HOW TO WRITE A SIMPLE PROBLEM STATEMENT IN 4 STEPS WITH A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

Method · September 2020

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.13364.88968

1 author:

Benard Lango
Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology
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Researchers and professors have their own definition of problem statement and a host of procedures to follow in penning the same. However, it is usually not an everyday occurrence to find one with a practical example. This article therefore takes you through the parts of a problem statement, its language and finally a practical example and one should be "home and dry" according to Professor Henry Bwisa of Kenya's JKUAT university. In analyzing a problem statement of any nature it would be important to use the structure of this article as the guiding framework. Why? It is a straight forward process devoid of complexities and wordy phrases usually used by those who believe that a document is judged by the level of jargon it holds. To understand how to write a problem statement, follow these steps:

STEP 1. General/Worldview of the problem Area

This section is usually the first paragraph and the top most that introduces the general view of the problem. It provides the laying ground that this is a worldview problem that has also been experienced elsewhere or just a general background to the problem. It relates the problem in general or in a worldview synopsis with relevant references pointing to the existence of the

problem. For shorter problem statements, this section should take about 3 to 5 lines and up to two or more paragraphs for longer problem statements.

PRACTICAL Example:

Clark, Bosanac and Sivamani (2018) estimates that about 6 billion people have access to mobile phone worldwide and that out of this figure about a third of the population is based in local areas. Leng, Talib and Gunardi (2018) on the other hand notes high levels of uptake of technology is experienced with big businesses operating in large towns and cities across the world while the local areas are lagging behind.

The above lines introduce the general problem area and a ground for the problem statement in the worldview. The next step is now to link this to the specific problem area and the problem itself. Remember, this is a simple generalized view to enable one understand problem statement, it can also be stated in two to three paragraphs depending on the format specified.

STEP 2: The Specific Problem Area and the Problem

Step two is about the real problem that the research wants to focus on and the specific area of problem location and localization. This section should bring out verifiable evidence that a problem exists and if it is not addressed then a few or more souls will suffer. In analyzing problem statements, most professors' (the author included) pays close attention to this section by asking a simple question: "what and where is the problem is?" This section should therefore bring out what the problem is and provide a verifiable evidence of its existence.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE:

South African local-based businesses do not have immediate access to the physical money banking system as they are located kilometers away and Porter (2011) suggests that in order for businesses including these local South African businesses to achieve and sustain superior performance, they must be able to implement systems that are competitively superior. Budree and Williams (2013, September) and Namada (2018) further concluded in their studies that South African villages with low income earners experienced low uptake of technological advancement and businesses in these locations are not keen on leveraging on technology.

It is now clear where problem is and what the problem is as depicted by the above paragraph. From the statements the problem is low uptake of technological advancements and this is localized or experienced in South African low income earning villages.

STEP 3: The Gap the Research Intends to Address

If this is not understandable, take a deep breath start at the top slowly and it will sink in. Now the problem and location is sorted but still it does not answer the question of what happens if the current conditions are maintained. A senior Professor Henry Bwisa (mentioned above) usually

puts it openly as a single question that needs to be answered: "*who dies if the research is not done?*" It is important to note that this may not be the actual death but to question that in case the problem is not solved, who is most affected. This section should therefore indicate the gap it intends to address or what the research is addressing. PRACTICAL EXAMPLE:

If the low levels of technology uptake remain unchanged within the low income earners in South African villages, Fombad (2018) while studying knowledge management of poverty eradication, a South African perspective, concludes that there will be a stagnant growth in the quality of life and more so on the development index of areas which in turn is reflected on the overall performance of the country's GDP. Several research have also been undertaken by various scholars (Kumar, Ferdous, Luque-Ayala, 2019; You, et.al., 2019) on technology use in South African villages but none was specific on what contributes to the the low levels of technological uptake.

STEP 4: Researcher's Intuition

This is the final step in problem statement which is easily forgotten by most researchers' especially where the research is purely for academic purposes. This section therefore depicts what the research intends to achieve when the whole research process is completed. It may be academically stated for academic achievement purposes or stated in the form intended to achieve a personal goal directed towards the outcome of the research which is usually the title of the research. It is usually the derive to undertake the research which in most instances is usually vaguely stated by most academicians as most pay more attention to the problem, the gap, and problem location. Be the father and mother of your research and ensure that as a father you know what drives you to do the research and as a mother to maintain that drive to the very end of the research. Remember not all FATHERS are drivers and not all MOTHERS are maintainers; know you your father and mother, and the research will be completed in time.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE: Researcher's Intuition

This research therefore investigates the factors influencing levels of technology uptake in low-income earning villages in South Africa.

As indicated earlier, the 4 steps outlined can also be used as the guiding framework in analyzing a problem statement whether in one paragraph or more than four pages. These steps are hypothetical and based on years of assessment of students undertaking research and research practice in various fields by the author and do not provide a conclusive basis upon which a problem statement is rejected. And now the full problem statement can be listed as below with the title driven from the researcher's intuition: *Factors influencing levels of technology uptake in low-income earning villages in South Africa*.

FULL PRACTICAL EXAMPLE:

FACTORS INFLUENCING LEVELS OF TECHNOLOGY UPTAKE IN LOW-INCOME EARNING VILLAGES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Problem Statement

Clark, Bosanac and Sivamani (2018) estimates that about 6 billion people have access to mobile phone worldwide and that out of this figure about a third of the population is based in local areas. Leng, Talib and Gunardi (2018) on the other hand notes high levels of uptake of technology is experienced with big businesses operating in large towns and cities across the world while the local areas are lagging behind. South African local-based businesses do not have immediate access to the physical money banking system as they are located kilometers away and Porter (2011) suggests that in order for businesses including these local South African businesses to achieve and sustain superior performance, they must be able to implement systems that are competitively superior. Budree and Williams (2013, September) and Namada (2018) further concluded in their studies that South African villages with low income earners experienced low uptake of technological advancement and businesses in these locations are not keen on leveraging on technology. If the low levels of technology uptake remain unchanged within the low income earners in South African villages, Fombad (2018) while studying knowledge management of poverty eradication, a South African perspective, concludes that there will be a stagnant growth in the quality of life and more so on the development index of areas which in turn is reflected on the overall performance of the country's GDP. Several research have also been undertaken by various scholars (Kumar, Ferdous, Luque-Ayala, 2019; You, et.al., 2019) on technology use in South African villages but none was specific on what contributes to the the low levels of technological uptake. This research therefore investigates the factors influencing levels of technology uptake in low-income earning villages in South Africa.

~~ Dr. Benard Lango, PhD

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About the Author:

Dr. Benard Lango, PhD

Researcher & Published Author | Project Management Lecturer | EIA/EA Lead Expert | Research Mentorship & Training Coach

Tel: +254 720 430336 | +254 734 430336

benard.lango@gmail.com | https://benardlango.wordpress.com