. The difficulty of the problem is evaluated based on what is known about the problem and its possible solution. Finally, the urgency to attend to the problem is considered. These four pieces make up a sound problem definition. The following explains each one in turn.

Task 1: Define the Elements of a Problem

When defining the problem's particular properties, the description should be accurate, explicit, concise, and understandable.

1. Accurate means all parts of the problem are included.
2. When explicit, the elements are clearly described in detail.
3. Concise means being expressed in as few words as possible.
4. Lastly, each statement must be understandable using clear, simple language and avoiding any ambiguity. Technical words, synonyms, vague terms, and esoteric vocabulary should be avoided.

The following are examples of strong and weak descriptions of a simple problem many of us have confronted in schools.

- Kindergarten teachers and school aides have reported the morning drop-off of kindergarten students is disorderly. Similar to two years ago, parents are not following procedures and are arriving late. The traffic backup and double parking by kindergarten parents is causing safety problems in the schools drop-off zones. Additionally, drop-off is taking too much time, causing some kindergartners to be late to class.
- Teachers have reported that there is a problem with the morning student drop-offs.

The first definition provides the detailed information necessary to allow a problem-solving team to move forward with a good understanding of the problem. That cannot be said about the second statement.

Vantage point and perspective also come into play. Most problem descriptions and definitions are subjective in nature. An accurate portrayal of the problem is far more likely when the problem is defined from multiple perspectives and different vantage points. The first is

viewing the problem from below or as this perspective is fondly known, from "in the trenches," the teacher's view. The second is the middle, the perspective as counselors and coordinators may see it. Finally, from the top, as administrators might see the problem. These viewpoints can differ greatly and provide important insights on the issue. While each member observes the same thing, they often see it differently. The same idea holds true when viewing from inside the organization versus viewing it from the outside. While a school faculty may view a problem one way, the parents and community may see different pictures.

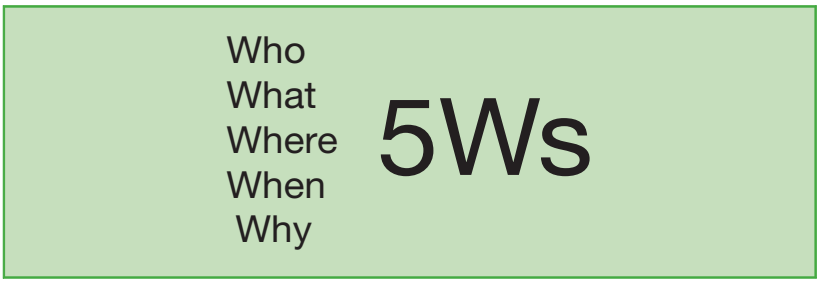
Vantage points also provide a different view of the problem. Proximity to the problem can provide a different picture of what is being seen. If the observer is at Ground Zero, he or she sees all of the particulars. Individuals who are observing from a distance, while not seeing the particulars, will see the context surrounding the problem. A close vantage point sees the trees. A distant vantage point sees the forest. The inclusion of various vantage points and perspectives is important when problems are complex.

Remember the lesson memorialized in the poem "The Six Blind Men and the Elephant," by John Godfrey Saxe. As the poem goes, each of the blind men is given the task of defining the elephant. The most important line in poem tells the tale, "*Though each was partly in the right/And all were in the wrong!*" While each blind man was right, it was only when they combined their descriptions that the elephant was properly described. Vantage points and perspectives provide reference points that form a comprehensive depiction providing more accuracy and specificity to the problem description. As a bonus, when each member's observation is integrated into the problem definition, the group comes closer to a common understanding of the situation. This idea is critical, since everyone should be attempting to solve the entire problem and not just a part they perceive. Figure out the both/and, not the either/or.

Theoretical Connections

The theoretical foundation for this section is found in the discipline of philosophy, specifically in the areas of argumentation and reasoning. The problem properties are applied adaptations of the concepts presented in Wayne Booth, Gregory Columb, and Joseph Williams et al. (2016), *The Craft of Research*. The conceptual basis for Step 1 is founded on the principles of reasoning. The text *An Introductions to Reasoning* (1984) by Stephen Toulmin, Richard D. Rieke, and Allan Janik, provides an excellent overview of the principles of argumentation.

