



# The Power of Less: Achieving Coherence Through Subtractive Design

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# Key Objectives



Introduce Addition/Subtraction  
as a lens to understand and  
improve school improvement

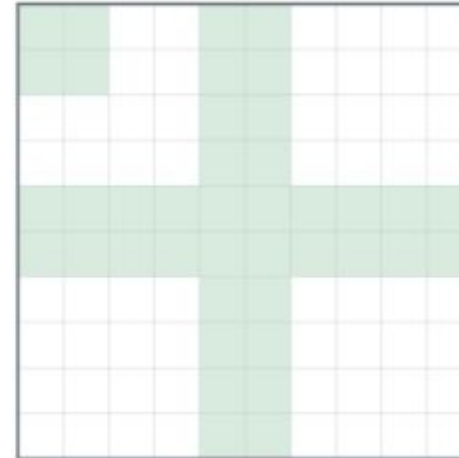


Brainstorm collectively  
what and how to subtract

# Warm-up...

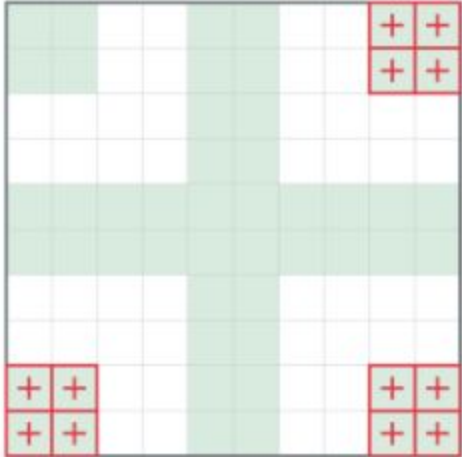
## The challenge:

Make the grid pattern symmetrical using the fewest clicks possible. Clicking any white square will turn it green, and clicking any green square will turn it white.

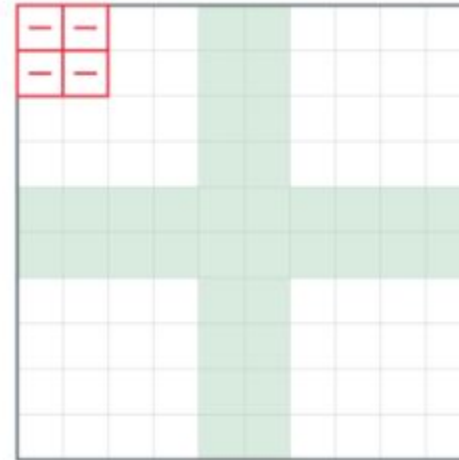


**Example additive solution:**

Adding green boxes to the three empty corners using 12 clicks.



**Subtractive solution:**  
Removing extra green  
squares in only four clicks.



# What can we learn from this exercise?

- People are conditioned to think of addition first! Especially when we are distracted or moving quickly.
- We need to remind ourselves that subtraction is an option. This can happen through intentional cues as well as specific policies and practices.
- Despite its potential for significant value-creation, subtraction has a “noticeability” problem - it is often less observable and less attributable to the specific action(s) someone took.

