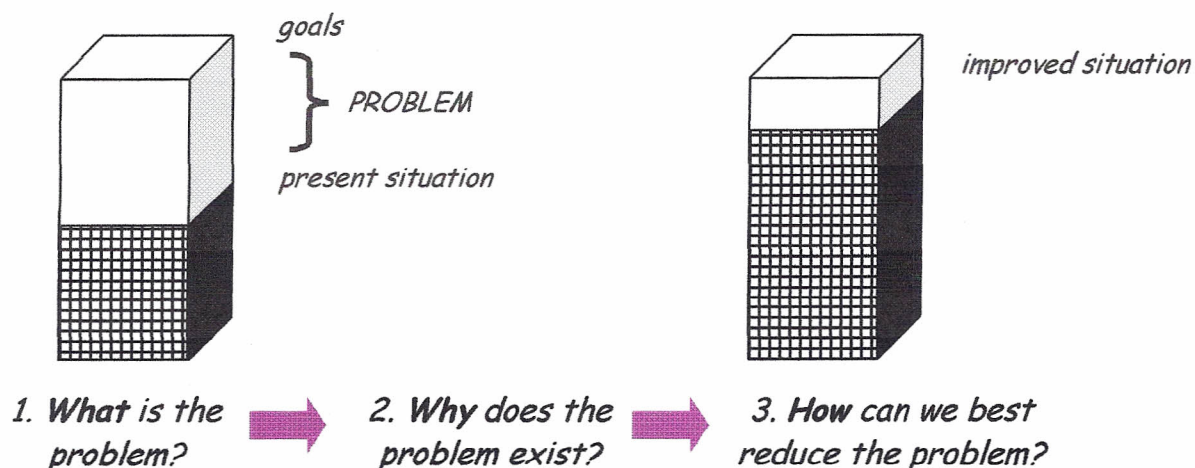


Analyzing problems Focusing on relevant solutions

How often have you been in meetings where they leap ahead to a “solution” or fall in love with an action proposal, without ever having pinpointed the problem that’s making people uptight in the first place? Or without exploring other possibilities. Or gauging their likely impacts and side-effects?

It can be very productive to say, “Hey. Let’s back up to see *why* we propose to do this. Is this in fact this is the best option? Does it really get at the underlying causes of the problem? Do we have enough information yet to choose a course of action?” Just like the doctor who has to diagnose illnesses, you could suggest that the group follow a simple thought framework like:



This can lead to more confidence in, and stronger justification of, the action proposal already being discussed. But it could make it clear that the group wasn’t really getting at the underlying causes of the real problem, or that additional lines of action deserve consideration, or that more fact-gathering and analysis is needed.

Of course, there is the danger of going too far with problem analysis. Studies and consultantships can sometimes be a ploy for bogging things down. If not carefully designed, and really supported by key leaders, they might prevent anything from getting done. One has to weigh the *benefits* of further examination of causes and possible remedies against the *costs* of studies and delays in reaching an action decision. But even just a few minutes devoted to clarifying the problem, pinpointing viable remedies, and “guesstimating” what the outcomes may be can often prevent serious mistakes, wastage of resources, and disappointments.