Figure 2.2 Describing the Elements of the Problem



Task. Define and Describe the Elements of the Problem.
Define the elements of the problem by using the 5Ws (see Figure 2.2). Remember, it's critically important to get multiple vantage points and perspectives when creating a problem's definition.

TASK CUE CARD

- *Desired Outcome*: A well delineated problem description accurately depicts the who, what, when, where, and why (how) of the situation observed, incorporating the most salient accountings of the members' reporting.
- *Group Organizers:* It is suggested that three Group Organizers be used: The *Whip Around, Brainstorming,* and the *Winnowing Process* (**For an explanation of each Group Organizer, see the glossary**).
- *Your Team Lesson Plan:* Prominently display five flip charts where all members of the group have visual access. Each chart will feature one of the 5Ws. Arrange member chairs in a half circle facing the chart area. As an alternative, you can position round tables, accommodating no more than six people, around the chart area. To begin, brainstorm. Give the members of the group approximately five minutes to consider what the 5Ws describe about the situation in question. At the end of a five-minute period, do a quick thumbs-up to determine who has finished. Ask those still working if they need one or two minutes to complete their work. Once all members are finished, ask them to stretch and come up with two to three more descriptors. Once done, have the group report out the first W—the Who of the problem. Beginning with one member, and then all in succession, ask each member to provide a descriptor of the Who of the problem. Continue *whipping* around the group in succession until all descriptors have been posted on the chart. Conduct the same process for the next four Ws. At the end of this process, ask the group to eliminate duplicates and to combine descriptors where appropriate. Once done, have the scribe or the group develop a written description for each of the Ws using the descriptors posted. You can also use

(Continued)

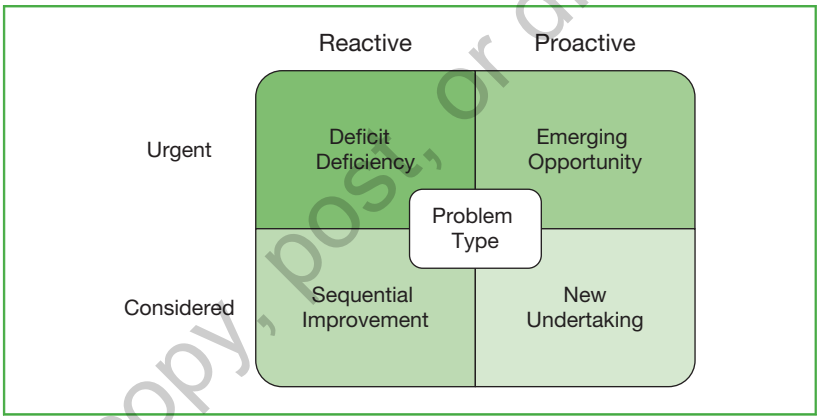
(Continued)

sticky notes as an alternative *Whip Around Process.* Instead of asking each member to state a descriptor in turn, members post their notes on each of the 5W charts after they have completed their brainstorming. Once posted, eliminating and combining descriptors can be conducted. This process should be completed within 20–45 minutes.

Task 2: Define the Type of Problem

Begin to identify the problem by searching for the cause of its novel behavior. Problems that cause unexpected outcomes can be placed into four distinctive types. As seen in Figure 2.3, the types are a deficit or deficiency, an emerging opportunity, sequential improvement, or a new undertaking.

Figure 2.3 Problem Types



The Deficit or Deficiency: A *deficit* is a shortage of something. A *deficiency* occurs when something falls short of expectation or requirement. In both of these situations, the organization is in reactive mode, needing to respond. Usually, there is a certain degree of urgency to address the issue. Examples of deficits in schools are plentiful.

- The principal is informed that school expenditures exceeded the budget allocated, thus creating a deficit.
- A school board is informed that the tax measure designed to meet the inflationary pressures on current school revenues has not passed.
- The school district operating budgets now are in deficit.

Examples of deficiencies are abundant as well.

