



Problems to Possibilities Canvas



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At First Person Consulting (FPC) we develop tailor-made approaches to complex questions drawing on the best of evaluation, systems thinking, and design. We developed this **Problems to Possibilities Canvas** drawing on our years of experience in facilitating processes to tackle complex questions. While the surface-level answer to these questions is often 'it depends', the real value is in the conversations and decisions that follow.

This Canvas has been created to support self-facilitation through a process to develop different framings of a problem or need, elicit a range of possibilities for what comes next, and to expand our collective understandings of a situation or context.

It can be used by any number of people and across any complex issue. We suggest using it as part of a workshop or similar style of process where you can spend time unpacking your individual perspectives, compare and discuss them, and then work towards a shared understanding of 'what next'. The instructions for each part of the Canvas are described below. While we hope that this process will guide you to 'an' answer we feel that its core purpose is to provide a fit-for-context way of holding spaces to have conversations on the things that matter most.

We encourage you to bring together people with a diverse range of perspectives or 'takes' on the problems and possibilities, and see what emerges.



Part 1: Problems to Patterns

Part 1 is about perspective taking, framing, and reframing our understanding of the problem to that of a systemic one.

Oftentimes what we think is 'the' problem is actually the result of a range of interactions and relationships between underlying factors. We call this network of factors and relationships the **patterns** that drive the problem. The way these patterns are experienced by people and communities can vary based on the places and spaces of focus, so taking a highly contextual view of what each pattern looks like is important. **Going from Problems to Patterns is a reframing of what the 'real' problem is, and what we need to change.**



Part 2: Patterns to Possibilities

Part 2 starts from underlying patterns, not surface-level problems, and creates space for possibilities.

With an understanding of the **patterns** within a place or context, we then need to shift into a solutions-based mode of thinking. Our goal in Part 2 is to work towards a vision that will result from addressing these patterns. **The term possibilities is intentional** - it frames what we can do as open, knowing that inevitable constraints (funding, timeframes) will limit what we can do. However, keeping our view focused on an optimistic future will ensure collective efforts are aligned. **This is a brainstorming process that encourages creative thinking.**

Tips for the process

1

Collaboration is key

We suggest you bring together a group of people to tackle the Canvas. To understand complexity requires a range of perspectives, which also drives innovative solutions.

2

Tackle different parts of the problem together

You can describe a 'big problem', but then each choose to apply the Canvas to different parts of it. This tool is a frame that you can adapt in both structure and process.

3

Ways to focus the problem

We talk about 'desired behaviours' or an 'undesirable outcome'. These sit at the centre of our process. For example:

- Desired behaviour: Physical activity amongst young people at school.
- Undesirable outcome: Poor mental wellbeing among carers in rural Victoria.

4

The trick is the story in the pattern

Notice the interactions - how do the relationships feed into each other. Are there factors that sit at the intersection of multiple relationships? Look for cycles where things keep reinforcing or balancing each other out. Every pattern has a story - the trick is to find it.

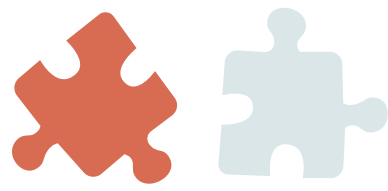


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Part 1: Problems to Patterns

We start by **framing** the problem or need systemically. What are the factors that drive it, and what are the underlying patterns or dynamics that we can see?

1. Bound the problem

Describe your problem in two sentences or less.

What is the nature of the issue, who does it affect, and where? This sets a boundary to your framing. If need be, work with others to help settle on a shared view of the broad scope you want to focus on.

2. Focus the problem

Next, consider a dimension of the problem you have identified. A good place to start is to focus on the **barriers to a desired behaviour, or on an undesirable outcome**. These should have some reference to a priority context and/or demographic to help focus the problem further.

3. Pull and weave the threads

Next, we want to start pulling and weaving our threads. This is done by:

- Asking “**what causes [your focus issue]?**” Try to **identify 3-5 drivers to start**. Draw an arrow from each driver to the focus in the centre.
- **Then, ask “what causes [each driver] to happen?”** Write down each answer and draw an arrow connecting them. **Some drivers will connect to multiple others.**
- **Continue asking this question and adding your answers and directed arrows between them.** Try to ensure closed loops so that no factors sit at the end of a single arrow.

4. Interpret the patterns

Once you have finished, ‘zoom out’ and look at the map of factors. Are there individual factors or clusters that have a greater number of connections or influence on the focus problem? Summarise what you see - **these are your patterns**.

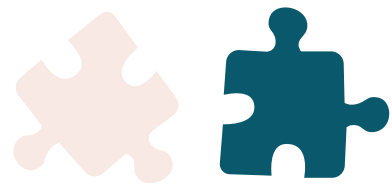
1. *The issue that we are looking to solve is...*

3.

2.



4. *The patterns that we can see are...*



Part 2: Patterns to Possibilities

We start by **framing** the problem or need systemically. What are the factors that drive it, and what are the underlying patterns or dynamics that we can see?

