

How do we determine a root cause of priority concerns?

3. Brainstorm Contributing Factors



Protocols for Brainstorming Possible Factors

It is easy to put on the judgement hat about causes of priority challenges. We have our own experiences — personal, professional, and within our school communities. These experiences inform our perspectives, biases, and assumptions. The power of bringing a diverse group of stakeholders together with the perspectives of our many personal experiences to explore the challenges and contributing factors provides enriched thinking that helps us get to a root cause.

In order to find a root cause, we must first consider key factors contributing to a problem. Most often, there is more than one contributing factor that has led to the challenge. Here you will find protocols to brainstorm possible factors that will bring voices, thoughtfulness, and additional ideas to the process. These protocols can be used separately or together to dive into the challenges and gain an understanding of the contributing factors and root causes.

7 Rules for Brainstorming

- **Defer judgment.**
- **Encourage wild ideas.**
- **Build on the ideas of others.**
- **Stay focused on the topic.**
- **One conversation at a time.**
- **Be visual.**
- **Go for quantity.**

Powerful Brainstorming⁴

1. Select a fact-based, data-driven challenge to post.
2. For 3 minutes everyone thinks of as many possible contributing factors and puts each on a separate post it note.
3. Taking turns sharing one idea at a time, each member of the group shares idea and posting around the challenge until all ideas are shared
4. Collaboratively categorize and discuss. Group members can ask clarifying questions at this time and add to one another's ideas. If any factors are outside of the control of the school, move them to the outer edges of the board.
5. To prioritize, each member of the group puts a dot on 3 of the ideas that thought to be most important causes of this challenge.

Step Ladder Brainstorming⁵

This brainstorming technique avoids group think and empowers all members of the group, honoring all voices.

1. In advance let everyone know the challenge based on the data and consider causes. Team members plan to come to the group with factors that contribute to the problem.
2. Begin with two members only of the group coming together and sharing their thoughts on the cause of the challenge.
3. Add a new member to the group that first shares his or her ideas about the cause of the problem and then the group discusses.
4. Continue to add members one at a time with each presenting his or ideas before discussing with the group.
5. After all members have shared and discussed, come to a consensus about a contributing factor for the challenge.

3-2-3 Brainwriting⁶

Brainwriting bolsters confidence for all participants to offer suggestions and encourages consideration of other's ideas.

1. A problem is presented. Brainwriting occurs over several rounds. In each round team members will write down three ideas (possible contributing factors) within 2 minutes.
2. After the first round everyone swaps the piece of paper with someone else, reads the paper and then writes down three more ideas. These can be new ideas or build on a previously written idea. Continue for at least 3 rounds.
3. After 3 rounds the papers are collected. The facilitator shares all ideas and the group discusses to come to a consensus of the most plausible contributing factors.

4 Adapted from *Borrowing a Powerful Brainstorm from IDEO*. Retrieved from <https://catlintucker.com/2017/09/brainstorms/>.

5 Adapted from *The Stepladder Technique: Making better group decisions*. Retrieved from https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_89.htm.

6 Adapted from *Mindtools: Brainstorming Toolkit*. Retrieved from https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_89.htm.