Developing Shared Understanding

KEY FACTORS MAPPING

**WHAT** This is a simple but effective method for quickly identifying the factors that have the most influence on addressing a given challenge.

**WHEN** This method is especially helpful when things aren't moving forward and there seem to be underlying issues that hold things back. The process helps push a group to think harder about what's really holding back progress.

**WHO** A diverse group of stakeholders who care about solving the challenge, especially if they seem to bring diverging perspectives on how to do it.

**HOW** To do this, draw a 1-foot circle in the center of the large sheet of paper. Write the group's challenge in that circle. Then, draw another circle that’s as large as possible on your paper, and another that’s in between these two circles. [See example below. Note that this exercise can be done with or without post-its.]

Instructions to participants:

1. I've put our challenge in the center of this page. Do we all agree that this is what we're working on?
2. Now, in this middle circle, I want you to generate post-its for anything that will impact us addressing our challenge. These might be things that will help us achieve it or hold us back from that. Go!
3. [You might need to group post-its into themes where people have generated similar items. Do this next.
4. Now in the outer circle, I want you to put down anything that impacts the elements in the middle circle.
5. Now, as a group, let's start connecting any element that impacts another element. We'll draw a line between any two elements where one element seems to impact the other.

At this point, a few elements will start to emerge as the ones that are most influencing other elements (because they have the most lines connected to them). You can check with the group whether that seems accurate and then work on specific strategies for addressing these key factors.

**WHY** Benefits of Key Factors Analysis:

- It's a very fast way to identify the factors that seem to have the most impact, and might be powerful places to focus intervention strategies.
- It helps a group put everything on the table and view it all together as factors to consider.
- You can include any type of factor, including policies, practices, institutions, or political issues.

**WHAT’S NEXT** The key factors are often things that have been under the table or unaddressed, so it is helpful to help the group talk through why that factor is having such a big impact (usually a negative impact) on their ability to address the challenge. Good facilitation can help them uncover some unstated assumptions, beliefs, biases, or political dynamics that have been holding back progress.

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**MATERIALS**

- Medium Post-it notes (two colors)
- Sharpie markers (one for each participant)
- Large wall of paper or whitebard, 6x6'

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