



Stuck on a Sticky Issue? Check out This Simple Tool to Help You Get Unstuck

Do you feel stuck by a complex issue or problem that just won't go away? Perhaps one of these situations rings true for you day after day:

- That problem I thought I had solved keeps coming back.
- My situation is so complex I don't even know where to begin.
- Nothing ever changes around here.
- We all know there is a problem, but no one seems to know how to fix it.
- Things are changing so quickly that I don't know what to expect next.

How do you typically deal with your recurring problems, or sticky issues, when they come up? Do you find yourself approaching your complex issue or problem in one of the following ways?

- Wishing the problem would just go away
- Settling for a temporary fix
- Waiting for your problems to solve themselves
- Blaming others for creating or failing to solve them

As you've likely already discovered, none of these approaches will effectively solve your issue. So what else can you do?

The "Same & Different" tool is one of the simplest and most powerful ways to engage with a sticky issue you face. Complete the worksheet below.

1. My sticky issue is:

Answer the following questions from looking at what is the same and different in your issue.

2. How is this issue the same as and different than it was yesterday (or last quarter or last year)?	
Same	Different

3. What are the similarities and differences between this sticky issue and related issues that are not so sticky?	
Same	Different

4. How would I like this issue to be the same as and different in the future from how it is today?	
Same	Different

5. How do multiple people in your group view the issue similarly and differently?	
Same	Different

6. Insights and Options for Action: Very often the process of answering these questions, and brainstorming the similarities and differences with your issue generates new and innovative options for action. Write down 3 insights you've seen:

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____

If you still find yourself stuck, focus more closely by asking three additional questions about your answers above:

- Which of these similarities and differences has no significant effect on the issue? (Put “0” in front of those.)
- Which ones make the issue worse? (Put “-“ in front of those.)
- Which of the similarities or differences make the issue better? (Put “+” in front of those.)

Select only one of the similarities or differences and figure out how to reduce its negative or increase its positive value. This additional step may uncover a new way to engage with your sticky issue. If not, then move to action by choosing one of the items and planning action to shift it. You may want to strengthen a positive similarity or difference, or weaken a negative one. You may focus on increasing or decreasing similarities or on increasing or decreasing differences. Whatever you choose, take the action and see what happens. How does your sticky issue transform? Then begin the process again—What? So what? Now what?

This simple approach isn’t always easy, but it does always generate new insights and options for action to reframe or remove the stickiest of your issues. Give it a try.

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