Writing a Problem Statement

How to do it?

1. Creation of a problem statement is an activity that is best completed in a small groups (46 people).

2. It is helpful to have a couple of organizational people who are involved in the process if possible.

3. Get each team member to write his or her own problem statement without conferring. Compare each of the sentences/ looking for common themes and wording. Start to write an improved statement using the common themes.

4. Ensure that the problems include the customer's perspective also ensure that the statement focuses on existing problems. Try to include the time frame over which the problem has been occurring. Try to quantify the problem if possible (i.e. lost revenue, increased efficiency, time to market, etc.). Finally, review your new problem statement against the following criteria:

   - It should focus on only on the one problem as provided by your client.
   - You should not be discussing solutions at this point.
   - Should be 3-4 sentences
   - You should be able to apply the 5 'W's (Who, What, Where, When and Why) to the problem statement.

Who?

Explain the specific individuals, groups or organizations that the problem affects. Provide a brief description of the organization

What?

Describe the problem's boundaries, the problem itself, the effect it has, what would happen if the problem gets solved or what would happen if you aren't able to find a solution. Discuss the negative aspects of the current situation and explain why it matters. This serves as a great communication tool, helping to get buyin and support from others.

Where?

Should state where the problem happens whether it's just in a specific location or in different areas. i.e. Departmentally, Specific Site, Organizationally, Globally?

When?

Should state when the issue started and how soon does it need to be resolved?

Why?

Should understand the importance of solving the problem and how solving the problem would impact the organization and everything involved with it. Its aim is to focus the process improvement opportunities which will help steer some later proposed solutions (Architecture Vision Document).

Problem Statement Template

Company Overview:

A couple of sentences describing the organization.

Problem Description:

Provide a brief description of the problem as discovered using the 5 W's.

Problem Background:

Describe the business context and why that creates the problem in the business.

Change Drivers and Opportunities:

Identify the environmental (market, technology, etc.) change drivers and opportunities behind a vision for a new target architecture. This could be a business problem that could also be seen as a business opportunity.

Stakeholders:

Identify all entities internal and external, that may be impacted by the problem detailed above. These impacts internally could be at the organizational, departmental, of individual employee level, and externally consider impacts to vendors, competitors, customers, etc. Also, please understand that the defined impacts could be either negative or positive.