- The state has published the school's student grade-level scores in reading and mathematics. The third graders are scoring below grade level in reading comprehension.

- The faculty senate has just received a report. Based on the college's entry assessment batteries, 50% of the incoming freshmen are performing below acceptable standards for entry into English 1A.

Sequential Improvement: Sequential improvement problems occur when, based on observation and assessment, better results and outcomes can be produced by making a change in a current process or condition. By doing so, a procedure becomes more responsive, or a better outcome is realized.

Here are two examples of sequential improvement problems.

- After research, the school's primary grades teaching faculty find if they integrate an enhanced phonics teaching strategy into the curriculum, it will substantially increase the reading performance of their second-grade male students.
- The counseling staff of a high school is recommending an online class be implemented for use in spring scheduling. Data suggest implementing this program will reduce scheduling errors by 10% and complete the process in two weeks less time.

Emerging Opportunity: Problems fitting this category are situations where conditions or circumstances are present that, if acted upon, will produce a benefit or advantage for the organization. In many cases, these opportunities are only available for a limited period of time.

- Grants are good examples of an emerging opportunity. An elementary principal has been notified that grant opportunities are available for reading improvement initiatives.
- The dean has been informed that with quick action, the recruitment of 40 new candidates for the college's master's program is almost a sure thing.

New Undertaking. The new undertaking problem is the building of an enterprise that does not currently exist in the organization. Usually, it is the organization's first experience with such a venture. The potential benefits gained from careful planning would be exceptional. The venture would add new capabilities and capacity. Here are a couple of examples of a new undertaking problem.

- Demographics suggest adding a PreK program to the school schedule will increase overall enrollment. Additionally, adding this program to the school's offerings will increase overall school revenues.
- The high school leadership council has determined the school's academic program will be greatly enhanced by adding an International Baccalaureate program to the curriculum.

Theoretical Connections

The problem types model described is adapted from the widely used classification of business problems: **shortfall, opportunity, improvement,** and **new venture**.

Task. Define and Describe the Impact of the Problem on the Organization. Classifying the situation's impact gives leaders a sense how to respond to solve the problem. Identifying the problem's impact also begins to produce an understanding of the problem's potency and urgency.

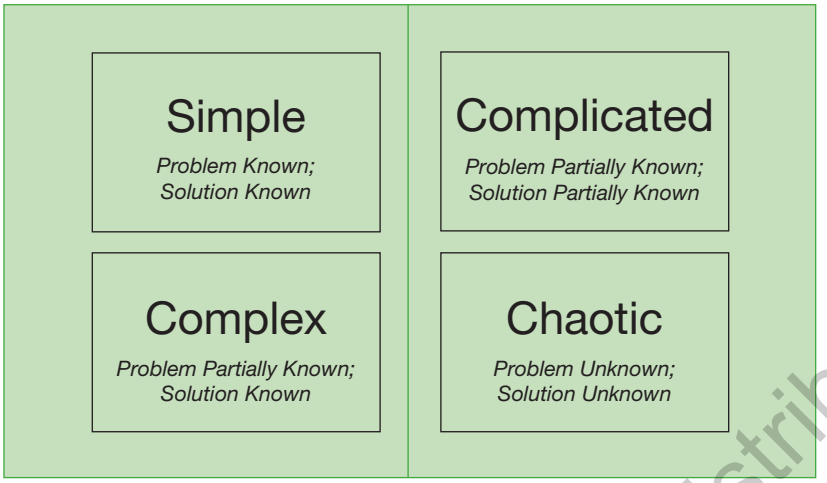
TASK CUE CARD

- *Desired Outcome:* The group should have a common understanding of the impact the situation presents to the organization.
- *Group Organizers:* Two Group Organizers are used here, the *Thumbs-Up Process* and the *Winnowing Process.*
- *Your Team Lesson Plan:* The group now has a sound description of the problem in hand. Place a copy of Figure 2.3 on a flipchart or whiteboard. Review the definition for each impact type shown on the chart. Ask the group members if anyone needs clarification of the definitions presented. Respond as necessary. Once the group has an understanding of the types, ask them to identify the problem's impact using a *Thumbs-Up* process. If all members are in agreement as to the choice, proceed to noting the reasons for the choice. If members are not in agreement, have each member state the reason for their individual choice and list those choices on the flipcharts or whiteboard by impact type. When listings are completed, have the group review the rationale for each type and select the best reasonable choice. Estimated time to complete this task is 5–15 minutes.

