



Activity: Planning a High-Leverage Change with a Driver Diagram (60 minutes)



OVERVIEW

Working from a well-developed common understanding of a problem facing the school community, the next step in a cycle of learning is the identification of a high-leverage change to impact the problem in a sustained and meaningful way. This activity leads participants through the creation of a driver diagram that will help visualize their improvement plan. This diagram will make explicit the connections between the improvement plan's eventual aim, the underlying theory of change, and the actions that will bring those changes to life. This diagram will become the basis of future work identifying responsibilities and creating indicators to measure improvement, and will become a resource that the school community can return to and update throughout the improvement process.

OBJECTIVE

Through a guided session of small and large-group discussion, participants will create a visual improvement plan called a driver diagram, which will guide their work through the cycles of learning.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

- Groups of approximately six to eight participants.
- One facilitator

MATERIALS

- Previously completed Fishbone Diagram from the activity: [Developing your Understanding of the Problem with a Fishbone Diagram](#)
- Graphic organizers (below)
- Solutions Parking Lot (below)
- Copy of the [Framework for Great Schools](#)
- Chart paper or a white board and markers (optional)

CONNECTED ACTIVITIES

To engage in this activity schools must have settled on a clearly defined problem to address and developed it by creating a fishbone diagram. Please see:

- [Developing your Understanding of the Problem with a Fishbone Diagram](#)
- [Conducting a Needs Assessment](#)
- [Establishing Goals Aligned to the Framework for Great Schools](#)
- [Guiding Questions for Step 2: Assessing Needs and Establishing Goals through the Lens of the Framework for Great Schools](#)

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What is the aim of our improvement effort and how do we plan to accomplish it?
- Where are the potential opportunities to create high-impact change?
- How can we turn our ideas into a coherent improvement strategy?

FACILITATION NOTES

1. Introduction and framing (2 minutes)

- Welcome participants and review the objective and guiding questions of the activity.
- Explain to participants that this activity will build on their previous work developing an understanding of the systemic nature of the problem they aim to solve. The next step involves turning that knowledge of the problem and its components into a plan of action for their ongoing improvement efforts.

2. Primer on avoiding solutionitis (5 minutes)

- Read participants the following quote, reminding them that they can find it at the top of their graphic organizer:
 - *“Solutionitis is the propensity to jump quickly on a solution before fully understanding the exact problem to be solved. It is a form of groupthink in which a set of shared beliefs result in an incomplete analysis of the problem to be addressed and fuller consideration of potential problem solving alternatives. When decision makers see complex matters through a narrow lens, solutionitis lures them into unproductive strategies.”* – Bryk, et al. pg. 24
 - Ask participants if anything about the quote resonates with them. Invite them to share a story if anyone has an example of a school improvement that might be described as the result of solutionitis.
- Tell participants that today they are going to try to avoid succumbing to solutionitis by exploring multiple options before committing to one approach. For this reason, this activity breaks up the planning into multiple steps and leaves solutions to the end. Solutionitis is a common problem because solution ideas naturally flow from discussions about the challenges educators face. When the conversation drifts towards solutions, their job is to call it out and record the idea on the Solution Parking Lot so that they can return to it later in the activity.

3. Turning a problem statement into an aim statement (15 minutes)

- Explain that the first step in creating their driver diagram is to decide on an aim statement. This may be as simple as “flipping” the problem statement from the head of their Fishbone Diagram into a positive statement defining what the school community hopes to accomplish to solve this problem, or it may take more work to narrow and refine. For example, the group may decide to focus in on one root cause identified during the fishbone protocol to better target the aim statement.
 - Ask the participants to work as a group to spend a couple minutes discussing what their aim statement should say.
 - If participants are not doing so on their own, remind them that an aim statement should utilize the S.M.A.R.T.¹ goal format.
 - If participants are having difficulty, ask them the following questions to help guide their thinking:

¹ S.M.A.R.T. goals are *Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound*. For more information on S.M.A.R.T. goals [see here](#).

