



What is the problem and what do we want?"

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The First Question Asked by ALT Coach

What is the Problem?



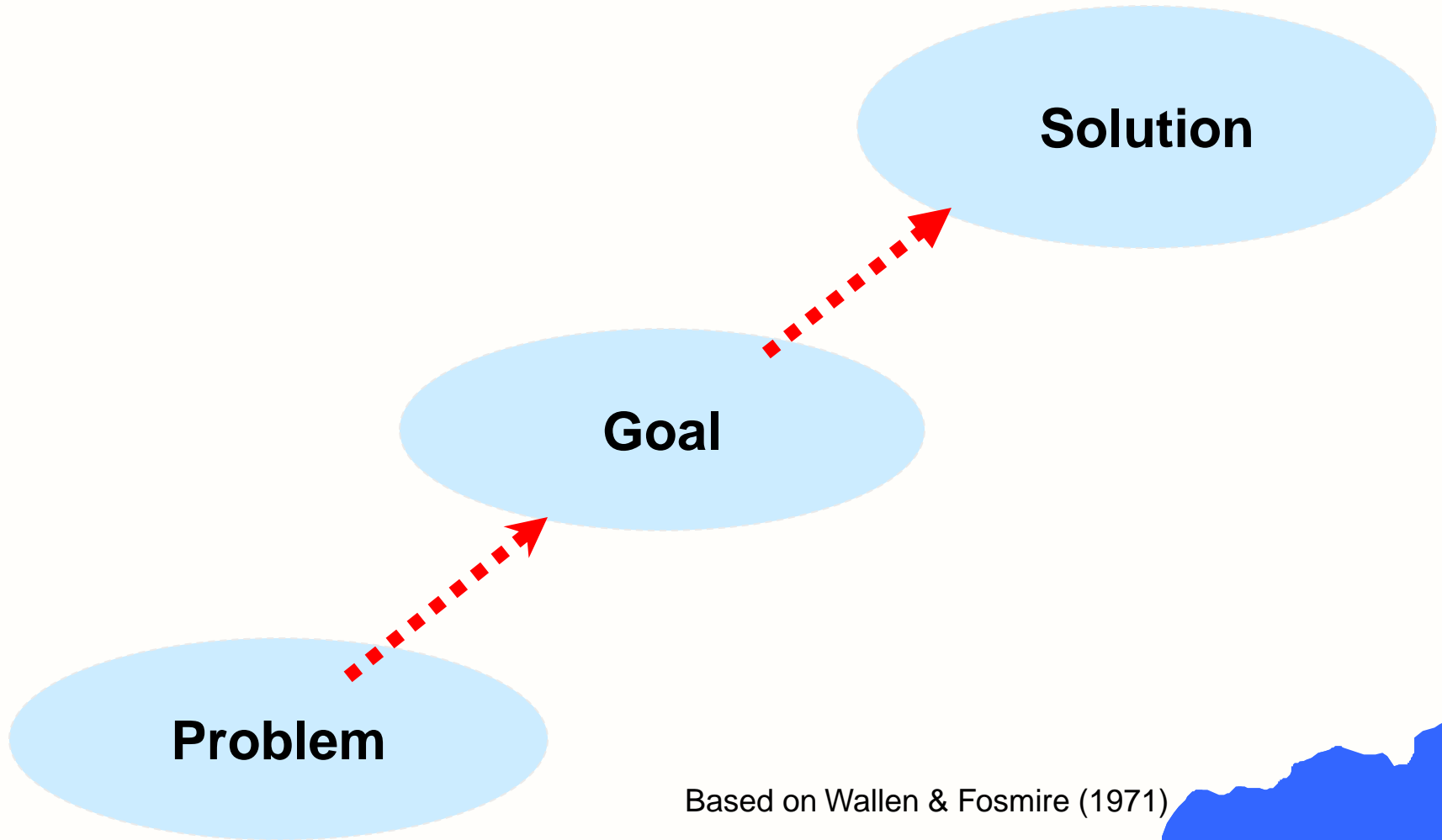
When answering the question, “What is the problem,” people are most likely to respond in one of three ways:

1. “This part of the organizational system is broken. It doesn’t work.” (Problem)
2. “We want these specific results.” (Goal)
3. “We need to find or create some way to achieve some specific result.” (Solution)