# Our assumptions we're going to make together today:

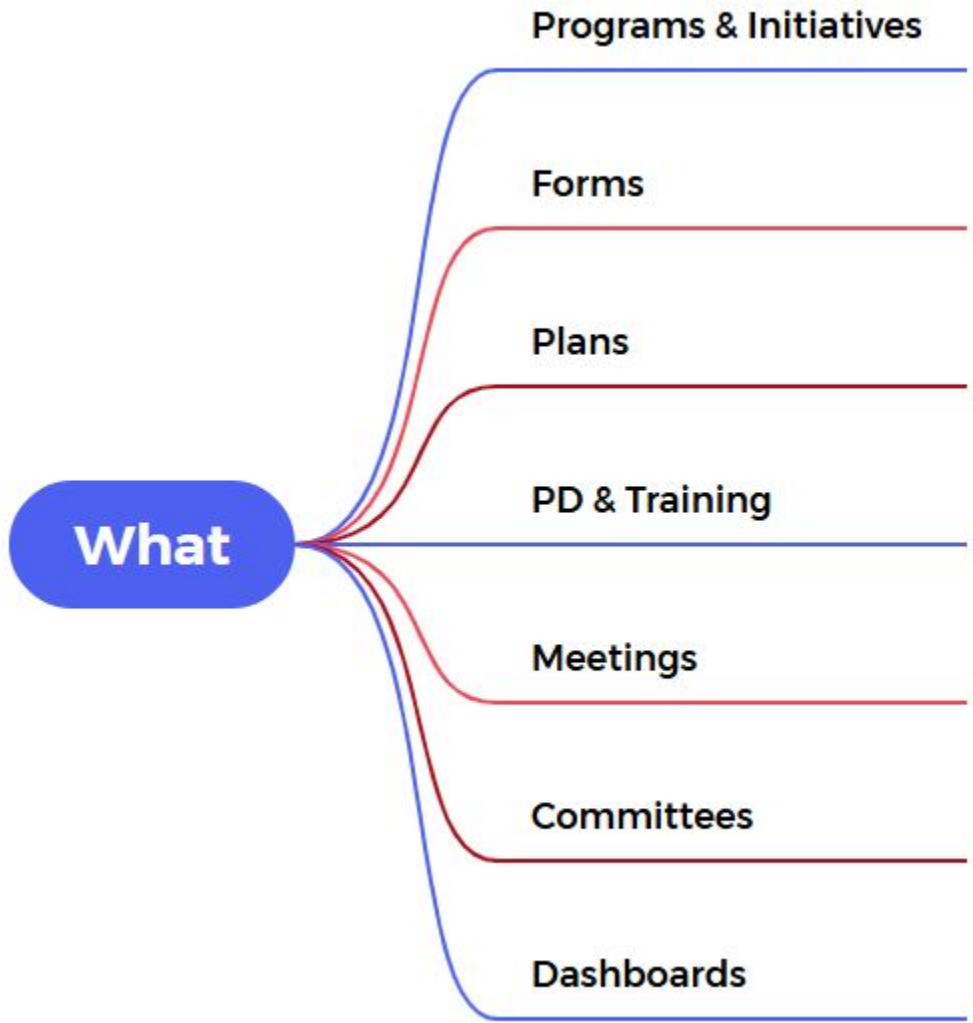
- Districts are not struggling due to lack of strategy; they are struggling due to *excess*.
- Most systems already have enough to succeed, but they lack the discipline and the practices to *subtract*.

Districts don't need better strategies, they need fewer of them, executed well. Our session today will explore how subtraction, NOT addition, is the fastest path toward coherence, trust, and measurable impact.

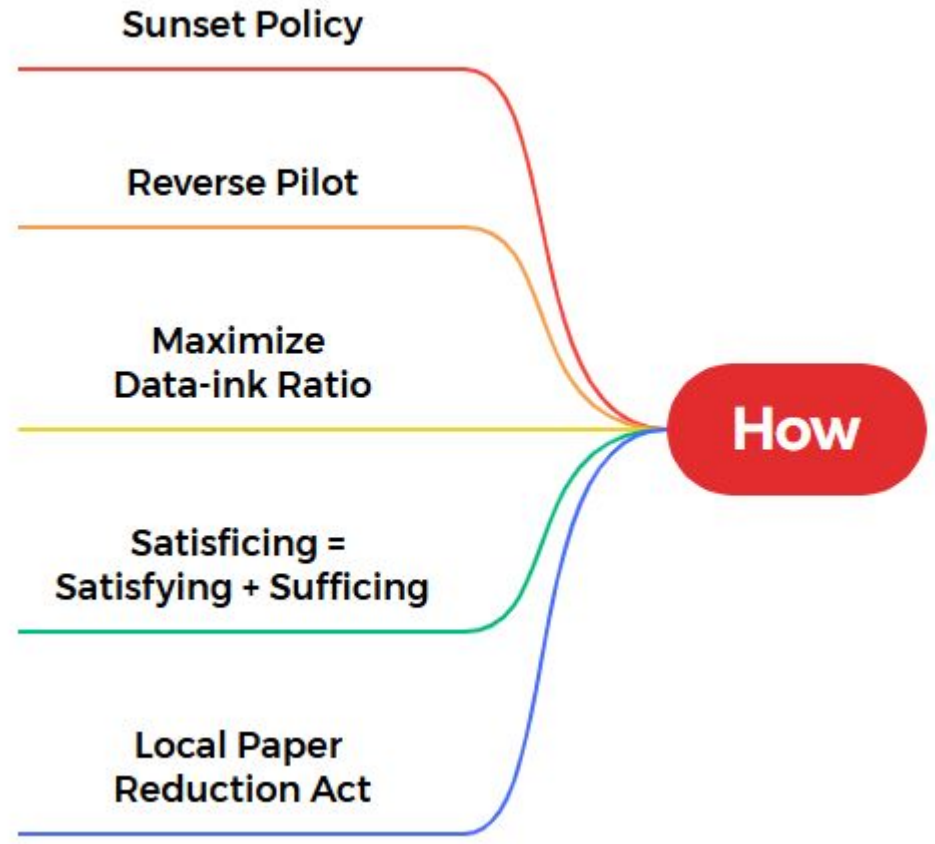
# Districts do subtract, but often not well