- Is the problem you are aiming to solve too big? Would tackling a particularly high-leverage cluster from the fishbone diagram be a more manageable size?
- Is the problem you are aiming to solve important to the school community? (note: the aim may address a problem faced by specific grades or content areas, but there should be consensus that it is a good place to start)
- If they are still struggling, remind them that while an aim statement is important, it isn't permanent and can be revised later in the cycle.
- Have them write their aim statement at the head of the driver diagram in the space indicated.

4. Creating drivers (15 minutes)

- Explain that the next step in the process is to describe the “drivers.” Drivers represent the main areas of influence necessary to advance towards the aim. They can also be described as hypotheses that help focus the work of accomplishing the aim.
 - For example, if a school selects an aim of: “increasing homework completion to 90%,” possible drivers might be: “students understand the task” or “students see the value of the homework.” These drivers work because they describe an area that has a clear connection to the aim, and a school can reasonably believe that by making progress in these areas they can “drive” an increase in homework completion.
- Tell participants that by completing the fishbone diagram in the previous activity, their job is halfway finished. Ask them to look at the larger causes on the fishbone diagram and think about which ones would make the best drivers for accomplishing the aim.
 - Divide the participants into two groups and have them work together to list potential drivers for about 3 minutes. They can use the larger causes on the diagram or come up with new or refined ideas.
 - Have participants share their ideas with the larger group. Encourage them to look for similarities and differences. Write down their ideas as they do. Stop when they run out of ideas or approach double digits.
 - Ask participants to check to see if the potential drivers are:
 - Broad enough to create confidence that they will impact the aim.
 - Specific enough that they can clearly imagine what the driver looks like.
 - If not, have them revise the driver.
- Explain that a large part of the power of drivers is how they help schools to prioritize its efforts to create the biggest impact while still respecting the time educators have to dedicate to their many other responsibilities. Ask participants to rank the top five drivers in order of potential impact on the aim.
 - Encourage them to discuss the merits of each and wait for a consensus before settling on positions.
 - If there is disagreement, tell them the exact order is not critical since there will be opportunity later to explore and even select multiple drivers. Ideally, consensus will be created, but if that is not possible, settle through voting.
 - Place the final five drivers on the communal driver diagram.

5. Uncovering opportunities to impact the drivers (10 minutes)

- Tell participants that the next step involves brainstorming opportunities to create the desired change in each driver. One way to think about opportunities is to look at a driver and ask the questions: “How?” and “Where?”

- For example: if a school is trying to impact the previously mentioned driver: “students understand the task,” opportunities might include: “Classwork and exit tickets.” This works as an opportunity because they represent a leverage point that can be utilized to impact the driver, yet is not so specific that it predetermines the action to be taken. Similarly, if a school has an existing after-school tutoring program, that can be considered an opportunity as well.
 - It is important to note that while it is easy to think of ways that these example opportunities could be used to impact the driver, opportunities are not explicit about exactly how they will be used. If they were, they would be solutions, and it is important that opportunities and solutions remain separate.
 - Remind participants that while it is very tempting to talk about solutions at this stage, it is not yet time to discuss concrete solutions. As before, the solutions that arise from discussion should be recorded in the Solutions Parking Lot.
- Break the room into two or three small groups and have them each select one driver to work on. Tell them they are responsible for brainstorming as many opportunities as possible in five minutes. Tell them to use the definitions and examples on the graphic organizer to guide them.
 - After five minutes has elapsed or the participants run out of ideas, introduce the *Framework for Great Schools* into the discussion. Ask them to think about where the driver fits within the six elements, and then ask them to think about where the opportunities they have come up with fit. Remind them that the six elements are highly interconnected, and ask them to use the lens of the elements to try and think of any other opportunities they might have missed.
 - After two or three minutes bring the groups back together and ask them to share. Place the opportunities on the communal driver diagram.

