

Description of a Driver Diagram

A driver diagram is a tool that helps translate the work from the fishbone diagram—which defined the problem, main factors, and related causes—into a clearly articulated improvement goal, or aim. The driver diagram identifies a logical set of smaller, tangible goals and supports the selection of specific actions, or change practices, to be tested as part of the continuous improvement process. The driver diagram provides a graphic representation of the various actions and change practices the Improvement Team could test through the continuous improvement effort. It has up to four elements: an aim statement, primary drivers, secondary drivers, and change practices.

Aim/ Outcome statement. The aim statement is the specific goal, developed in response to the problem statement, that guides the improvement effort. It should describe what the Improvement Team wants to achieve, by how much the team wants to increase or decrease something, and, if possible or appropriate, by when. Ideally, an aim statement should target a specific population, be time specific, and be measurable. The aim statement generally restates the problem from the fishbone diagram in the affirmative. In the Grove Elementary School example case the problem is that students, especially low-income students, are below proficient in math. The aim statement restates this problem by affirming what the positive corollary to that problem might be and states it in specific and measurable terms. The aim statement in the driver diagram for the example case is that the percentage of students performing at proficient or above will increase by 10 percent, and the gap between low-income students and their peers will decrease.

Primary drivers. Primary drivers focus on the conditions that are essential for making the improvement described in the aim statement. An aim generally has three to five primary drivers that act independently or together. These drivers are derived from the factors identified in the fishbone diagram. Taken together, the primary drivers represent how the aim might be achieved. In the Grove Elementary School example case the principal and the teachers observed that students were not engaged in math class, which is identified as a factor in the driver diagram. They believe this lack of engagement might be contributing to lower performance. So, one of the primary drivers they identified is to increase student engagement in class. However, the primary drivers may be too general, as with this example, to direct specific actions, in which case, secondary drivers are necessary.

Secondary drivers. Secondary drivers, derived from the primary drivers, are specific leverage points that are expected to have a direct impact on the primary drivers and, in turn, on the aim. They more clearly direct the types of change practices that participants can implement. In the Grove Elementary School example case a primary driver, related to one of the factors in the fishbone diagram, is to increase student engagement. So, a secondary driver that directly relates to student engagement is to increase students' math discourse. This secondary driver is derived from one of the causes the team identifies: a lack of language and listening skills. While this focus on student discourse is somewhat more specific, and is expected to have an impact on the primary driver, it still does not provide a specific action in the form of a change practice. Depending on the scope of the aim and the specificity of the primary drivers, secondary drivers may not be necessary.

Change practices. Change practices are the interventions or specific work practices that are predicted to affect the secondary and, in turn, the primary drivers. Derived from the secondary drivers, or in some cases from the primary drivers, change practices should be specific, actionable, and measurable. In the Grove Elementary School example case a change practice directly related to the secondary driver of increasing math discourse among students is to have teachers introduce and use sentence starters to prompt math discourse in the classroom. This change practice is specific and measurable and is hypothesized to positively influence math discourse and, in turn, student engagement.