- Across-the-board cuts: indiscriminate and inequitable subtraction.
- Eliminating an initiative is almost always motivated by clearing space for something else.

We can do better!



# Frictions



# Goals of subtraction

## More

Coherence

Focus

Joy and excitement

## Less

Confusion and conflicts

Distraction

Frustration and indifference

# Improving Alignment and Coherence through Subtraction

- As districts work to better align instructional materials, assessments, and curricular priorities, they must also identify and eliminate strategies that undermine coherence.
- This requires a comprehensive framework for understanding:
  - What is currently in place
  - What is missing
  - Where misalignment exists
  - Which strategies are effective or ineffective

# Continuous Monitoring of Program Effectiveness and Alignment

- In order to maintain coherence, ongoing monitoring of curricular and assessment priorities is required.
- Formative evaluations of effective and ineffective programs can help improve alignment (e.g. St. Paul, MN)
- This may also lead to scaling up initiatives that are more effective and in alignment with organizational and instructional goals

# Subtraction efforts in LEAs

- **St. Paul Public Schools** Dashboarding and Tracking System
- **Guilford County Public Schools** Initiative Monitoring

# District Examples

St. Paul Public Schools

# Logic Model

<b>CLIENT FOCUSED OUTCOMES</b>	<p><b>Students:</b> Increased reading proficiency  <b>WINN teachers:</b> Improved knowledge &amp; skills in support of effective small group differentiated instruction  <b>Classroom teachers:</b> Improved knowledge &amp; skills in support of effective small group differentiated instruction</p>				
<b>RATIONALE STATEMENT</b>	<p>By providing an additional licensed classroom literacy teacher in K-2 classrooms, educators will have an increased capacity to provide Tier 1, small group differentiated reading instruction. This increased capacity will provide K-2 students with more opportunities to engage in small group differentiated reading instruction; thus, leading to improvement in students' reading proficiency.</p>				
<b>INPUTS/RESOURCES</b>	<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>OUTPUTS</b>	<b>SHORT TERM OUTCOMES</b>	<b>MEDIUM TERM OUTCOMES</b>	<b>LONG TERM OUTCOMES</b>
56 ARP Funded Literacy What I Need Now (WINN) Teachers for Elementary Schools (1-2 per site based on student enrollment at sites)	Monthly professional development required for all Literacy WINN teachers on topics to support high quality reading instruction; ie. science of reading, data, foundational skills, decodable books	72 hours of PD for Elementary WINN teachers	Elementary WINN teachers have knowledge of how to use FAST screening and progress monitoring data to inform instruction	Teachers will obtain greater knowledge of evidence-based practices to meet student-specific needs	Increase in the number of elementary sites fully implementing Tier 1 evidence-based literacy practices in alignment with the science of reading
15 WINN Teachers for Middle Schools (1 per site)	Monthly professional development and PLC time for Literacy WINN teachers	71 hours of PD for Middle School WINN teachers	Middle School WINN teachers have skills to effectively teach small groups using SIPPS materials (Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words)	Middle School WINN teachers understand how the foundational understanding about how to teach phonics to striving readers.	Increase reading growth for high risk students
5 Literacy WINN TOSAs	Foster the skills of WINN TOSA's to provide coaching, planning, professional development, record high quality instruction and create resources to support WINN and K-2 teachers.	1:1 monthly coaching sessions with WINN Teachers, weekly visits to cohort schools based on site-specific needs, WINN TOSA bi-monthly planning, facilitating monthly WINN Teacher professional development sessions, supporting PLCs and leadership teams.	WINN Teachers will feel supported by coaching, professional development, and resources.	Improved systems, processes and practices for WINN Teachers and classroom teachers	Increase reading growth for high risk students

