Recovering with Equity

SMC's Spring Workshops

Part 1 of 3, 2-18-22

Identifying High-Leverage Problems of Practice

Getting to the Problem: Easier Said than Done

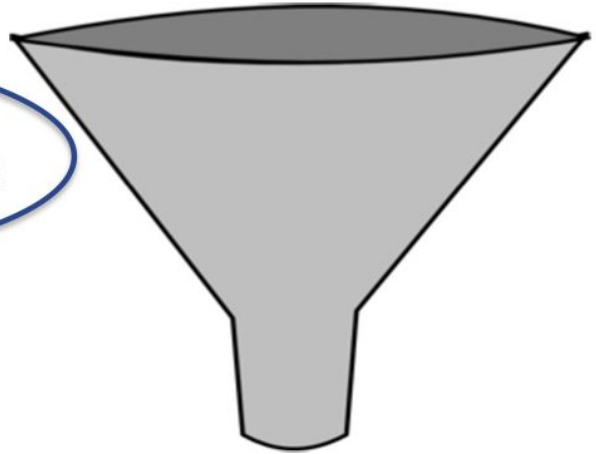
- The roadblock is **'solutionitis'.** Human tendency is to jump too quickly to solutions before the full nature of the actual problem is understood.
  - Not enough thought and reflection about why to focus on a particular problem (*Why THIS problem? And, why now? Is it solvable given the constraints and affordances of our system?*)
  - Incomplete analysis of the problem to be considered (*What are the root causes of this problem? Why and when does it happen?*)
  - Seeing complex matters as simpler than they are (*What do we need to know/investigate about our system before diagnosing/jumping to a solution?*)

Issues, Problems, Aims

Issues – important topics or problems for debate or discussion

Problem – a specific unsatisfactory situation that can be dealt with

Aim – a quantified improvement topic



Issue – Students are entering college underprepared.

Problem – High % of students are not passing gateway Mathematics courses.

Aim – 20% increase in students passing gateway Mathematics courses.

Actions – Investigate the system, Identify high leverage points to focus on

High-Leverage Problems of Practice

- Leverage
  - Impact across the system
  - Occurring frequently
- Feasibility
  - Locus of control
  - Reasonable time frame
  - Specific and measurable

	Low Feasibility	High Feasibility
High Leverage		
Low Leverage		

Getting to a High Leverage Problem of Practice

If you had to identify the three greatest challenges facing your department/CE committee,
what would they be?

Deeply consider issues of **leverage** and **feasibility**:

- If we get it right, will we see improvement **across our system**?
- Does it **occur frequently**?
- Do you **care** about it? (gut test)
- Is it within your (or someone on your team's) **locus of control** and **reasonable time frame**? ***
- Is it **specific**?
- Is it **measurable**?
- Is it an **institutional priority for CE**?

Getting to a High Leverage Problem of Practice

If you had to identify the three greatest challenges facing your department/CE committee,
what would they be?

In relation to this specific work, we are looking for a problem that:

- We **collaboratively** care about it (*shared concern*)
- Is an **institutional priority for CE**
- We don't already know how to solve/there is **room to learn**
- Is broad enough to explore, but shared enough to develop **common language** and spark cross-team collaboration and learning
- **Guides selection** of the equity partners

Define the problem you are trying to solve

- Be specific & concrete
- Should not contain an implied solution
- Problem you are capable of working on without a miracle
- Pass the “gut test”
- Keep the conversations candid and curious!
- What is the data telling you about this problem? How does the data help you become more specific?

Writing the Problem Statement(s)

- It should prompt us to investigate the problem **before** diagnosing it! No solution-oriented language or thinking.
- It should be a simple and clear description of the problem.
- It should be specific and measurable.
- What is the data telling you about this problem? How does the data help you become more specific?

Problem Statement(s):

Example

Problem Statement:

- This department does not provide a customized student experience through program of study that embeds academic and career supports

Causal Systems Analysis (Fishbones)

Causal Systems Analysis: Fishbone Diagrams

We are trying to answer:

What are the root causes of this problem?

Why do we get the outcomes we currently do?

How does our system produce these outcomes?

With the goal of:

Identifying the root causes of the problem.

Developing a shared understanding of the problem you are trying to solve.

Drawing upon the expertise and experience of stakeholders across our system.

Fishbone Diagram: Blank Template For Later