Task 3: Determine the Difficulty of the Problem

Having described and defined the type of problem being faced, determine its difficulty based on what is known about it.

Figure 2.4 Classifying the Difficulty of Problem



Source: Adapted from the Cynefin Framework (2003), Cynthia Kurtz and Dave Snowden.

Cynthia Kurtz and Dave Snowden of IBM created the best model for classifying problem knowability. A problem's difficulty is based on what is known about it and what is known about its solution. The more known about a problem and its solution, the less difficult it is to solve. The less known, the more difficult the problem will be to solve. The *Cynefin Framework*, as they named it, categorizes problem types from the simple to the chaotic, based on each problem's order, ambiguity, and the available knowledge of it. Four in number, the classifications are simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic. *Simple* and *complicated* problems have consistent and replicative elements. *Complex* and *chaotic* problems are dynamic and have elements that are novel and changing.

Static Problems: The term *static* means regular and stable. Static problems are commonly known about and have predictable solutions. Their elements are formed like machinery, where problem parts can be interchanged and also improved. The vast number of solutions for the static problem can be adopted from a selection of previously known alternatives. Dealing with the kindergarten drop-off and pickup que is an example of a static problem.

Changing Problems. *Changing problems* are ones where their environments are in flux and/or where the problem properties are in disorder. The evolution and movement of these problems are ill defined. The solutions for *changing problems* are not normally found by adopting previous solution alternatives but are dependent on solutions that adapt to a new environment or circumstance. Staffing levels are an

example of a dynamic situation dependent on student enrollment and budget allocations. An influenza outbreak is a great example of the dynamism of a chaotic situation. Given an understanding the general behavior of the four problem types, the following examines each type in turn.

The Simple Problem. To begin, a simple problem is a well-known, familiar issue. Once identified and defined, present knowledge, guidelines, processes, and procedures are readily in place to address and resolve it. Some adjustments to the solution are based on improving past solutions. The simple problem is straightforward and linear. First, do Step 1, then Step 2, and so on.

Here are some examples of a simple problem:

- It is spring time. The high school vice principal needs to determine the class offerings for next year and develop a process for creating a student class schedule for the coming year.
- Parent–teacher night is scheduled to occur in four weeks. The principal needs to develop a program that maximizes the positive interaction between teachers and parents.
- The college dean needs to develop the graduation day program for the college.

Each of these examples portrays a problem easily identified, previously defined, and having solutions readily available.

The *complicated problem* has knowable parts as well. The difference between the complicated and the simple problem is that while the parts of the complicated problem are knowable, one or more of those parts are not knowable. So in order to adequately identify, define, and solve this problem, leadership must find, consult, and perhaps collaborate with those who are familiar with the currently unknown parts.

Here are some examples of a complicated problem:

- Detecting recent deficiencies in student learning, the faculty wishes to broaden its instructional strategies. The school principal brings in a curriculum consultant to assist the relevant faculty members in selecting and becoming proficient in a certain type of instruction to improve student learning.
- Colleges are facing turbulent times. The strategies and programs of the past are not achieving the same results. The faculty has decided to develop a strategic plan. The president or dean seeks out experts

in future forecasting, scenario building, and strategic planning to assist the faculty in program development.

As seen, in both cases, school personnel have generally identified the problem but, due to the lack of in-house knowledge, must seek outside expertise to help them identify, define, and develop processes to solve the problem.

The Complex Problem. A *complex problem* is changing, emerging, and not fully knowable. It is changing because it elements are changing. It is emergent because the problem as observed is not fully formed, and future events can dramatically change its final definition and potential solution. Since the future will form its critical parts, the problem is not fully known. Due to its nature, it is ambiguous and confusing. Depending on its severity, the complex problem can be very volatile. Each of these is dependent upon future events and policy determinations.

