Specific Problem Statement (SMART)

Benefits at a glance….

- structured approach to clarifying problems and setting clear objectives
- understand the real problem before tackling it
- uses 'SMART' to identify

What is it?

SMART is an acronym used when creating objectives to define a set of criteria that are easy to understand and to know when they have been fulfilled.

Applied to the problem:

- **Specific** – target a specific area for improvement
- **Measurable** – quantify or show an indicator of progress

Applied to the ideal state:

- **Achievable** – they need to be agreed, to be attainable and able to be implemented
- **Realistic** – states what results can realistically be achieved, given available resources
- **Time-bound** - there need to be deadlines, but are they reasonable?

So the **Problem Statement** is a simple sentence that contains the problem but no causes or solutions and to be a **SMart Problem Statement** it needs to be **Specific** and **Measurable** and clearly say "what's wrong with what, how much and so what'.

When to use it?

We create a **Specific Problem Statement** when we want to gain clarity about what it is that we actually want to improve. This is the first step in the Focus ***Creative Problem Solving (CPS)*** process as illustrated in the figure below.

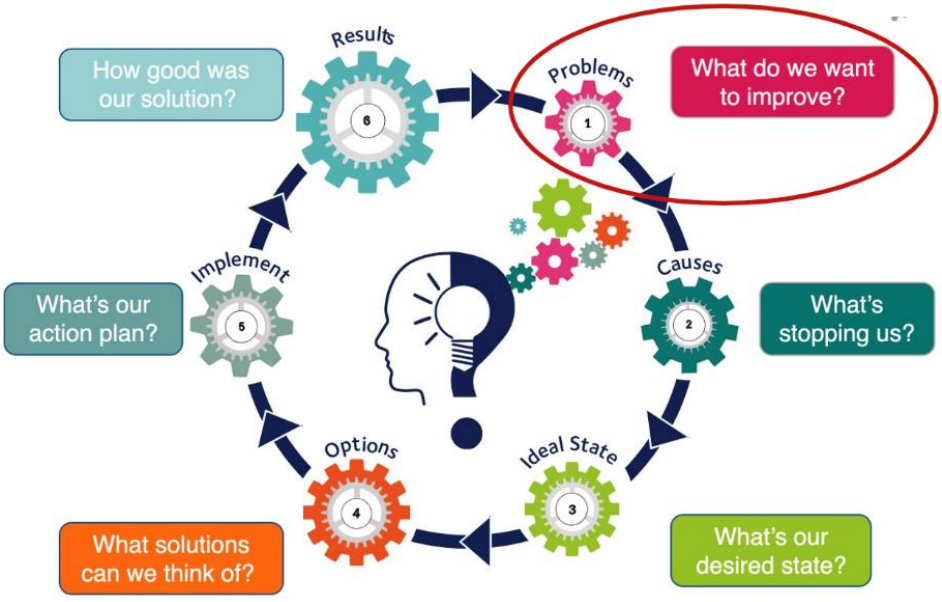

Figure 1: The Creative Problem Solving (CPS) process

We start by defining the 'problem' so that it is **Specific** and **Measurable**. Further on in the process when we have agreed on our 'ideal state' and are considering options, we use it to ensure that the solution we choose is **Achievable**, **Realistic or Relevant** and **Time bound**.

How to use it?

Problem Statement

Begin by working on your specific **Problem Statement** however rudimentary it is to start with.

It's ok to start with a bad **Problem Statement**.

Part of the work in the problem exploration and definition will be to go from a bad **Problem Statement** to a better one.

As an example, a simple statement might be:

> *'The coffee machine is always broken …'*

This can be turned into a **Specific** and **Measurable** objective by exploring the problem using 'Kipling Questions':

- **WHAT** is the problem?
- **WHEN** does it occur?
- **WHERE** does it happen?
- **WHO** is affected by it?
- **HOW** often does it happen?
- **WHAT** is the impact

Now re-write your **Problem Statement** to include 'what's wrong', 'How much' and 'what's the impact' and check that it is **Specific** and **Measurable**.

> … to … '*The coffee machine in the canteen has not been available 25% of the time this week. This results in additional waiting time, lost revenue and complaints'*

Warning: *However tempting it might be to do so, it is important that you 'quantify' and 'qualify' the actual problem before jumping to conclusions about causes and just going for a quick fix.*

Ideal state

At the other end of the scale, you need to know where you want to be before deciding how to get there. If possible, use ***Voice of the Customer*** (VoC) data, to help inform your 'ideal state'. Using your ***process maps*** and applying the ***8 wastes***, generate ideas and potential solutions to help deal with the problem and get you to your 'ideal state'.

It is now that you can start thinking about applying **smART** to the **Ideal State** to ensure that any potential solutions are **Achievable**, **Realistic** and **Time-bound.**