

## Three Types of Problems\*

	Type 1 Technical Problems	Type 2 Value Problems	Type 3 Wicked or Intractable Problems
Agreement on the definition of the problem	YES	YES	NO
Agreement on possible solutions	YES	NO	NO

**Type I** problems are fundamentally “how to” questions. They are usually technical in nature, meaning they tend to be solved by technical fixes. There are high levels of agreement on both the definition of the problem and possible solutions. Generally, Type-I problems are amenable to expert-generated solutions. Intrinsicly, these problems tend not to require much consideration of values and beliefs and may not even require high levels of participation and involvement by those who have the problem. Examples of Type-I problems might include finding the fastest route to Chiang Mai, fixing a broken arm, washing clothes if you spill something on them.

**Type II** problems are best thought of as “value” problems. Solutions become less clear because value dimensions are present. The more that people study such problems, the more difficult it might become to find “the reasonable solution” because of the differing values. Even though there may be general agreement on the definition of the problem, there is little or no agreement on potential solutions. In fact, solution-seeking discussions can cause people to confront painful choices that they will either try to avoid or dominate because they don’t want to choose.

Unlike Type-I problems that lend themselves to the diagnostics and interventions of experts, Type-II matters require a serious consideration of values, not just by the experts, but by those who in some way must implement the solutions or live with the outcomes. In these circumstances, information alone won’t fully inform decision-making because the problems involve matters of the heart. Type-II problems evoke the emotions and stubborn responses associated with worldviews, ideologies, and belief systems.

**Type III** Like Type-II problems, Type-III problems are driven by deeply conflicting values but, unlike Type-II challenges, proposed solutions may not be considered valid simply because they are brought forward by someone who is typically defined as an essential part of the problem. Consider the Syrian conflict. One ethnic or religious group might propose a solution on new ways to govern but is immediately considered suspect by others in a different ethnic or religious group.

Complex public issues do not always fall neatly into one of the three categories. The usefulness of these typologies is to diagnose problems to help us think about how we might approach them.

\*Adapted from *The Creative Problem Solver’s Handbook For Negotiators and Mediators* edited by John W. Cooley, American Bar Association, 2004.