Actual Problem Statements

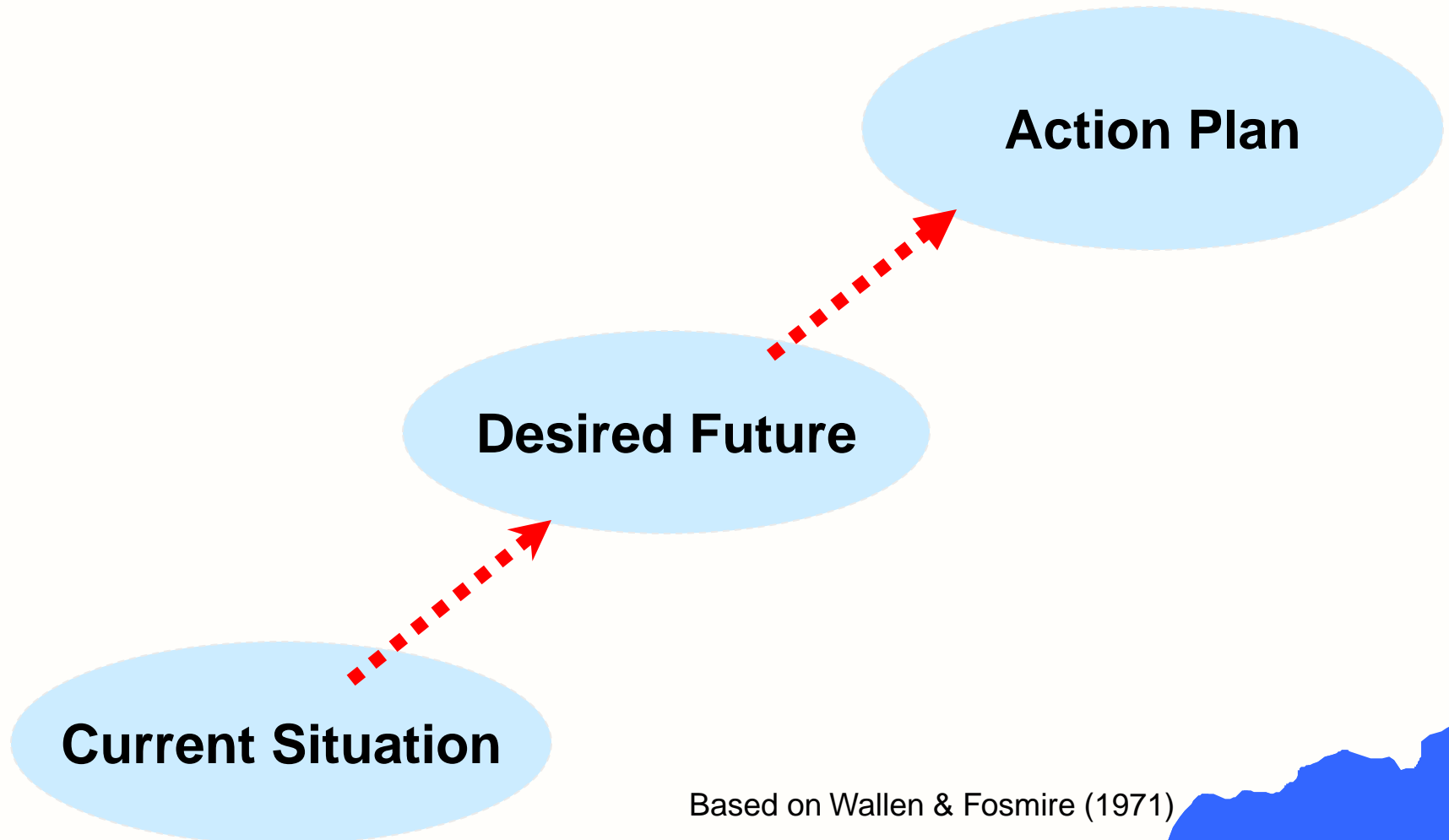
- A staff indicated that she wants to be promoted to a higher level. How to retain this staff and motivate her?
- How to get a Chairman (leader in the grassroots committee) to motivate his members to perform their task well
- No one is willing to take up the leadership role and lead the team.
- A colleague refused to follow instructions and is not motivated to come to work on time.
- There is no initiative from this staff and does not respond promptly to Grassroots Leaders (Community Leaders / Grassroots Volunteers) on time.
- A staff is unable to cope with the task allocated to him and yet he is enthusiastic about completing the tasks that he likes to do.
- How to have a better relationship with my son?
- How to create a positive work culture in the organization?

