**Writing a Problem Statement**

When writing a problem statement, it is important to clearly identify and state the organizational problem that needs to be resolved. To articulate this information clearly, the following pieces can be used as building blocks for the statement.

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| **Original problem or focus question** | Restate the initial problem that launched the inquiry process, or rewrite the focus question or one of the clarifying questions as a statement. |
| **Stakeholders who are most affected by the problem** | Identify who is most directly impacted by this problem. Alternately, who would benefit the most if this problem were resolved? |
| **Type of problem** | For example, is the problem based upon skills, attitudes, knowledge, resources, competition, defects, or something else? |
| **Suspected cause(s) of the problem** | Based on the data analysis or the root cause analysis, what does the team think is the most significant cause or causes contributing to this problem? What, if addressed, would make the greatest impact on resolving the problem? Include specific evidence. |
| **Goal for improvement and long-term impact** | Describe the target for impact. The goal should be measurable. |
| **Impact to stakeholders** | Describe possible impacts to stakeholders if the problem is not addressed. |
| **Proposal for addressing the problem** | The proposal is a high-level strategy that represents promising practices drawn from research, local knowledge, and local expertise. Note sources, if possible, when presenting this information. This proposal will become the basis for subsequent action planning. |
| **Final problem statement** | Tie the above statements into three to five coherent sentences that could be easily understood by a wide range of stakeholders. |

**Sample *Writing a Problem Statement* Worksheet**

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| **Original problem or focus question** | * Call center representatives are not meeting quality standards. |
| **Stakeholders who are most affected by the problem** | * External customers and call center representatives |
| **Impact to stakeholders** | * Loss of customers and revenue * Lower performance evaluations for representatives * Higher call center attrition * Potential missed service level agreements (fines) |
| **Type of problem** | * Skills and Resources: Without the appropriate skills training and tools to perform the job, the call center representatives are not prepared to succeed in their positions. |
| **Suspected cause(s) of the problem** | * Call center representatives do not receive adequate training. * There are insufficient online resources for representatives to refer to in production. * There are insufficient management resources for coaching and mentoring representatives. |
| **Goal for improvement and long-term impact** | * The call center will achieve a 99.8% quality rating with no more than 2% of the staff on quality action plans. |
| **Proposal for addressing the problem** | * Increase training time to meet industry standards. * Provide relevant, updated online tools for call center representatives. |
| **Final problem statement** | * Many call center representatives are not achieving quality standards, thereby contributing to the overall low quality rating (92%) for the call center. Through data and process evaluation, it was determined that the training time for call center representatives is 30% less than other similar call centers, which may contribute to lack of skills training. In addition, the online tools available to the call center representatives are not updated frequently with procedural changes and do not contain all required information necessary for representatives to perform their job. The low quality over the past 6 months has resulted in a 2% decrease in customers and a $550,000 loss in annual revenue. Decreased employee satisfaction in the call center due to the issue has contributed to a 5% increase in voluntary attrition, which costs the business $80,000 annually. There is an opportunity to improve quality and reduce both customer and employee attrition by addressing the skills training and resource issue in the call center. |

***Writing a Problem Statement* Worksheet**

Complete each section of the chart below. Refer back to the section guidelines and completed sample worksheet above as needed.

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| **Original problem or focusing question** |  |
| **Stakeholders who are most affected by the problem** |  |
| **Impact to stakeholders** |  |
| **Type of problem** |  |
| **Suspected cause(s) of the problem** |  |
| **Goal for improvement and long-term impact** |  |
| **Proposal for addressing the problem** |  |
| **Final problem statement** |  |