# Professional Learning Community Monitoring Structure

**Innovation Office** provides an overview of initiative purpose, current implementation status, any leading outcome indicators available and strategy team compliance with meetings/reports

**Federal Programs** provides an overview of spend and any pertinent budget information

**Research, Evaluation & Assessment** provides an overview of data collection and dashboard status

We bucket each strategy into one of three categories:

- **On track:** Work is on track, making progress toward achieving outcomes
- **Concerned/at risk:** Risks or issues that might impact achieving outcomes
- **Behind/off track:** Significant issues that have impacted achieving outcomes

After we finish reviewing all strategies, we collectively determine an "intervention" plan for each strategy deemed behind/off track



*Inspire students to think critically, pursue their dreams and change the world.*

# Sample PLC Notes

Notes regarding implementation progress

Notes regarding spend down

Notes regarding dashboard and data collection

Team assessment of implementation status

Team assessment of progress toward meeting outcomes

Strategy	Implementation Overview	Financial Overview	Dashboard Overview	Implementation Category	Outcome Category
<u>2</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On track, continuing training</li> <li>Currently have 37 signed up for their cohort in January</li> <li>Been a lot of back and forth on getting payment - they finally received</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Still have full budget - \$58,463</li> <li>70 staff remaining to be trained, supplemental pay, \$10,800 this year</li> <li>TEACH - \$3k Supplemental pay</li> <li>Materials \$2500</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not close to being able to evaluate the efficacy of the work</li> </ul>	On Track	Behind/Off Track
<u>3</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workbooks/progress monitoring is rarely completed before meeting</li> <li>Home visitor; building curriculum for other home visitors, visiting families? What is the result of having a home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Still have 70% of budget left</li> <li>Met with ECFE, ECSE declined the meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feels this will progress well after meeting with REA</li> </ul>	On Track	Concerned/At Risk
<u>4</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Still need to update data</li> <li>Little behind on collecting mentor profiles, due to school closures</li> <li>We are APPS, Comms plan willing to step up and help do a spotlight on him</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Half spent, \$ in two positions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet, data received, dashboard in development</li> </ul>	On Track	On Track
<u>5</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on green rooms, school care wellness</li> <li>Behind due to being pulled to other work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Behind - 79% unspent</li> <li>May be due to a position not being filled</li> </ul>		Concerned/At Risk	On Track
<u>6</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expansion of program in place</li> <li>Began internships in Feb. Right Track in more</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Challenge financial has been contracts</li> <li>Right Track was completed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Published</li> </ul>	On Track	On Track
<u>7</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Covers staff salary &amp; CRI Expo</li> <li>Strategic plan initiative, theory of action devote time to coach principals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>75% left on budget</li> <li>For exp &amp; salary, will be spent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In development</li> </ul>	Concerned/At Risk	Concerned/At Risk
<u>8 L</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Full implementation</li> </ul>	ESSER II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In development</li> </ul>	On Track	On Track
<u>8 M</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have not been able to meet since last meeting, meeting next week</li> <li>Will clarify what WINN looks like in</li> </ul>	ESSER II		Behind/Off Track	Behind/Off Track

Inspire students to think critically, pursue their dreams and change the world.

