

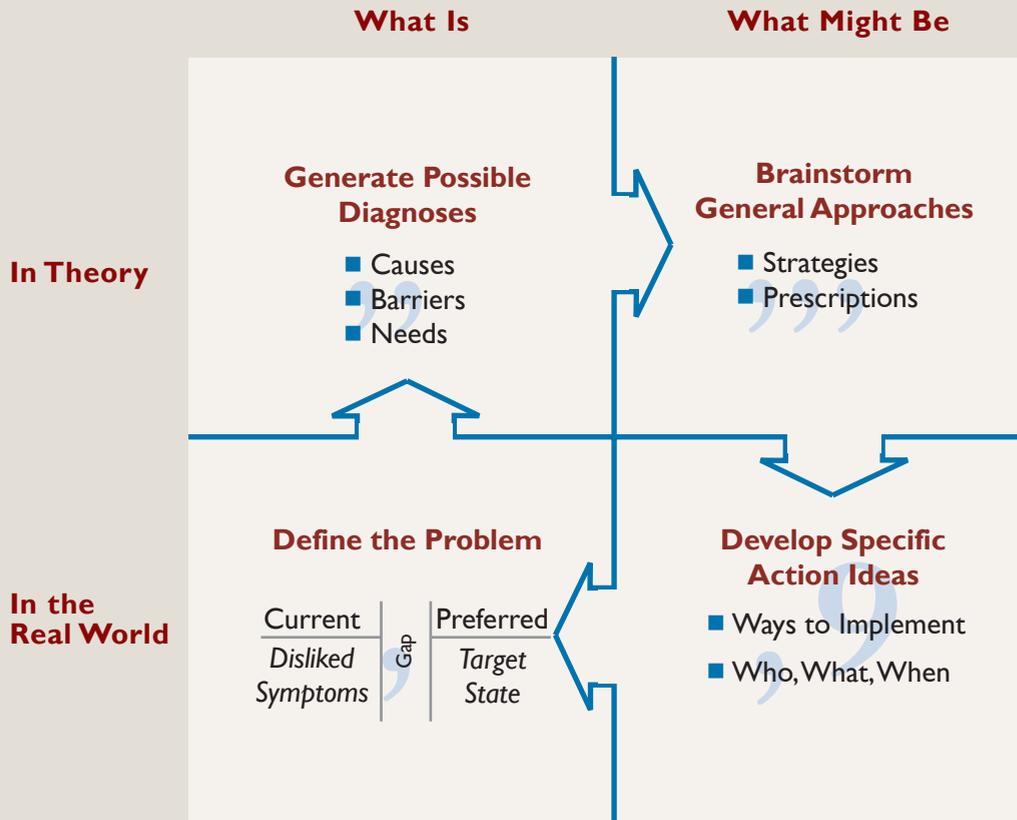
Four-Quadrant Problem-Solving Tool

Understand the Problem First



The Four-Quadrant Problem-Solving Tool can help define and analyze complex problems and possible approaches systematically and creatively (rather than leaping immediately to possible solutions), a process required for addressing such problems effectively.

Using the Four-Quadrant Problem-Solving Tool



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Tips for Using the Four-Quadrant Problem-Solving Tool

1. Define the Problem

- Think broadly about what is wrong.
- Identify the specific characteristics of the current situation that are undesirable (the disliked symptoms of the problem).
- Define the specific characteristics of a realistic preferred state.

2. Generate Multiple Possible Diagnoses

- Analyze and brainstorm possible causes for the gap between the current situation and the preferred state.
- Look for multiple alternative or overlapping possible causes, needs, or barriers.
- Consider different disciplinary and professional perspectives to stimulate creative insights: negotiation strategy, business strategy, law, organizational theory, psychology, communication, and so on.
- Consider any diagnoses that could themselves be treated as a problem in need of further analysis; where appropriate, plug such diagnoses back into Step One as disliked symptoms.

3. Brainstorm General Approaches/Strategies

- For each possible diagnosis, brainstorm some possible prescriptive strategies or general approaches for improving the situation.
- Defer any evaluation of which solutions are best until you have spent sufficient time generating many creative possibilities.
- If someone suggests a possible solution that seems like a particularly good idea, ask why — what diagnosis lies behind that idea — and then try to develop other good approaches.

4. Develop Specific Action Ideas and Plans

- Explore how the approaches generated in Step Three might be implemented. Assess their feasibility in the real world and the costs and benefits associated with each.
- Drive general approaches to specific action plans (for example, who will do what by when?).
- Brainstorm multiple action ideas for each possible approach, as some approaches may be easier to implement or more likely to succeed.