6. Brainstorming change ideas (10 minutes)

- Thank the participant for being patient with their ideas for solutions, and tell them they have arrived at the point where they can bring them into the discussion.
 - Ask them to look over the opportunities on the driver diagram and write down any ideas they have for changes they could make to school practice that connect to the opportunities for about 3 minutes. Tell them they can use ideas from the Solution Parking Lot if they wish.
 - As a group, share and discuss the change ideas and add them to the driver diagram.
 - When the brainstormed ideas have all been added, ask participants to look over the diagram and ask if anything is missing. If there are opportunities that do not have change ideas connected to them, ask them to try to think of some to complete the diagram.
- [Optional] If time and interest allow, you can elect to continue to add opportunities until participants complete whole diagram.

7. Turning the driver diagram into a plan of action (10 minutes)

- Tell participants that they now have everything they need to create a plan of action. In order to do so, they have to choose a single change idea to be their starting point.
 - Explain that by starting small through taking on a single change idea, it will be possible for the school’s learning cycle team to implement, measure and refine the change while still maintaining focus on their other responsibilities. The narrow focus on a single change will also allow for quicker feedback and refinement, which will accelerate the team’s learning.
- Tell participants that the primary criteria for selecting which change idea to focus on should be the potential impact they expect it to have on their aim, and the feasibility of implementing the change under current conditions with current resources. The goal is to create the maximum possible impact without overwhelming school professionals with additional work.

- To accomplish this, draw a simple graph on a whiteboard or a piece of blank paper. Separate the vertical axis into high-impact and low impact, and the horizontal axis into highly feasible and less feasible so that you have four quadrants.
- Explain that the participants should discuss and place each of the change ideas under consideration onto one of the four quadrants. When they are finished ask them to look at the high-impact, high-feasibility changes tell them to settle on one change to make the focus of their cycle of learning.
 - The facilitator should support the discussion by helping guide participants towards a consensus, since maintaining enthusiasm for the work throughout the process will be aided by choosing a change that has the support of all the participants.
- Congratulate participants on completing their driver diagram and choosing their change idea. Tell them that they can check the robustness of their diagram by seeing if reading it left to right each connection answers the question: “how?” and reading right to left answers the question: “why?”. For example, when looking from the driver: “students see the value of the homework,” ask the question “how?” If the opportunity to its right: “students see the impact of homework in their understanding and grades” answers the question well, then there is a robust connection.
 - Ask participants to spend a moment inspecting their driver diagram in this way, using both “how?” and “why?” questions.

7. Next steps (5 minutes)

- Thanks participants for their work and remind them that the driver diagram they have created is a living tool that will help them through their cycles of learning and can and should be refined and updated as they gain experience and understanding of the improvement effort.
- Explore the practical measurement guidance to use measurement and local data collection as a tool for creating continuous improvement: [Guide to Predicting and Measuring Improvement](#).

Example Driver Diagram

"Aim"

The goal for improvement that answers the question: "What are we trying to accomplish?" The aim should specify how much, for whom and by when

Increase homework completion by 90%

"Drivers"

The hypothesized areas of influence necessary to advance the Aim

- Students understand the task
- Students see the value of the homework
- Students persist through difficulties
- Families encourage homework completion
- Students have access to necessary materials and study conditions

"Opportunities"

The component of the system that activates the driver. The "how" of change

- Classwork/ Exit tickets
- Teacher Knowledge of individual students
- Existing tutoring program
- Students' own interests
- Students' appreciation of their own progress
- Students can find help
- Students' self belief
- Parent conferences
- Parent email list
- School/public libraries' internet access and study space
- Existing book fair

"Change Ideas"

