

Diagnosing AI Projects

Issue Space Toolkit

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Direct edition companion packet

How To Use This Packet

This packet is designed to help you move from understanding the method to using it on a real issue.

Suggested order:

- 1 read the short guide,
- 2 fill in the canvas,
- 3 use the workshop script if you want to run the method with a team.

This packet works best with one live issue, not with your whole AI strategy at once.

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How To Use Issue Space On Your Own Project

This short guide is for one reader working on one live AI issue.

You do not need a workshop, a consultant, or a full transformation

program to start. You do need one real complaint, some honesty about what is happening, and about 45–60 minutes of focused attention.

When To Use This Guide

Use Issue Space when:

- the team keeps repeating the same complaint,
- a pilot is stuck between demo and scale,
- leaders want action but the diagnosis still feels thin,
- different groups are describing the same issue in different ways,
- you suspect the visible problem is only part of the real one.

Do not use this as a substitute for technical validation, legal review, or domain expertise. Use it to improve the diagnosis before those other decisions move too far.

Before You Start

Choose one issue, not the whole AI program.

Bad starting point:

- We need a full AI strategy.

Better starting points:

- We need more AI talent.
- Users do not trust the system.
- We cannot scale the pilot.
- Legal keeps slowing the project down.

Also gather a few concrete signs:

- delays,
- rework,
- low adoption,
- budget friction,
- model errors,

- workflow complaints,
- no clear owner.

You are trying to diagnose a live problem, not create a polished story.

Step 1. Write The Trigger Issue In Plain Language

Start with the sentence people are already using.

Do not improve it too early. A messy sentence is often more useful than a polished one because it shows what the organization thinks the issue is.

For example:

- We need more AI talent.
- The model is good, but nobody trusts it.
- We have lots of pilots and little value.

If the sentence already sounds like a solution, go one step deeper.

Example:

- We need better governance.

Ask:

- Why are people saying that now?
- What happened?
- What risk are they reacting to?

Often the deeper issue is not governance by itself. It may be unclear ownership, weak explanation, poor domain fit, or a real trust gap.

Step 2. List Symptoms Before Explanations

Now list what has actually been happening.

Symptoms are useful because they keep you close to observable reality. They stop you from turning one preferred explanation into the whole story.

Helpful prompts:

- What failed, slowed, or stalled?

- Where is the friction showing up?
- Who is frustrated?
- What kind of work is getting harder?
- What keeps getting discussed without resolution?

You do not need a long list. 4–8 strong symptoms are enough for a first pass.

Step 3. Walk The Issue Across The Six Dimensions

Take the trigger issue and test it across the full map.

For each dimension, write:

- 1 what you see now,
- 2 the main risk,
- 3 what evidence is still missing.

Domain-Specific Fit

Ask whether the AI approach fits the real logic of the task, workflow, and sector.

Helpful prompts:

- Does this system fit the real work?
- Are domain experts involved deeply enough?
- Do we know what a meaningful error looks like here?

Technical And Technological Foundations

Ask whether the data, infrastructure, integration, and maintenance discipline are strong enough.

Helpful prompts:

- Is the data fit for purpose?
- Can this system be supported in real use?
- Are we underestimating reliability or integration risk?

Managerial Leadership

Ask whether the issue is being led and framed well.

Helpful prompts:

- Who owns the problem?
- Who can make the hard trade-offs?
- Are leaders asking for scale too early?

Organizational Intelligence

Ask whether the organization can learn, adapt, and redesign work around AI.

Helpful prompts:

- Are we learning from pilots?
- Are we redesigning roles and workflows where needed?
- Do we keep repeating the same mistakes?

Relationships And Networking

Ask whether the right people are aligned and able to explain the issue to one another.

Helpful prompts:

- Are business, technical, legal, and user views connected?
- Are vendors shaping too much of the agenda?
- Do users have a real feedback path?

Ethical And Wider Impacts

Ask whether the broader consequences are being handled seriously.

