

Drawing Out Our Mental Models – A Systems Thinking and Communication Tool

Activity handout

3	2	1	4
<i>Causes of causes – factors that influence the trend of the variable to the right</i>	<i>Causes – factors that influence the trend of the focal variables</i>	<i>Focal variable – the outcome whose trend you want to change (repeat on each line)</i>	<i>Consequences of changes in focal variable</i>

Activity: Integrating Your Mental Models

Directions:

1. Put the focal variable in the middle of a large sheet of flip chart paper
2. Each team member is given a turn to add 2 of their variables
3. Repeat until all team members have added variables they think are most important when building a picture of their challenge
4. Pause to group similar variables together. Create a new post-it note that has the theme of similar variables written on it, and use that theme post-it note in your diagram
5. Draw connections between variables
 - Label with "same" or "opposite" to indicate whether a change in one variable will lead to a change to the other variable in the same or opposite direction

CLD Cheat Sheet:

1. Name the variable: a variable is something that can vary over time and go up or down (i.e. is measurable)

Ex: if you want to add a variable around transportation – you will need work on the wording to determine what part of transportation varies over time that you are interested in. This could be added as “access to transportation” or “% of community with reliable transportation”, for example.

2. Draw the arrows: arrows show that one variables affects the other

S = same direction relationship (an increase in one variable = an increase in the other variable or a decrease in one = a decrease in the other)

O = opposite direction relationship (an increase in one variable = a decrease in the other variable or vice versa)

3. Look for feedback loops: feedback loops occur “when the effects become causes”

Types of feedback loops:

R = Reinforcing loop, causing a trend to continue - so it continues to go up and up and up or down and down and down

B= Balancing loop, including one or more links that counter a trend – so levels of variables fluctuate, but are basically stable over time