Influencer Circle for Prioritizing Hypotheses of Root Cause

*"I learned that we can do anything, but we can't do everything…
at least not at the same time."*

-Dan Millman, Author

Purpose:
The influencer process guides teams to prioritize the likely root cause that has the greatest influence on other root causes.

Description:
This influencer process is a relations diagram. It is used to identify the most likely root cause of a student data problem generated during the data inquiry process. Teams use an influencer circle to study the interrelationships among those possible causes, helping them determine how hypotheses of practice (HOPs) connect to one another and which practices have the greatest influence. By completing this activity, teams identify dominant root causes to consider for improvement.

Guiding Questions:
- What are the most likely root causes in practice (HOPs) for a student data problem?
- Do they all represent causes that are controlled by the school?
- Have all members of the team participated in generating likely root causes from multiple perspectives and lenses?
- How do these HOPs relate with one another?
- Of all the HOPs, which have the greatest influence over the others?

Suggested Uses:
- To prioritize the highest likely root causes in practice for a student outcome priority
- To understand the interrelationships among practices and determine which practices have the greatest influence
- To determine a focus for improvement planning efforts which will lead to the greatest benefit
- To encourage meaningful collaboration leading to powerful discussions of practice

Suggested Time:
- Allow about 60 minutes to complete the process, allowing ample time for discussion.

How to Use this Resource:
- This activity begins with HOPs written individually on sticky notes. Be sure that each hypothesis completes this statement, "We have this student data problem because **we are/are not doing *this*…**" Each potential root cause, then, would begin with the bolded phrase above.
- Arrange the HOPs in a large circle on a table or wall. If there are more than 10 HOPs, the group should reduce the number to 10 or less. This often is done by voting--ie. each person votes for his/her top five.
- The team begins by looking at the HOP at the top of the circle-- noon on a clockface. Compare it to the HOP next to it (1 o'clock) and ask, "Is there a relationship between the two potential causes?" Discuss among the team. If so, draw a line between the two sticky notes.
- Continue looking for relationships between the first HOP and each of the other HOPs, moving clockwise around the circle. Draw lines between those HOPs that are related; do not draw lines where there is no relationship.
- Return to the top of the circle and examine the pairs of HOPs that have a line connecting them. This time ask, "Of the two potential causes, which one influences the other or which affects which the most?" Discuss among the team and reach consensus. Draw an arrow head on the line which points toward the HOP that is being influenced. *A decision must be made; do not put an arrow head on each end!*
- Repeat the previous step for each pair of connected HOPs, moving clockwise around the circle,
- Count the number of "in's" and "out's" for each HOP. An "in" has an arrow pointing to the HOP, while an "out" has an arrow pointing away.
- Write the total number of "in's" and "out's" next to each sticky note. The HOP with the greatest number of "out's" is the most dominant likely root cause of the student data problem.

References
Langford, David P. 2015. *Tool Time for Education: Choosing and Implementing Quality Improvement Tools.* Molt, MT: Langford International. Pp. 70-71.

Key Words: prioritize, interrelationships, influence**,** hypothesize, root cause
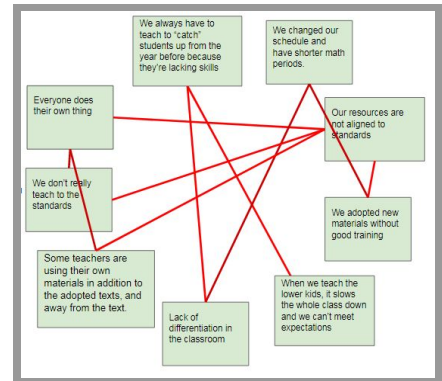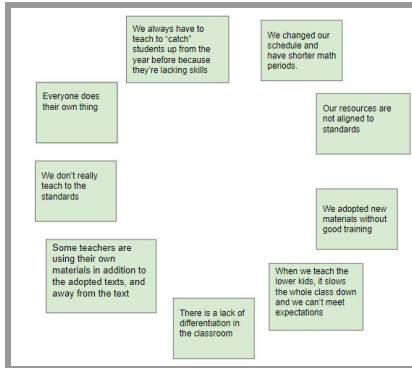
Brief Feedback
Thank you for helping to improve these resources.

Influencer Circle Activity

1. Place up to 10 hypothesis statements in a circle on chart paper, as shown.

2. Draw lines of relationship between HOPs that are related.

3. Draw an arrow head on the line which points toward the HOP that is being influenced

4. Count and record the number of the ins and outs for each HOP
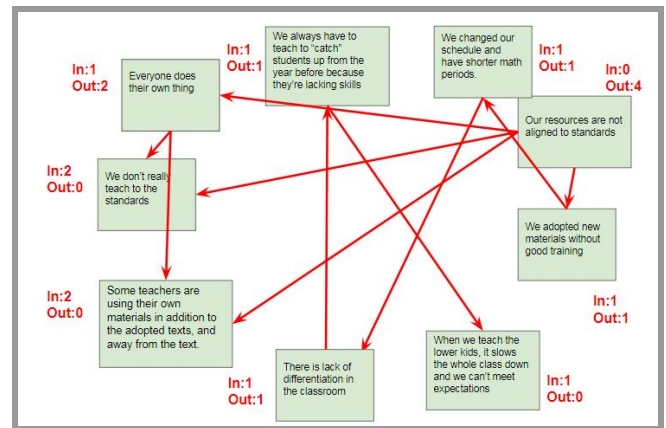
5. Identify the HOP with the most outs. This becomes the focus to inform the selection and implementation of an evidence-based improvement strategy.