Salient examples of the complex problem are the following:

- School closures
- Program course eliminations
- Potential school funding reductions

Chaotic Problems. The *chaotic problem* is the most ambiguous and difficult issue to address. It is not knowable, predictable, or stable. Due to its foreign nature and immediacy, it tends to be highly volatile and often creates a crisis. Being unaware of its true nature, school leadership is usually taken by surprise. The situation is extremely ambiguous and unnerving. The staff has no known associations to identify it, and the problem's dynamics are so irregular it's hard to observe it accurately. While the effects of the problem can be seen, they only offer clues as to what it might be. The perfect example of the chaotic problem is a pandemic like COVID-19. The problem seems to emerge from nowhere; it takes us by surprise; we have no immediate solutions to counteract it; and it can have devastating consequences.

Task. Determine the Difficulty of the Problem.

There is a tendency for groups, having described the problem, to rush and misidentify its difficulty. Impress on the group that recognizing what we know and don't know about the problem helps determine the correct processes to solve it, the time required to obtain that solution, and the difficulty and the urgency to solve it. A misunderstanding of the problem's difficulty leads to a flawed problem-solving process and inappropriate solutions.

TASK CUE CARD

- *Desired Outcome:* The group has determined whether the situation presents a simple, complicated, complex, or chaotic problem.
- *Group Organizers:* Two Group Organizers are used in this plan—*Sticky Notes* and the *Winnowing Process.*
- *Your Team Lesson Plan:* As with the previous step, explain the task and go over the definitions for the types as shown in Figure 2.4. Ask the group to review the results from the first two tasks. Using that information, determine what is currently known about the problem and its potential solution, as well as what is not known about the problem and any possible solution. Allow members sufficient time to note the responses on sticky notes. Once done, have group members post their notes on the appropriate flipchart sheet—Known about the Problem, Unknown about the Problem, Known about the Solution, Unknown about the Solution. Have the scribe or a group member review the posted notes on each chart, eliminate duplicates, and combine similar ideas. Once the charts have been revised, discuss chart contents with the group. Based on the discussion, have the group determine the problem type. The estimated time for this activity is 20–45 minutes.

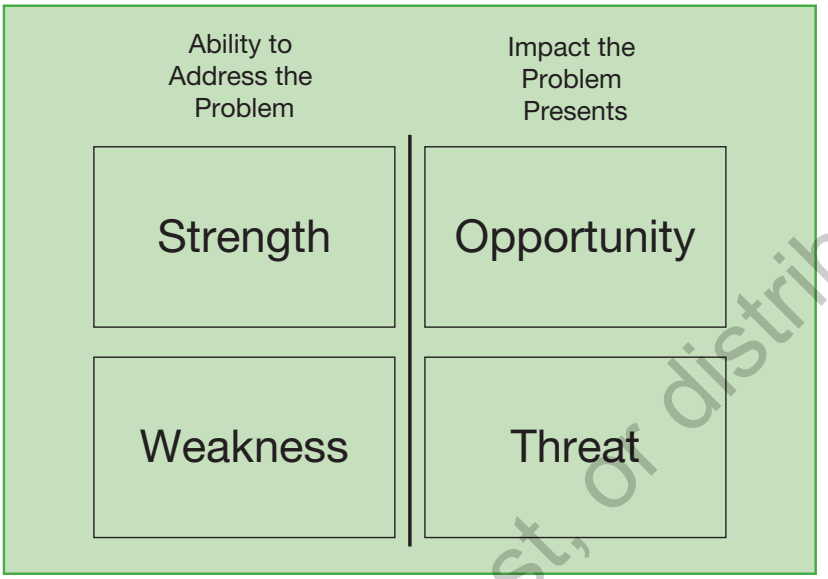
Task 4: Urgency to Solve the Problem: The Strength Weakness Opportunity Threat (SWOT)

A SWOT analysis is principally used to assess a school's overall capability and is generally conducted when staff is strategically planning. In this case, however, the SWOT tool has been adapted to assess a problem's potency and the urgency to solve it.