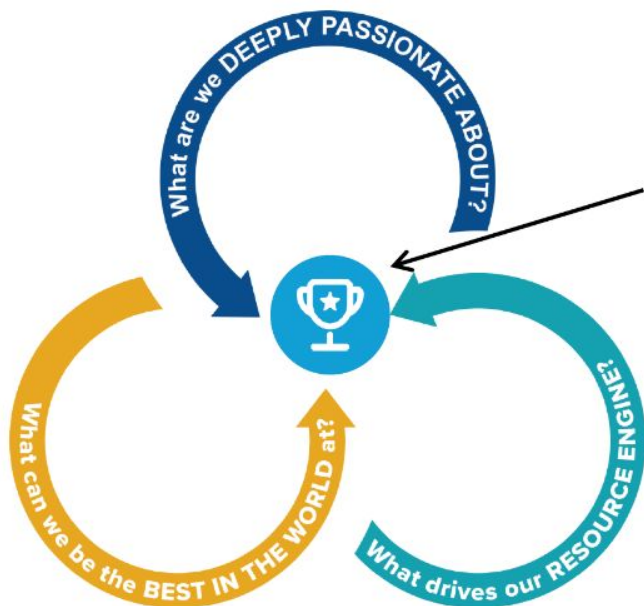


# District Examples

## Guilford County Schools (NC)

# The Dilemma

We need to clarify our strategic differentiators...



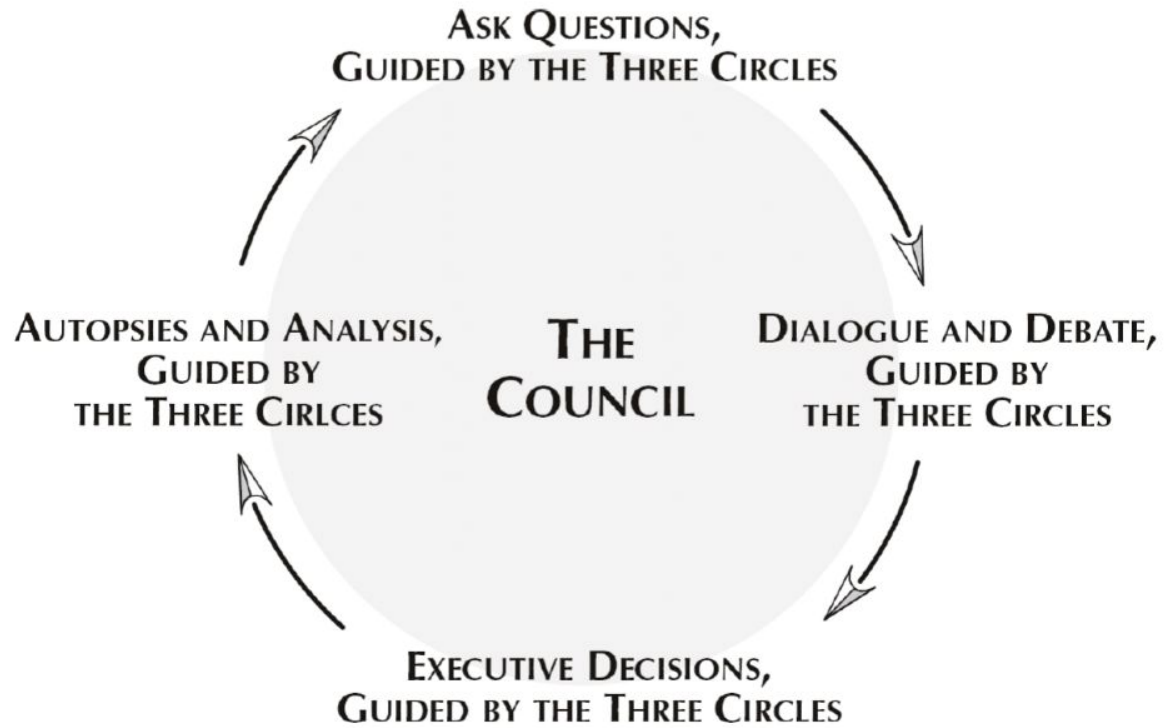
*Hedgehog Concept focused on postsecondary experiences in school*

... while not losing momentum on operational effectiveness



*51 strategic initiatives using the Roadmap to Success framework for progress monitoring*

# Good to Great Council



GETTING THE HEDGEHOG CONCEPT  
AN ITERATIVE PROCESS

Source: Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great*. Random House Business Books.