Helpful prompts:

- Who is exposed if the system is wrong?
- Where must human judgment stay strong?
- Are accountability and override rules clear enough?

Step 4. Look For The Pattern

This is where the issue usually changes shape.

What started as a talent problem may turn out to be a leadership and workflow problem. What looked like a trust issue may depend on explanation, domain fit, and weak human-review design.

Ask four questions:

- Which dimension looks primary?
- Which dimension is secondary but influential?
- Where are we oversimplifying?
- Which stakeholder view is missing?

You are not trying to build a perfect causal model. You are trying to stop treating a compound issue as if it had one clean source.

Step 5. Reframe The Diagnosis

Now rewrite the issue in fuller form.

Weak version:

- We need more AI talent.

Stronger version:

- We are trying to scale AI with weak ownership, uneven workflow redesign, and too much dependence on a small technical group.

Weak version:

- Users do not trust the model.

Stronger version:

- The trust problem comes from weak explanation, low domain fit, and unclear accountability in the workflow.

The goal is not elegance. The goal is a diagnosis that changes the next move.

Step 6. Choose One Next Action

Do not jump from diagnosis to a giant action plan.

Choose one next move that improves the situation or improves the diagnosis.

Good next moves include:

- gather better evidence,
- narrow the use case,
- clarify ownership,
- redesign part of the workflow,
- add domain review,
- create a governance checkpoint,
- pause a scale decision until the diagnosis improves.

The right next move depends on the pattern you found. If the primary issue is leadership, hiring more engineers will not solve it. If the primary issue is weak technical foundations, a workshop on trust will not solve it either.

Step 7. Set A Review Point

Issue Space works best as a cycle.

Set one review date before you finish.

At the review point, ask:

- Has the trigger issue changed?
- Did the last action improve the issue or only reduce noise?
- What new evidence do we have?
- Has the primary dimension shifted?

Without a review point, teams often treat the first diagnosis as final. In AI work, that is rarely wise.

Common Traps

1. Starting With The Favorite Solution

If you begin with "we need a platform" or "we need governance," you may never see the real issue clearly.

2. Treating The Framework Like A Scorecard

This is not about filling six boxes and moving on. It is about seeing the shape of the issue.

3. Letting One Loud View Win Too Early

If one stakeholder defines the issue too fast, you lose useful disagreement.

4. Confusing Activity With Progress

More pilots, more tools, or more meetings do not prove the diagnosis is improving.

5. Writing Too Much

Short phrases are better than long paragraphs for the first pass. If you cannot state the pattern briefly, the diagnosis may still be muddy.

What A Good First Output Looks Like

After one pass, you should have:

- one clear trigger issue,
- a short list of symptoms,
- a map of where the issue sits across the six dimensions,
- one primary dimension,
- one or two secondary dimensions,
- a short reframed diagnosis,
- one next action,
- one owner,
- one review date.

That is enough to improve the quality of many AI decisions.

A Final Rule

Do not spend at full speed until you can name the issue in fuller shape. You do not need certainty.

You do need a diagnosis that is better than the first slogan in the room.

Issue Space Canvas

Use this canvas for one live issue.

Write short phrases, not essays.

Do not start with the solution. Start with the issue.

Page 1

Project Snapshot

- Project or initiative:
- Team or business unit:
- Sector or domain:
- Current AI use case:
- Decision owner:
- Date:

Trigger Issue

Write the complaint in the words people are already using.

Examples:

- We need more AI talent.
- The pilot worked, but scaling failed.
- The business does not trust the model.
- We have too many tools and too little value.

Trigger issue:

Why this matters now:

What has already been tried:

Visible Symptoms

List the signs that made this issue impossible to ignore.

1

2

3

4

5

Six-Dimension Map

For each dimension, write one short line on what you see now and one short line on the main risk. If a dimension feels important but still uncertain, capture the biggest missing evidence items on page 2.

