

## Problems That are Too Rich

One of the 8 problem types defined on [www.problemsolving2.com](http://www.problemsolving2.com), a website created by Jerry L. Talley.

These pages outline the essential nature of the problem and the best process for addressing it.

---

<b>Definition</b>	<p>Problems with a vast number of solutions, but with no objective criteria for selection. Unlike <i>Problems with Uncertainties</i>, the ambiguity is in our intent, not in the future. Often the options are not even specifiable. The ambiguity and openness can be paralyzing. Typically requires an artistic or visionary choice. There are subjective criteria (unlike Puzzles, which have "best", or objective answers), but they require judgment to assess.</p> <p>The problem requires an eye to possibility as well as reality, that is, there is often an audience that must believe it, invest in it, implement it, or buy it.</p>
<b>Examples</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Defining the vision for the company / project / group / etc.</li><li>● Large number of initiatives or projects or products with no way to set priorities</li><li>● Building graphic representations of ideas</li><li>● Product design (iMac, the Apple "cube")</li><li>● Company logo, "look and feel"</li><li>● Website design</li><li>● User interfaces</li></ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Such choices usually require inspiration, but not without an anchor in reality</li><li>● If there is an audience (customer group? employees? investors?), finding the balance of "audience acceptance" and "artistic creativity"</li></ul>
<b>Definition of Good Outcome</b>	<p>There is an option created which reaches beyond the known and the given. It defines an innovative step, but with appropriate consideration of those who must implement or purchase the concept. If there is an audience, there is enough initial acceptance to support further pursuit of the choice.</p>
<b>False Solutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Using market response to unduly limit the creativity of the artist or visionary</li><li>● Endlessly arguing for the "rightness" or objectivity of essentially subjective judgments</li></ul>
<b>Typical Identification Errors</b>	<p>The role of an audience in <i>Problems that are Too Rich</i> sometimes misleads people to consider it a puzzle ("just ask the customer what they want") or a Problem of Many Voices ("everyone deserves their say").</p>
<b>When to Exit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● The artistry of the task is ignored and people insist on "objective" solutions</li><li>● The effort is tainted by friction and conflict; the safety required for risk taking is absent</li><li>● Traditional beliefs are pushed without challenge</li></ul>

---

## Problem Solving Process for Problems that are Too Rich

	Leader / Sponsor	Individual Contributors	Neutral Party
		The process below is for the principals, although the audience for their work is part of the sequence.	
<b>Exploring the Problem</b>	The Leader may be most able to strike the right balance between being responsive to an audience (customers, investors, employees, etc.) and reaching beyond what is wanted, expected, or known.	This part of solving <i>Problems that are Too Rich</i> is noticeably different from more classical steps. Typically those considering visionary or artistic judgments need to immerse themselves in the phenomena, so what looks like "analysis" is actually "getting a feel" for something. They are often responding to clues on an intuitive even unconscious level. For example, the interior decorator who has lunch with a client may learn more from the client's personal expressions than from their stated design preferences.	The Facilitator may be valuable for managing the tension between data and imagination. There will be some who rush to customer data to solve the problem, and others who want to dismiss customers in the hope of a truly visionary solution. Both are right, as long as they make room for the other perspective at some point in the process.
<b>Considering Options</b>		<p>Generating options in this problem class is an essentially intuitive and/or artistic activity. While evaluation of alternatives is still important, evaluations from the audience must be used in moderation. Like classical problem solving, the real value of evaluation of options will be the chance to surface unarticulated criteria. Those criteria, in turn, will allow for greater exploration of new alternatives.</p> <p>The lack of objective criteria means that consensus will be more elusive. Sometimes a visionary solution has to be pushed by someone in authority or with great credibility.</p>	One dilemma the Facilitator may help in managing is the tension between a solution in response to immediate needs vs. a solution for a more distant future.

**Implementing  
Solutions**

Some problems of this type become straightforward projects. That is, once the innovative product design is done, it becomes straightforward to build it. Once the architectural drawings capture the desired “feel” of the new building, it becomes articulated as construction drawings. The implementation looks like that of a Puzzle.

Often, however, implementing a solution to a *Problem that is Too Rich* is a matter of “installing” a vision. It is anything but straightforward. Communication may be the first step, but it often involves as much persuasion as explanation. Eventually the feedback from the relevant audience becomes crucial. Are people feeling inspired? Awed? Excited? Engaged? Or is the vision too “far out” to provoke anything other than puzzlement?

And what should we track to monitor the success of such an implementation? If the solution is a visionary statement for a project, product, or a whole organization, what tells us “it’s working”? The monitoring needed is more complicated. A vision needs to not only motivate, but to direct. People should be able to reference decisions made or resources allocated as a result of the vision. We would hope to see a strategic plan that translates the vision into a more specific set of objectives.

A vision statement, however, also requires some openness. The inspiration is not just to follow, but to expand and create. We would hope to see some evidence of new thinking, of applications beyond that anticipated by the author of the vision.

---