

Creating Connection Circles

and finding embedded loops

1. Draw a circle (or use a connection circle template) and write key elements around the outside. You may want to limit the number to 5 – 10, especially when introducing students to the technique. Elements chosen should be
 - a. relevant to the main idea of the story/text/system.
 - b. dynamic, i.e. their values change.
 - c. nouns or noun phrases, preferably.
2. If desired, create behavior-over-time graphs around the circle for each of the elements.
3. Identify causality: elements that cause other elements to change (increase or decrease).
 - a. Draw an arrow from the “cause” element to the “effect” element.
 - b. Label the arrowhead with “+” (indicating that an increase in the first element causes the second element to rise) or a “-” (indicating that an increase in the first element causes the second element to fall). If preferred, use different pencil colors to indicate (+) and (-) relationships.
4. Continue this process until you have represented all desired causal connections. Links may be based on actual data or on hypotheses.
5. Identify and analyze feedback relationships in the circle. To find a feedback loop, look for arrows in sequence that lead back to the original element. These feedback relationships can be shown in causal loop diagrams (CLDs).
6. Tell the “story” of the relationships represented within the connection circle.