A Practical Mental Model Helps to Craft Great Questions



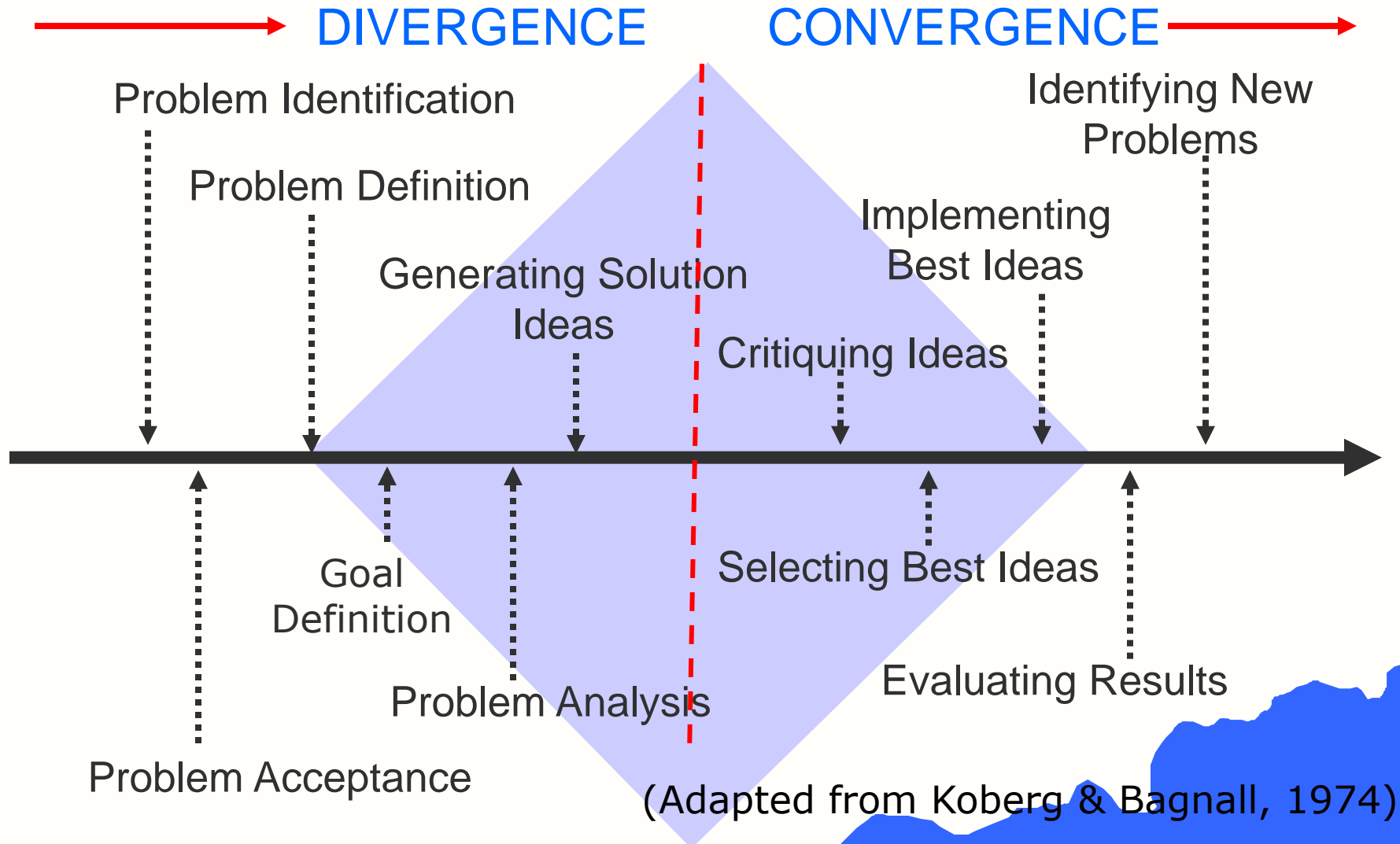
Based on Wallen & Fosmire (1971)

A Practical Mental Model Helps to Craft Great Questions



Based on Wallen & Fosmire (1971)

Stages of Effective Problem Solving





Operational Definitions

Problem

The Current State, Problem-to-Solve, Opportunity-to-Exploit, Dilemma-to-Manage, Conditions as They Currently Exist (Whatever is a Source of Wide-Spread Dissatisfaction)

Goal

Desired State, End State, Results, Effects, Outcomes, Compelling Future Conditions that We Want to Create

Solution

Strategy, Tactics, Action Steps, Implementation Plans, Proposals, Potential Solutions, and Any Action that Contributes to Reducing the Discrepancy between the Problem and the Goal.



