

# Specific Problem Statement (SMART)

## 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?

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

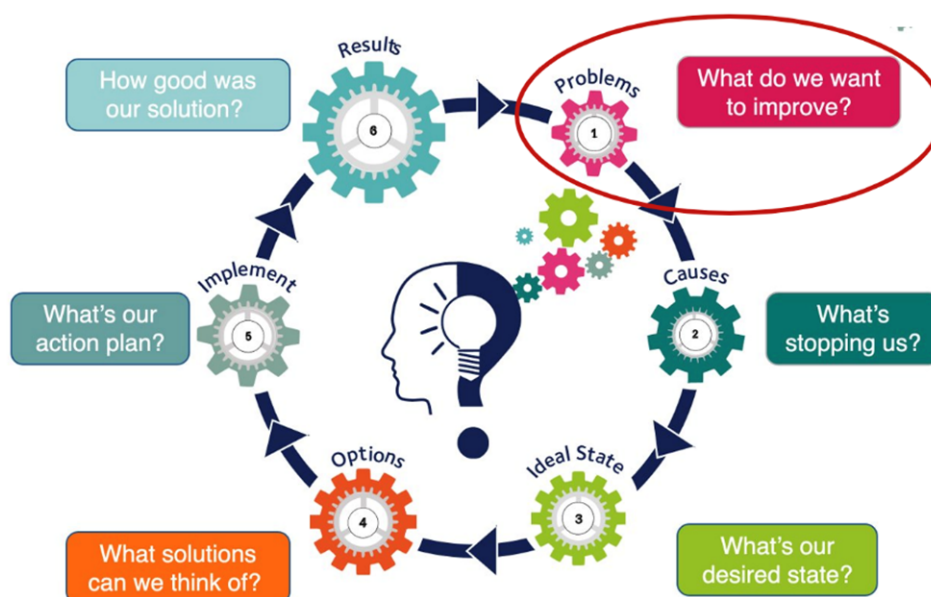


Figure 1: The Creative Problem Solving (CPS) process

### Benefits at a glance....

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



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 simple 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?
- **WHAT** is the impact?
- **HOW** often does it happen?

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'*

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**Warning:** It is important that you 'quantify' and 'qualify' the actual problem before jumping to conclusions about causes and just going for a quick fix.

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### 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**.