

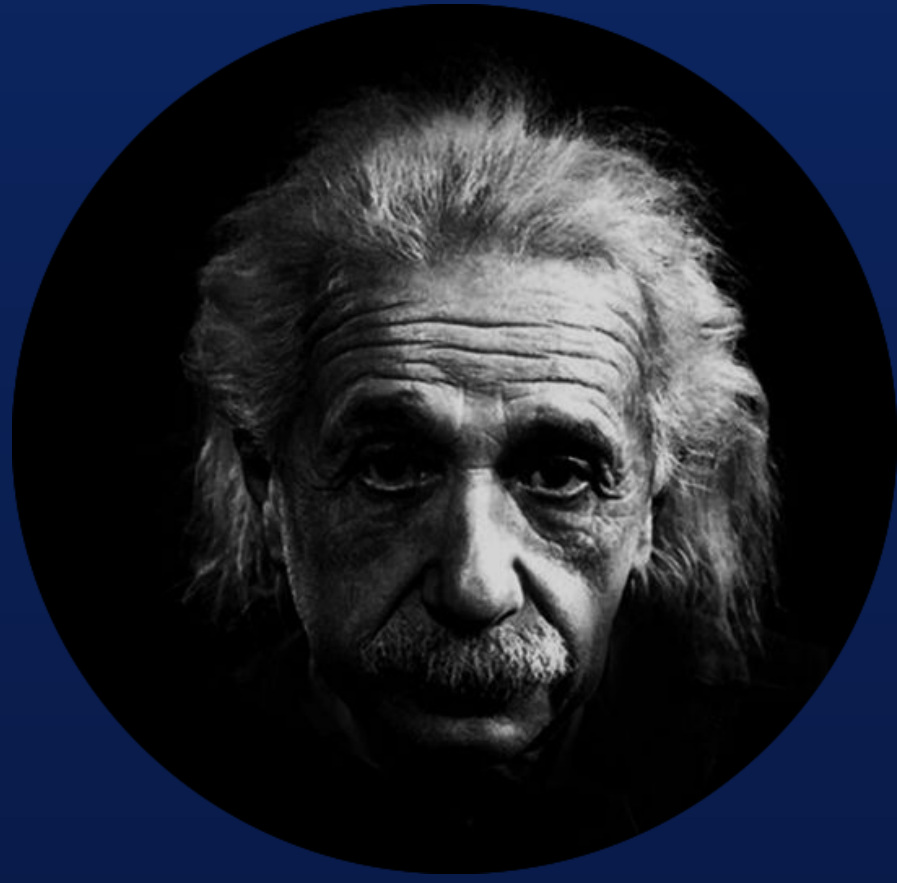


PROBLEM DEFINITION

BETH SIMONE **NOVECK**

ANZSOG

 GOVLAB



“

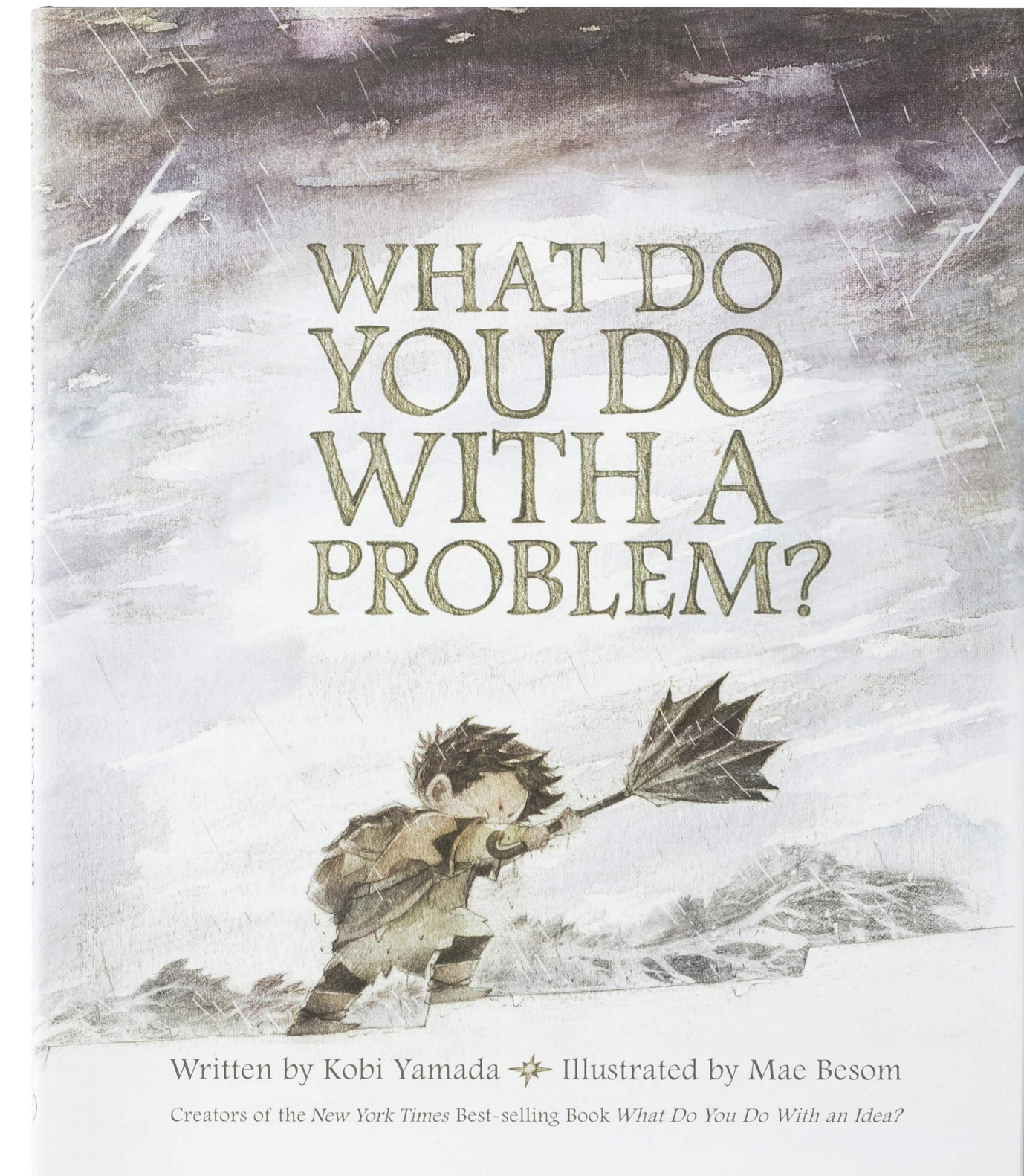
If I had an hour to save the world, I would spend 55 minutes defining the problem and only 5 minutes on finding the solution.

- ALBERT EINSTEIN



When I got face-to-face with [my problem], I discovered something. My problem wasn't what I thought it was. I discovered it had something beautiful inside. My problem held an opportunity! It was an opportunity for me to learn and grow. To be brave. To do something.

- KOBİ YAMADA, *WHAT DO YOU DO WITH A PROBLEM?*



WHY PROBLEM DEFINITION IS SO HARD

“ How good is your company at problem solving? Probably quite good, if your managers are like those at the companies I’ve studied. What they struggle with, it turns out, is not solving problems but figuring out what the problems are. In surveys of 106 C-suite executives who represented 91 private and public-sector companies in 17 countries, I found that a full 85% strongly agreed or agreed that their organizations were bad at problem diagnosis, and 87% strongly agreed or agreed that this flaw carried significant costs.

THOMAS WEDELL-WEDELLSBORG, HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW

WHY PROBLEM DEFINITION MATTERS

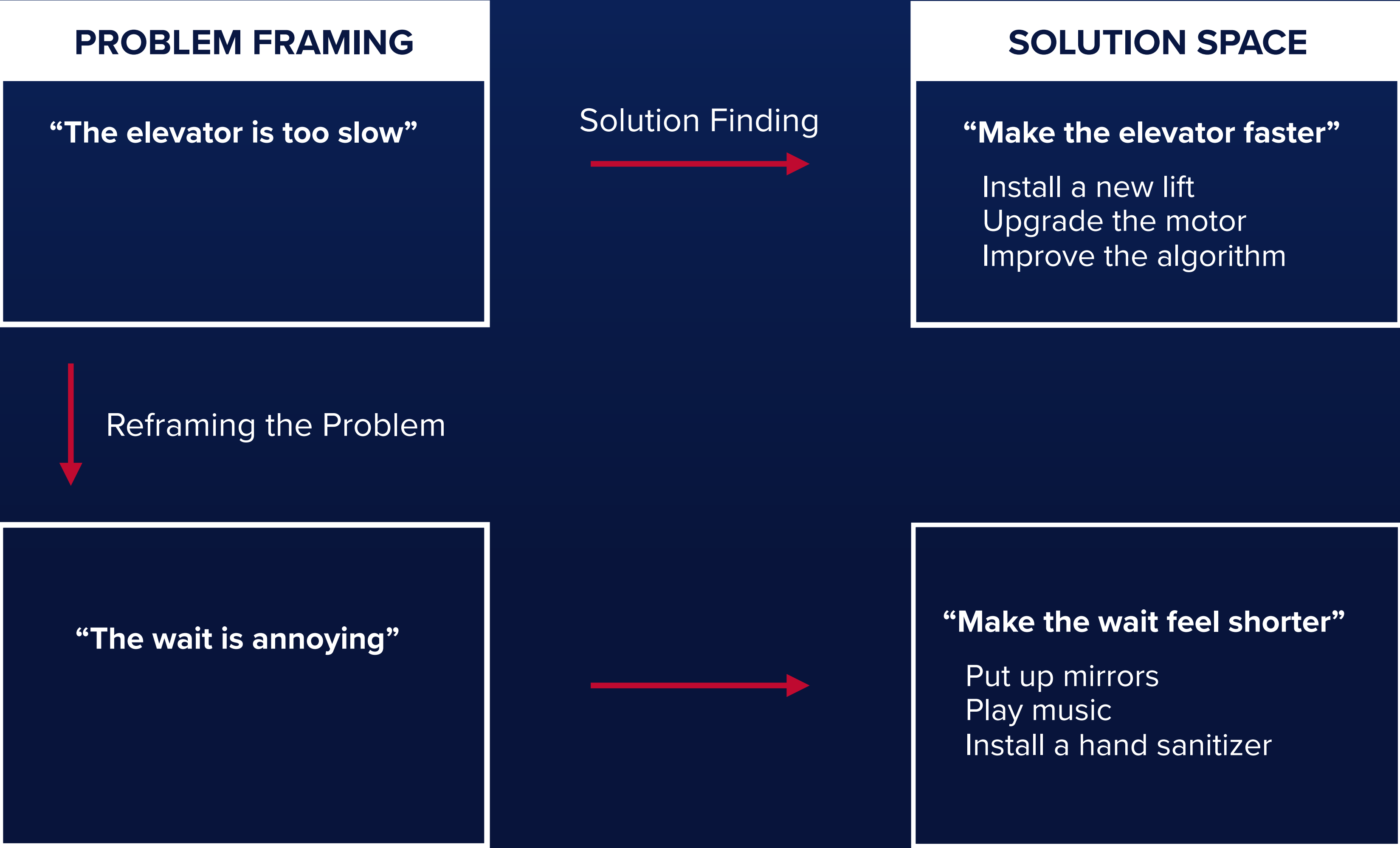
“ The formulation of a problem is often more essential than its solution, which may merely be a matter of mathematical or experimental skill. To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle, requires creative imagination and marks real advance in science.

- **ALBERT EINSTEIN**

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM WITH NOT DEFINING THE PROBLEM?

- Solving the wrong problem
- Creating new problems
- Writing good job descriptions
- Failing to solve an actionable problem

SHIFTING THE FRAME



Credits: "The Slow Elevator Problem", Are you solving the right problem?, Harvard Business Review

PROBLEM DEFINITION

POSITIVE DEVIANCE



SOLVING PROBLEMS TOGETHER



EXERCISE 1

WRITING THE DEFINITION

- When does it occur?
- Where does it occur?
- Who is impacted by the problem, their needs, their incentives?
- Which additional patterns or trends can be observed about the problem? How has this not been solved yet?

EXERCISE 2

ROOT CAUSES

- Why do you think the problem is happening?
- Make a list of root causes.
- Develop a hypothesis for the most likely causes.
- Repeat 5 times to create a likely list (the 5 Why's).
- Prioritize those problems that are solvable by you working with others.
- Articulate criteria for success. A properly defined problem has indicators that can be used to determine when the frequency or the severity of the problem has been reduced



EXERCISE 3

SHIFTING THE FRAME



EXERCISE 4

REFINING THE PROBLEM DEFINITION

Limited

Have I limited the scope? In other words, narrow a large problem down to more readily definable smaller problems

Actionable

Have I described something actionable? Making the problem more specific makes it more actionable. What would render the challenge actionable?

Specific

Have I described something specific?

Support

Have I described a problem that will be supported? In other words, is this a problem my organization cares about enough to take action and invest in an evaluation process to determine if the solutions will work?

Owner

Have I identified a problem owner? Someone needs to be on-point to manage the problem-solving process and communicate back with collaborators. Thus, a well-authored problem definition is one where there is someone whose responsibility it can be to manage the solving process?



THANK YOU