As can be seen in Figure 2.5, the SWOT looks at the problem's impact and the school's ability to address it. Based on the description of its particulars, classifications, and characteristics, the problem is evaluated based on the opportunity or threat that it poses and the strengths or the weaknesses of the school to address it. If a problem has been assessed to be a threat and the ability to respond to it has been assessed as weak, this problem is likely potent, with a high need to solve. On the other hand, a problem that can be defined as an opportunity, playing into the school's strength, may have less potency and need. This distinction is important to note when using a SWOT to determine the power of a problem. There is

no hard and fast formula, as situations vary. Each problem should be assessed on its definition of specifics and its situation in context to accurately determine the urgency to solve it.

Figure 2.5 Adaptation of a SWOT Analysis



Theoretical Connections

The SWOT concept can be attributed to Albert Humphrey, who first applied the concept in a Stanford research project in the 1960s. The model as used today was first employed by Urick and Orr at the Long Range Planning seminar held in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1964.

Task. Determine the Potency and Urgency of the Problem.
The time span for solving a problem is dependent on the problem's effect on the organization. Explain to the group that external threats to the school and the school's weaknesses are much more critical to solve than perhaps the pursuit of opportunities by the staff. Explain how the SWOT works. Finally, point out to the group that the outcome for this task is to identify the problem's power and the urgency to solve it.

TASK CUE CARD

- *Desired Outcome:* The potency and urgency to solve the problem are identified.
- *Group Organizers: The Whip Around* and *Consensus Process* are the Group Organizers used here.
- *Your Team Lesson Plan:* Present Figure 2.5—SWOT—to the group. Explain each quadrant. Then ask the group members to examine the accumulated information about the problem.
- Once the members have had sufficient time to understand the information, do a *Whip Around* of the group members. Have each member state whether the problem is an opportunity or threat to the school and whether the staff's response would come from weakness or strength.
- Tally the responses. If the group is in agreement, proceed to the next task. If members have differences of opinion, facilitate a common understanding by the group.
- The estimated time to complete this task is 5–15 minutes.

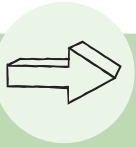
Creating the Written Definition

Task. Compose a Written Definition and Description of the Problem. Up to this point, the group has accumulated important information about the "what" and "how" of the problem. Now the acquired information will be organized to compose an inclusive and accurate written statement defining and describing the problem.

TASK CUE CARD

- *Desired Outcome:* A written statement defining and describing the problem.
- *Group Organizers:* Two Group Organizers are used for this task—The *Clarification Process* and *Consensus Process.*

- *Your Team Lesson Plan:* Appoint or have the group select a writing team of two or three of its members to compose the problem statement. The writing team is given all of the information accumulated in the previous tasks. Provide a sufficient amount of time for the writing team to compose the problem statement. Once completed, have the writing team present the statement to the group. Post the written statement on the flipchart. Make sure it is easily read by the entire group. Provide time for the group to ask questions for clarification. Once completed, ask for amendments to the statement. Incorporate accepted amendments, and finalize the statement. The estimated time for the group to review the written statement is 15–20 minutes. This does not include the time required for writing the statement.



Consider This . . .

Identifying and defining a problem well is the foundation to successful problem solving. Any builder will tell you, an error in a building's foundation creates errors throughout the entire project. So too with problem solving. Building a strong foundation begins by clearly identifying a situation needing attention. Leaders experienced in problem solving have learned to be reflective, constantly asking two questions: What is? and What should be? They practice problem solving by walking around, seeking to uncover and anticipate problems in a proactive manner.

Successful problem solvers avoid the common errors in identifying and defining problems. They stop and think: They engage others as necessary, and they examine the situation from many vantage points and perspectives. They are rational in their thinking, addressing the problem straight on.

A strong problem definition is built on four pillars: the description of the situation, the type of problem it represents, its difficulty to solve, and the urgency to solve it. When leaders and problem-solving groups address each of these elements in turn, they are able to develop a clear and comprehensive definition of a problem.

Before leaving this chapter, some sage advice for the neophyte school leader. When identifying and defining problems remember the following: Don't fly solo, and look before you leap.