

What is the project problem statement?

After all the questions asked in the previous section, you now have the answers.

Has the issue been clearly understood?

When pondering this question, it is important to understand the difference between the symptom and the underlying cause. A symptom is the effect of the problem and although related to the problem, the focus should remain on the reasons behind or the cause of the symptom.

The first symptom may have manifested itself sometime after the root cause event that triggered the symptom.

Therefore – How did the problem first manifest itself?

What evidence is available to substantiate the claims?

Looking at the key performance indicators of most projects – these include:

- Schedule
- Cost
- Scope

Is the project late on several key milestones?

Is the project greatly over budget?

Has the scope of the project changed?

What controls are in place to monitor these KPIs?

When were they first flagged and by whom and why?

Now do you have a clear picture of the of the problem?

If so, this can lead us to the root cause.

The problem statement can look something like this:

The issue is that due to

The project has not been able to deliver in the area of

Resulting in

Impact – What is the impact of the project problems to the business?

Where should the project be now in terms of progress?

Where is the project now in terms of percentage complete?

Is there are metric available on Earned Value against Planned Value? Are these figures reliable?

So now a clear problem statement is clear and understood, what can be done to correct the problem and prevent a recurrence.

Let us get back to our case study. We can apply the principles to the problem statement. We can now say that:

Problem statement can look something like this:

*The issue is that **the known technical issues were carried to site.....***

*The project has not been able to deliver the **required functionality***

*Resulting in **numerous delays to the schedule and increased budget***

The report to the site leadership call out all the shortfalls identified.

Now that the problem is identified and communicated, the remediation work can commence in earnest.

Once you have completed the investigation and communicated the findings via a presentation, what normally follows is a report.

Reporting on a project issues can be a challenge because often there is a lot of background detail to be considered.

A report template in word is included as part of this training course.

The shape of the report should look something like this. The report we present here has been honed over many years and is still a work in progress. There is no need to stick rigidly to this format, but it generally ticks all the boxes in terms of what senior management or leadership in most organizations are looking for. If you have any feedback or suggestions, we would be happy to hear from you at projects@systeme.ie.

Here is our recommended report format.

Referring to the written list of information that you need to share and questions you need to ask and check them off discreetly as you run through them. Practice, practice, practice for effective communication. If your communication is in the written form - use concise clear direct points to get the message across. Don't dress anything up or try to hide the issues in detail.

Background Information

This section should ideally contain a description of the scenario leading up to why you were called on site in the first place. The language used here needs to be specific and tailored to the client that asked you to investigate the problem or situation in the first instance. Use the language of your customer – don't try to gloss over this section. They called you in to help because they have a real problem. Provide some context in terms of the company or facility, what they do, what their main product is, and what may have gone wrong in the first instance. What event or status triggered the client into action in the first instance?

Description of the Problem and Impact of the Problem

Use this section should to demonstrate clinically your interpretation of the problem and the impact of the problem.

What was happening or not happening? What was supposed to happen – what didn't happen?

Something happened that should not have happened.

Something didn't happen that should have happened.

Some unexpected event occurred.

The system or team did not perform as expected – (what was the expectation?)

Some external influence, person, system, change etc. - has changed the operating parameters – the rules have changed and the system or team cannot cope.

What is the nature of the problem?

The perceived nature of the problem can often influence the early stage of the

investigation. You may be steered in one direction early on based on the initial observations. You may have to explore some options before you arrive at the right destination.

Findings

What did you see when you first arrived on site?

What did you observe?

What did you notice?

Who was there?

What were they doing?

What were they saying?

What evidence was present to indicate that there is a problem?

How are people reacting to the problem?

What evidence is available?

Actions Taken

What actions were taken during the course of the investigation and why were those actions taken?

If any actions were taken – what was the impact of that action? What was learned from that action?

Root Cause Identification

Call out the root cause or causes in concise, clear language.

Conclusion

This is where the problem statement should be included

*The issue is that **the known technical issues were carried to site.....***

*The project has not been able to deliver the **required functionality***

*Resulting in **numerous delays to the schedule and increased budget***

Recommendations

Here provide clear bullet point recommendations that are unambiguous and indicate why each point is being recommended.