

Input–Process–Outcome (IPO) Activity

Purpose	To give teams the opportunity to think about data elements in terms of <i>Input</i> (i.e., the data that are “givens,” or the data that typically are beyond our immediate control); <i>Process</i> (i.e., the data elements that describe the actions learning organizations plan for and implement to get the outcomes they are striving to achieve, given the input); and <i>Outcome</i> (i.e., the data elements that describe the results of learning organization processes, given the inputs).
Target Audience	All staff
Time	Thirty minutes—or more depending upon how much discussion is encouraged.
Materials	A set of printed headings (<i>Input, Process, Outcome</i>) and a set of data elements (e.g., teaching styles, curriculum, attendance, etc.) printed, cut, and scrambled for each group (5 to 10 people in each group). You will need masking tape or push pins, if you are going to use a wall. You may use tables.
Book Reference	Chapter 3, <i>Using Data to Improve Student Learning in School Districts</i>

Process Protocol	<p>Prior to the session, print the headings (IPOHead.pdf) and data elements (IPOElem.pdf) files onto two different colors of paper. If possible, the printed headings and data elements should be on approximately 3 inch by 7 inch strips. Cut the headings and data elements into strips and group as sets.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Establish the size of the group(s) that will be participating in this activity. Small groups (5 or so) are beneficial in allowing everyone to participate. However, even with larger groups (10 or so), everyone can participate.2. Make sure each group gets a set of headings and data elements that are already cut into strips.3. Explain that this activity involves working with data elements that we would gather and use for continuous school improvement planning. These elements are typically organized as demographics, student learning, perceptions, and school processes, and that these data can be further categorized as <i>Input / Process / Outcome</i> elements. See the following definitions. <p>Definitions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Input:</i> Data elements that describe what learning organizations start with. The “givens”—usually beyond our immediate control. The context.
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- *Process*: Elements that describe the actions learning organizations plan for and implement to get the outcomes they are striving to achieve, given the inputs.
 - *Outcome*: The data elements that describe the results of learning organizations' processes, given the inputs.
4. Ask participants to place the headings—*Input*, *Process*, and *Outcome*—on the floor, table, or wall.
 5. Have each group member select a data element and place it under either *Input*, *Process*, or *Outcome*, describing why she/he believes that data element belongs under that particular heading. Group members can “help.” There may be times when an element might fit under more than one heading.
 6. After each group has sorted all the data elements under the three headings, and have agreed with the placements, allow the groups to walk around the room to see where the other groups placed their data elements.
 7. Have the large group discuss differences in the placement of the data elements and the implications of the placement.
 8. Share the IPO Diagram and talk about the data elements as inputs and the others that are results of our processes, given the inputs. If these are the only data elements that are “givens,” it seems logical that we should gather these data and know what they are as we establish processes and systems to achieve positive outcomes. It is worth noting that of all the typical data elements (30 some), only one represents student achievement results. This means that we cannot just look at student achievement results to understand what we can do to improve.

Comments to the Facilitator

It is quite revealing to notice where participants place different data elements under the three headings, and to hear their reasons for the placement. The discussion reveals beliefs about what is “possible” and “not possible” to change. For example, many staffs from underperforming high schools consider student behavior, graduation, and dropout rates to be “givens” or *input*. In other words, the kids come to them “bad” or with destinations predetermined. Participants need to be encouraged to discuss the effect of school processes on elements that some may consider as “givens” or *input*.