



Structured Brainstorming: Circle Map

A circle map diagram can be used to structure the thinking of a group when they want to brainstorm and then group their ideas into categories. Within the context of Unified Improvement Planning, this strategy can structure team brainstorming about explanations for their priority performance challenges.

Materials

- Group writing space (e.g., chart paper, projector and screen, Jamboard)
- Appropriate tools (e.g., markers, sticky notes, computers)

Pre-Work

CLARIFY THE FOCUS OF THE BRAINSTORM

Identify one performance challenge to focus the brainstorm.

SET UP THE CIRCLE MAP

Create the Circle Map where all brainstorm participants can access and add to it. The Circle Map includes three elements-- a large circle, a small circle in the center of the large circle, and a frame drawn around both circles. Write the performance challenge in the small circle.

Protocol

1. REVIEW PROTOCOL- Preview the process and outcomes with the team.
2. CREATE A FRAME- Identify what will “frame” the brainstorming. What additional data has the group reviewed (e.g. school process data, perception data)? Write these inside the frame and outside the large circle.
3. WHOLE GROUP BRAINSTORMING- Around the center circle, team members will brainstorm all of the possible causes of that performance challenge. Using sticky notes, team members will list (one per note) possible causes of the priority performance challenge. During this process, it will be important to ensure every idea is captured and all “voices” are in the conversation. At this stage more is better. Then team members should post their sticky notes on the circle map (inside the outer circle, but outside the inner circle).
4. CATEGORIZE IDEAS- Sort ideas into natural themes by asking: what ideas are similar? Is this idea connected to any other? To do this, team members will work in silence with each person moving sticky notes around to create groupings. Team members should keep moving notes until a consensus is reached.
5. SUMMARIZE THEMES - The team discusses the groupings. If some ideas don’t fit into any theme, leave as a stand-alone idea. If some ideas fit more than one theme, create a copy and put in both groups. Finally, the team should create a short 3-5 word description for each grouping
6. PRIORITIZE- As a group, determine which grouping(s) represent the highest-leverage root cause(s) to focus improvement efforts on addressing: As defined by Preuss, a cause is a “root” cause if:
 - The problem would not have occurred if the cause had not been present,
 - The problem would not reoccur if the cause were corrected or dissolved, and
 - Correction or dissolution of the cause would not lead to the same or similar problems.

Sample Circle Map

CMAS Math growth

NWEA MAP Math Growth

Staff Retention Data

Staff Survey Data



Student Attendance Data

Student Discipline Data

Circle Map

