

# Phases of Problem Structuring

## Problem Sensing

The stage at which the analyst picks up on early signs of something being wrong--this is what Dunn calls the recognition of a "felt existence" of a problem situation

Product: Problem Situation

## Problem Search:

This is the process through which analysts systematically check stakeholder perceptions and understanding to ascertain their views on the problem that has been sensed. The idea here is to identify multiple perspectives to the problem.

Product: Metaproblem

## Problem Definition:

In this stage, the analyst defines the problem to propose a conceptual representation of the problem based on stakeholder input.

Product: Substantive Problem

## Problem Specification:

This stage involves the development of a formal representation of the problem defined.

Product: Formal Problem

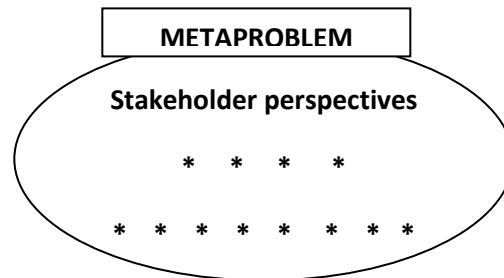
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## The Objectives

- Problem Search: Identify stakeholder positions to structure the metaproblem. (Possible method to help in this stage: Boundary Analysis p.95-98; see also Procedural Guide 3- Stakeholder Analysis)
- Problem Definition: Use the stakeholder positions and metaproblem to define the substantive problem. (Possible method to help in this stage: Classification Analysis p.99-102)

## Group Work:

1. Use the case study to identify the stakeholders in this case. Who are they? What are their positions (as can be inferred from the focus group discussion)? This exercise is part of "Problem Search" in which we are attempting to develop a metaproblem. In this task, we should structure the metaproblem, which can be thought of as the second-order problem defined by its members, who are the class of all first-order problems (stakeholder perspectives)(Dunn, p. 83).



2. Alongside #1 above, write down any stakeholders whose views are NOT mentioned, but you believe should be considered within the boundaries of the metaproblem. Also note any questions you have-- 1) as an analyst in this task (e.g. data you might need in using one of the above methods, and/or in identifying stakeholders' positions and how you would collect it), or 2) as a policy student learning the process of problem structuring.
3. Record on the board what your group finds: stakeholders, their perspectives, and any questions.
4. Come together as a whole class and discuss the findings of the small groups in order to DEFINE the problem. This is the process in which we should try to move from the metaproblem to the substantive problem. This involves seeking out worldviews, ideologies or myths that might help define the problem within a conceptual framework. (Errors of the third type are common here- the analyst runs the risk of choosing the wrong conceptualization of the problem situation). If possible, specify the method(s) used in the process and think about why they have been chosen.