

# Template

# **HMW-question**

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# Problem formulation for innovation or brainstorming



## HMW-QUESTION INTRODUCTION

A good starting question is crucial in order to arrive at useful ideas, solutions and results. The basis of an innovation session or brainstorming session is therefore the right starting question, the HMW question or the How-Might-We question (NL = HKW, How Can We). A problem analysis is essential to arrive at the correct question. A problem analysis helps to better understand the problem and provides insight into whether it is worth the time and energy. To find out, the who, what, where, when and how questions about the problem can provide guidance.

The HMW question is the translation of the problem into one starting question. This question is the core and continuous guideline of the innovation session or brainstorming session. Information from the problem analysis is used to formulate a good starting question. It is not about the problem, but rather about finding a solution, idea or result. The ideal HMW question is formulated in such a way that it is broad enough to generate divergent ideas / solutions / results and at the same time narrow enough to give direction to the problem and future ideas / solutions / results. A good HMW question is concrete, clear, challenging, short and gives positive energy. It is important to focus on one problem per question. A specific question leads to concrete ideas / solutions / results. Keep the HMW question simple and understandable, so don't use jargon. Keep the question short, do not use commas and clauses. In addition, the HMW question must encourage action, by using positive words. Finally, it is good to know that the question does not suggest one specific solution but encourages innovative thinking.

# Executing the Method

- Formulating the problem**

Describe one specific problem based on the problem analysis. Use the who, what, where, when and how questions to explain the problem. Then summarize one problem in 50 to 100 words.
- Sidenotes**

Write down the main result of what is attempted to be achieved. Also write down any possible restrictions and important information to be aware of. Such as a specific target group, scope, technology, time, costs and location.
- Convert problem**

To formulate an HMW question, the problem described in step 1 must be converted into a question. To formulate a clear HMW question, the question must contain a subject and a verb. Begin the question with "How might we ..." and post the problem questioningly.
- Check**

Check whether the question meets the conditions of a good HMW question. The question must be concrete, clear, challenging and short and it must generate positive energy. Write the HMW question on a flip chart or a large sheet of paper (minimum A3 format). Hang the HMW question visibly on the wall, so that all participants can always see the question during the innovation or brainstorming session.
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*Tick off the steps*

# Sidenotes **HMW-question**

## **Formulating the HMW-question**

The HMW question is usually formulated by 1 or 2 facilitators / creative leaders of an innovation or brainstorming session.

## **Apply HMW question during a session:**

Do not write down the HMW question until during the session. Let any client describe the context and the problem, after which the participants can ask clarifying questions. Next, present the HMW question and check that the participants understand the question. Any adjustments can still be made, but make sure that the question is concrete, clear, challenging and short and that positive energy remains in it.