1. Domain-Specific Fit

What we see now:

Main risk:

2. Technical And Technological Foundations

What we see now:

Main risk:

3. Managerial Leadership

What we see now:

Main risk:

4. Organizational Intelligence

What we see now:

Main risk:

5. Relationships And Networking

What we see now:

Main risk:

6. Ethical And Wider Impacts

What we see now:

Main risk:

Page 2

Pattern Check

Primary dimension:

Secondary dimension:

Which stakeholder view is missing?

Where are we oversimplifying?

What missing evidence do we still need?

1

2

Reframed Diagnosis

Complete the sentence:

This is not just a _____ issue.

It is mainly a _____ issue with strong

_____ and _____ effects.

Action Bridge

What is the single next move that would improve the diagnosis?

What should we stop doing for now?

Who owns the next step?

When will we review the issue again?

Quick Check Before You Leave

- Did we describe the issue before prescribing the solution?
- Did we separate symptoms from explanations?
- Did we identify at least one missing evidence item?
- Did we choose one next move and one owner?

Issue Space 30-Minute Workshop Script

Use this when a team needs a fast first-pass diagnosis.

Recommended group size: 3–8 people

Best use cases:

- early project confusion,
- stalled pilot,
- disagreement across functions,
- repeated complaints with no clear next move.

What You Need

- one live issue
- one facilitator
- one visible canvas or shared document
- people who represent at least two different viewpoints

Ground Rule

Do not solve the problem in the first ten minutes.

The job of this session is to improve the diagnosis.

Minute 0-5: Name The Issue

Facilitator says:

"Let us start with the sentence people are already using. Do not improve it yet."

Write the trigger issue where everyone can see it.

Examples:

- We need more AI talent.

- Users do not trust the model.
- The pilot worked, but scaling failed.

Then ask:

- Why does this matter now?
- What made it visible?

Output:

- one trigger issue
- one short reason for urgency

Minute 5-15: Map The Six Dimensions

Facilitator says:

"Now let us test the issue across the six dimensions. We are not scoring maturity. We are asking where the issue actually sits."

Move through the dimensions quickly:

- 1 domain-specific fit
- 2 technical and technological foundations
- 3 managerial leadership
- 4 organizational intelligence
- 5 relationships and networking
- 6 ethical and wider impacts

For each dimension, ask:

- What do we see now?
- What is the main risk?
- What evidence is missing?

Push for short phrases.

Output:

- six short notes
- early signals of where the issue is clustering

Minute 15-20: Surface Disagreement

Facilitator says:

"Where do we disagree most strongly?"

Then ask:

- Which dimension feels primary?
- Which dimension is secondary but influential?
- Which stakeholder view is missing?
- Where are we oversimplifying?

Do not rush to consensus.

Useful disagreement is a success condition, not a failure condition.

Output:

- one likely primary dimension
- one likely secondary dimension
- one visible area of disagreement

Minute 20-25: Identify Missing Evidence

Facilitator says:

"What do we still not know well enough?"

Ask:

- What are we assuming?
- What evidence would change our view?
- What have we been saying without really checking?

Keep this list short and practical.

Output:

- 2–4 missing evidence items

Minute 25-30: Choose The Next Move

Facilitator says:

"What is one next move that improves the diagnosis or improves the situation?"

Choose one:

- gather evidence,
- clarify ownership,
- narrow the use case,
- redesign a piece of workflow,
- add domain review,
- add a governance checkpoint,
- pause a scale decision.

Then assign:

- one owner
- one review date

Output:

- one next action
- one owner
- one review date

Closing Script

Facilitator says:

"We are not leaving with a perfect answer. We are leaving with a better diagnosis than we had thirty minutes ago."

Fast Facilitation Notes

- Ask for examples, not slogans.
- Do not let the loudest person define the issue too early.
- If every dimension sounds the same, the diagnosis is still too shallow.
- If the team keeps pulling toward solutions, bring them back to symptoms and evidence.
- End with one action, not a wish list.

What Good Looks Like

At the end of the session, you should have:

- a visible trigger issue,
- a six-dimension first pass,
- one primary dimension,
- one key disagreement,
- a short list of missing evidence,
- one next move,
- one owner,
- one review date.