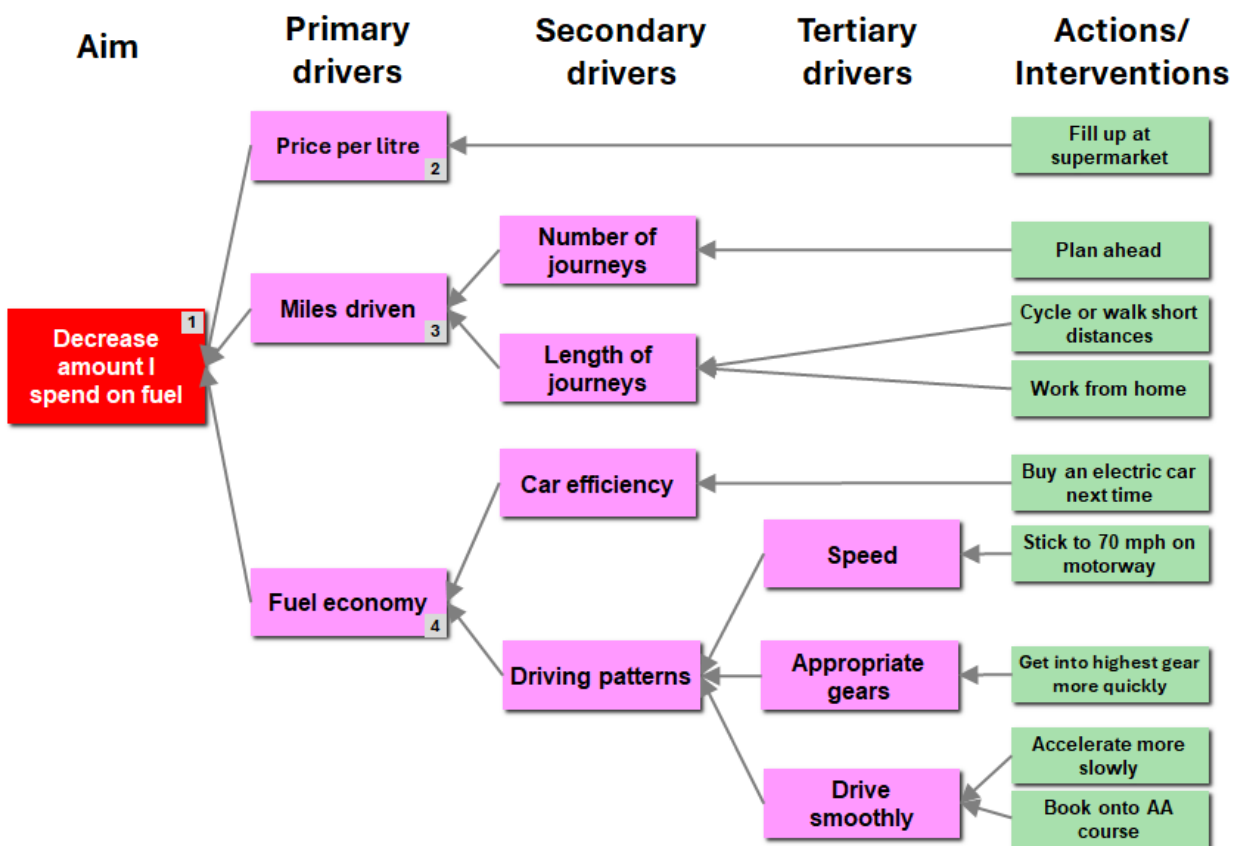


Driver diagrams

What is a driver diagram?

A driver diagram is an immensely powerful, yet practical tool that helps you show the important factors that affect your improvement goal and the key actions that impact on those factors. It is your 'theory' about how the system that you are working in and wanting to improve actually works. It captures an entire change programme in a single diagram and also provides a measurement framework for monitoring progress.

The layout of a driver diagram is most easily explained via a simple example. Imagine your personal goal was to reduce the amount you spend on fuel. The diagram below shows the driver diagram you might have constructed around this goal.



The diagram explained

The goal (box 1)

Notice how the driver diagram starts with a clearly defined and measurable goal. Often these come with a defined numeric target but it is not necessary to have one for the diagram to work.

Primary drivers (boxes 2 to 4)

The overall goal is linked here to three factors that you believe to have a direct impact on it. You assume that fuel costs will go down if you find cheaper fuel (box 2), reduce the number of miles you drive (box 3) or increase your fuel economy (box 4).

This first set of factors are referred to as primary drivers because they directly 'drive' the achievement of your main goal. These drivers may act independently or in concert to achieve the overall goal.

Lower level drivers

For more complex goals, the number of levels in a driver diagram can be expanded so that each primary driver has its own set of underpinning factors (ie 'secondary factors' etc). It is these secondary drivers (or lower level drivers) that would then be linked to projects and activities. The process of breaking down a goal can continue to lower levels to create third level or tertiary drivers.

Actions or interventions

The ultimate aim of a driver diagram is to define the range of actions or interventions that you may need to undertake. These can appear anywhere in the hierarchy of the driver diagram but are usually shown on the right hand side.

Important note: A driver diagram is read from right to left. For example, if I stick to 70 mph on the motorway then my speed is reduced which impacts my driving pattern leading to better fuel economy.

How to create a driver diagram

1. Start with a clearly defined goal
2. Brainstorm potential drivers - the areas where change will impact on your aim. Concentrate on generating ideas for drivers at this stage, don't try to allocate into primary or secondary straight away.
3. Once you've completed the brainstorm then cluster the ideas to create an agreed set of 'drivers'. Make sure that each driver is clearly defined (and potentially measurable).
4. Now you can identify the links between the drivers – creating primary, secondary and tertiary drivers. A driver can only be a primary driver if there is a direct link to the goal or aim.
5. Set these out in the diagram format. Make sure each driver is identified in a separate box and that there are arrows that depict the logic – for example, which secondary driver affects which primary driver.
6. Add actions or interventions.
7. Check the logic. Does it read properly from right to left? Make any changes
8. Finally, decide which drivers and interventions that you want to measure and add those to the diagram.

Tips and tricks

- Driver diagrams are a 'live' tool. They will change over time as you make changes to your system.
- If you can make your drivers measurable you have created a measurement framework for determining progress towards your overall goal
- Creating a driver diagram with a team ensures that everyone understands your goal and how they can contribute towards achieving it

- Driver diagrams will vary from place to place - there is no definitive 'right' answer as your local situation may be very different from other parts of the country

What do people think of driver diagrams?

"It took us a few times to get it refined, we changed it six times; it was an intuitive process. But it really is the backbone of our strategy. We're now hanging project measures on to it."

"Driver diagrams are something that can be applied to any environment, any situation... It gets you into a structure of thinking where even with a very complex and complicated programme, you can put that into context to another person."

"It enables us to move from a concept or an idea into starting to execute a programme and delivery very quickly. That has been a major difference to the way we work..."

Want to know more?

- We run a one hour webinar on driver diagrams so check out the NHS Elect website for details.
- There is also a booklet called 'What's your theory' by Brandon Bennett and Lloyd Provost, available on the NHS Elect website and also via the link www.qualityprogress.com

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