1. Frame an optimistic future

If the broader problem were solved, what would be the benefits to the people, places and spaces that were affected? What would be happening as a result?

2. Describe the pattern

What were the patterns identified in Part 1? If you identified multiple, focus on one that feels the most appropriate for the context. These are the roots of the tree to the right hand side.

3. Plant the seeds and grow

This model for change uses roots and a tree as a metaphor. Starting with points of intervention - like planting seeds - the intent is to identify the changes needed over time to achieve the vision.

But nothing works in isolation - and things don't follow a linear path - there will be things that branch off from your efforts to new areas. The path to change may be indirect, or require many different branches. There could be other things that need to be in place to ensure that the tree grows as intended.

The model does not specify language for stages of change - use this as a space for you to reflect how change makes sense to you in this context. Use words or symbols - there are no constraints.

Use these **seeding prompts** to kickstart your thinking:

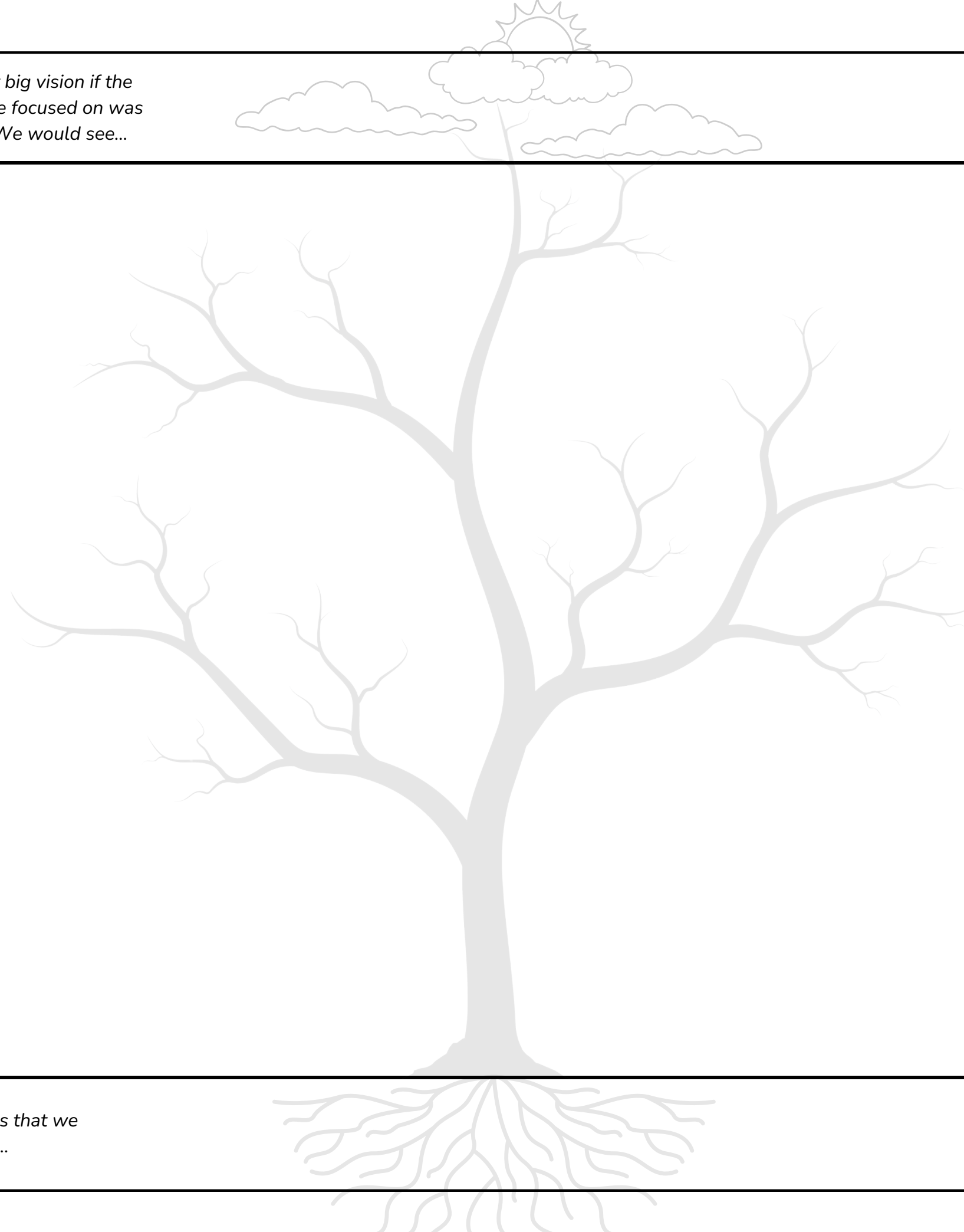
- What if constraints were the opposite to what you assume?
- How might a child approach this problem?
- Imagine the idea is like dropping a stone in a pond, how does this translate to this problem?

Your goal is to create a narrative for change. The roots are the 'beginning', the tree is the 'middle', and the sun and clouds are where you want to 'end' up.

1. *What is our big vision if the issue we are focused on was resolved? We would see...*

3.

2. *The patterns that we can see are...*



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