The Energizing Impact of Problems

Example Problem Definition:

The problem is that our market share in some of the largest Domestic demographic groups (e.g. hispanic/latino) has declined over the past 10 years. As a result, our revenues have not increased over this period.

- What emotional reactions is the team likely to have to this problem statement? What is the impact of these feelings on the team?
- Is this the real problem or is it a symptom?



Confusing the Presenting Problem with the “Real” Problem

What are the predictable consequences of assuming that the presenting problem is the real problem that needs to be solved?

- ?
- ?
- ?



Questions to Uncover the Real Problem

- Is this the real or root problem or a symptom?
- Does the team understand the nature of the dissatisfaction with the current situation? Who is dissatisfied, why, for how long?
- Does the team have a full understanding of the factors that have contributed to the creation and perpetuation of the dissatisfaction with the current situation?
- Does the team have a full understanding of the history of efforts to eliminate or reduce the causes of dissatisfaction?

Notice that these questions encourage the team to reflect upon the problem that it is defining and to understand the assumptions it is making about current situation.



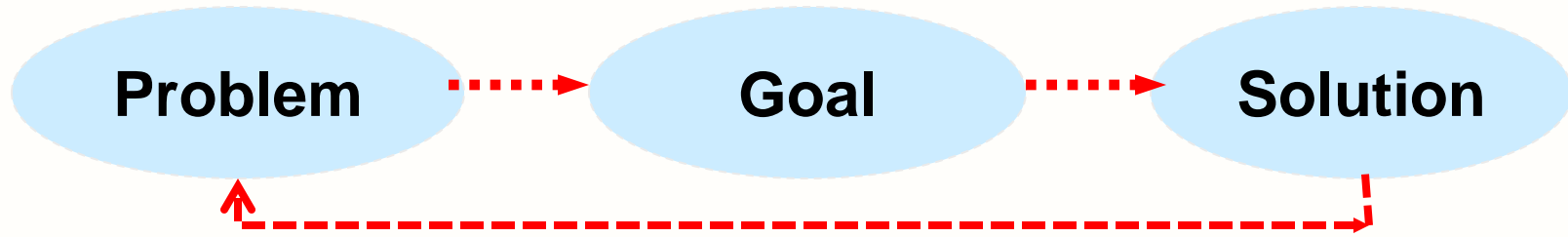
Solutions Disguised as Problems

Consider this problem statement:

Our problem is to increase the number of dealerships in hispanic/latino areas by 15% over the next 3 years.

- What are the dangers of using this definition as a problem statement?
- The coach can ask, *“If this statement describes a part of the Solution, what is the Problem?”*

Moving Back from Solution to Problem



- For what problem is this proposed action (or action step) intended to be a solution for?
- If the team implements this proposed solution, what current problem conditions would be improved?
- What problem conditions would be dealt with by implementing this solution?
- What secondary problems might the team run into if it sets this solution in motion?



Defining Goals

- Problem is where the energy is and tends to focus on the “here-and-now” whereas the goal is the future
- Goals generate new, positive energy
- Seek great goals that solve this and many other problems



Define What you Want to Achieve and Why that Goal is Important

Our goal is to increase market share in the hispanic/latino demographic group for our most popular products by 15 % over the next three years. By reaching this goal we will be creating important new markets that will increase product revenues by 4%.

This goal provides direction as well as inspiration!

To Move from “Problem” to “Goal”



- If the problem was solved, what would the future look like?
- What do you want to accomplish?
- What is it about the problem situation that you would like to add, modify, or eliminate?
- What do you want that is missing in the problem statement?

To Move from “Solution” to “Goal”



- If we execute this proposed solution, what goal would we accomplish, create, or produce?
- Why would we execute this solution? What useful purpose would this solution serve?
- Toward what specific goal is this proposed solution aiming?
- Who would be affected by taking this action? In what ways would they be affected? How would that change the problems?



A Complete Problem/Goal Definition

The problem is that our market share in some of the largest domestic demographic groups (e.g. Hispanic/Latino) has declined over the past 10 years. As a result, our revenues have not increased over this period.

Our goal is to increase market share in the Hispanic/Latino demographic group for our most popular products by 15 % over the next three years. By reaching this goal we will be creating important new markets that will increase revenues by 4% and create optimism and energy among our distributors and dealers.

Questions, Learnings & Ideas





References

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- Koberg, D., & Bagnall, J. (1974). *The universal traveler: A soft-system guide to creativity, problem-solving and the process of reaching goals*. Los Altos, CA: William Kaufmann.