



BSR Conference 2010  
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## New Perspectives: Reframing Problems

Breakout Session Summary  
Wednesday, November 3, 2010 | 2:45-5 p.m.

### Speakers

- » **Anupam Bhargava**, General Manager, Line Maintenance Services, Pratt & Whitney Global Service Partners
- » **Erin Fitzgerald**, Director, Social and Environmental Innovation, Dairy Management
- » **Marika McCauley Sine**, International Public Affairs Director, The Coca-Cola Company
- » **Nancy McGaw**, Deputy Director, Business and Society Program, and Director, Center for Business Education, Aspen Institute (moderator)

### Highlights

- » Reframing a problem is an innovative step that can lead to better solutions.
- » Strategies to reframe a problem include asking open-ended questions, trying a different perspective, imposing constraints, and taking a strengths-based versus gap-based approach.

### Memorable Quotes

*"To get to the right solution, you need to have the right problem."* —Nancy McGaw, Aspen Institute

*"Be bold. What if you could do it? What if you had no constraints, what would it look like?"* —Erin Fitzgerald, Dairy Management

### Overview

McGaw provided an overview of techniques for reframing problems, which include asking questions such as: *What is the problem that I am working on? If I look at it from a different perspective, how would the definition of the problem change?* She noted that one of the challenges to reframing problems is that people prefer to champion solving problems rather than reframing problems.

McGaw presented five strategies to reframe problems: 1) ask open-ended questions; 2) be specific about the problem; 3) try a different perspective; 4) impose constraints—which can be a driver for innovation; 5) try a strengths-based analysis, looking at what is right, versus a gap-based analysis, looking at what is wrong. McGaw then introduced the panelists, Aspen Institute First Mover Fellows, who presented context for their situations and their current framings of their problems.

Fitzgerald explained that Dairy Management was created to address the problem of how to get the value chain to work together. She originally framed the problem as: How are we going to feed 9 billion people with a finite amount of land, air, and water by 2050? After considering who is the steward that can enable this change, and who needs to be enrolled and motivated to address this problem, she realized the answer is farmers. Fitzgerald then reframed her problem: How will we enable the 55,000 U.S. dairy farmers to be prepared to address the increasing demand of stakeholders to provide food for 9 billion people while still preserving resources?



Bhargava explained that Pratt & Whitney's problem is how to expand investments to advance renewable and clean energy technologies. His company faces challenges such as investment constraints, risks associated with new technologies, and the long-term nature of the returns. He framed his problem with two components: 1) what is the business case to compel senior executives and stakeholders to pursue this problem?; and 2) how will renewable and clean energy address the issue of the 1.44 billion people who do not have access to energy?

McCauley Sine presented the situation that Coca-Cola faces. By 2020, the majority of the company's products will be sold by small businesses, which are the engines of its business. Most of these businesses are run by women, who face unique challenges. She framed the problem as: How can Coca-Cola help these businesses be more successful, both to ensure the success of Coca-Cola and the communities where these women live?

Participants divided into small groups to discuss reframing the three problems presented by the panelists. Based on these discussions, participants had these tips for reframing:

- Shift the timeframe into the future, which can open up new solutions.
- Use case studies from other industries to understand how companies have framed and solved similar problems.
- Engage diverse stakeholders.

The panelists presented the following tips for reframing:

- Divide the problem into discreet pieces.
- Test assumptions.
- Understand different stakeholders' perspectives and what resonates for them.
- Quantify the value of the results.
- Identify partners.
- Identify a vision.
- Consider the "[appreciative inquiry](#)" approach.

The panelists then shared how they reframed their problems. Fitzgerald reframed her problem as: How can dairy be part of the solution for conserving and protecting resources and for healthy food systems and healthier products? McCauley Sine reframed her problem by explicitly stating the business motivation first: to increase Coca-Cola's sales, to quantify the ROI from investing in their small business retailers, and to highlight the positive impact on the women and their communities. Bhargava realized to reframe his problem he needs to clarify whether the primary driver is creating a market need or helping the intended beneficiaries.

Once the problem has been reframed, panelists recommended creating a road map with specific projects to address the issue and set targets. For example, McCauley Sine shared that at the Clinton Global Initiative meeting in 2010, Coca-Cola's CEO announced a 10-year global initiative—5 BY 20—to empower 5 million women in its global business system. To achieve this goal, Coca-Cola has started a year of consultation with stakeholders.

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