The alteration to the system or process to be tested

Model homework task in class and ensure students' notes support homework



Add arrows to connect Opportunities to Change Ideas

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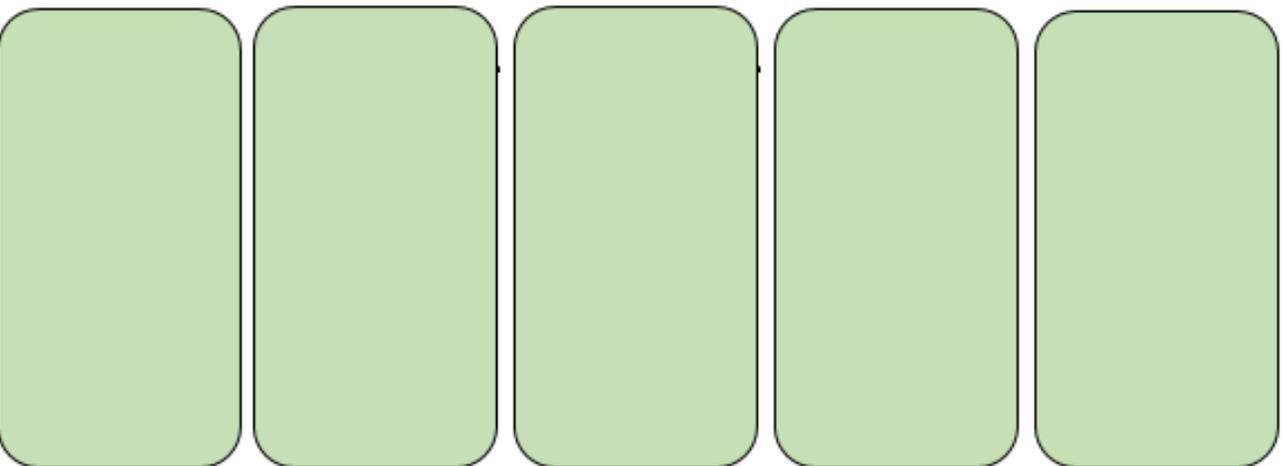
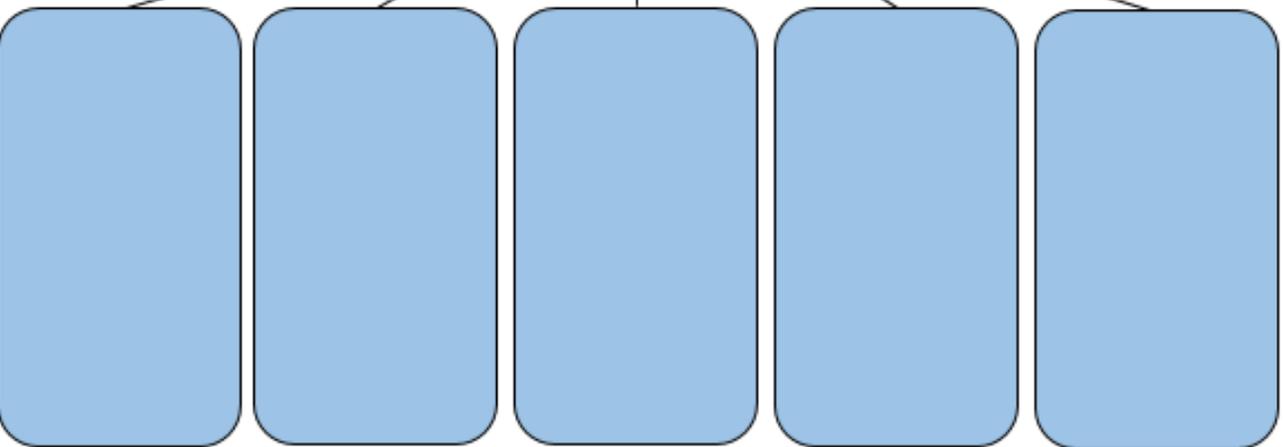
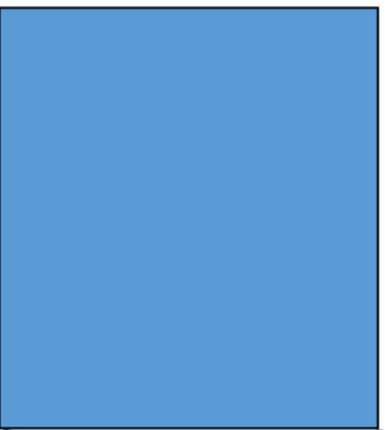
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"Change Ideas"

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