## Characteristics of the Council

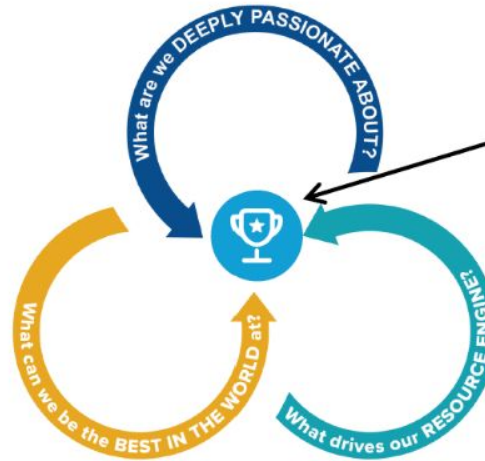
- Participate in dialogue and debate in search of understanding
- 5-12 people with a range of perspectives and expertise
- Not limited to executive team
- Meets periodically

# Impact on Initiative Monitoring



## Department monitored

*Advances GCS Better Together Strategic Direction Focus Area Priorities and/or Commitments*



## District monitored

*Advances GCS Hedgehog Concept*

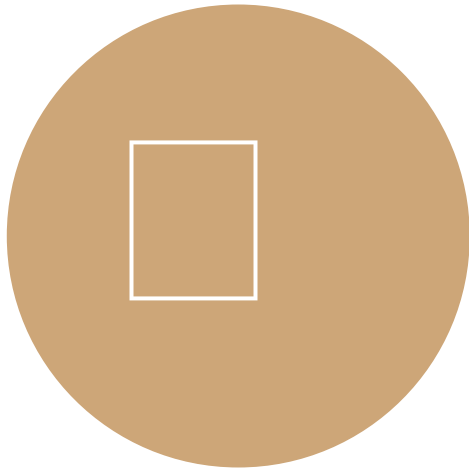


## Eliminate

*Does not sufficiently advance strategic direction priorities nor Hedgehog Concept; resources not available to support initiative*

# Putting the room to work!

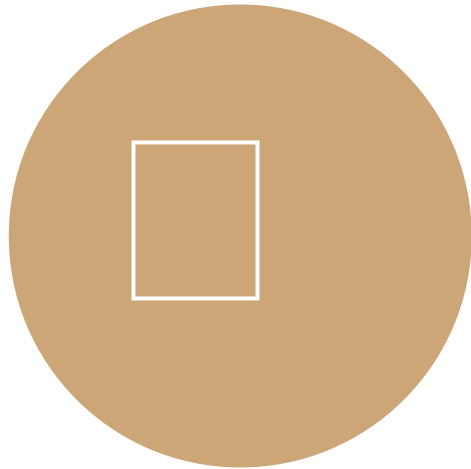
## Individual/small group discussions



We are going to go through three steps to help the room brainstorm possible subtraction opportunities within your organizations.

1. Initiative audit - brainstorm a list of current initiatives/programs and any associated data/impact metrics that are available
2. Categorize these initiatives on a 4-box matrix - two dimensions: evidence of impact and alignment to priorities
3. Pressure testing - evidence ladder exercise for one key initiative

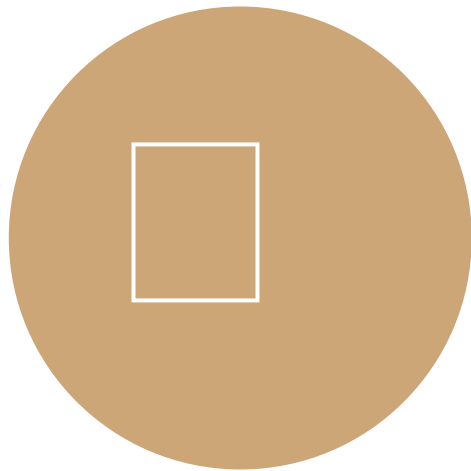
# Initiative brainstorming - 5 minutes



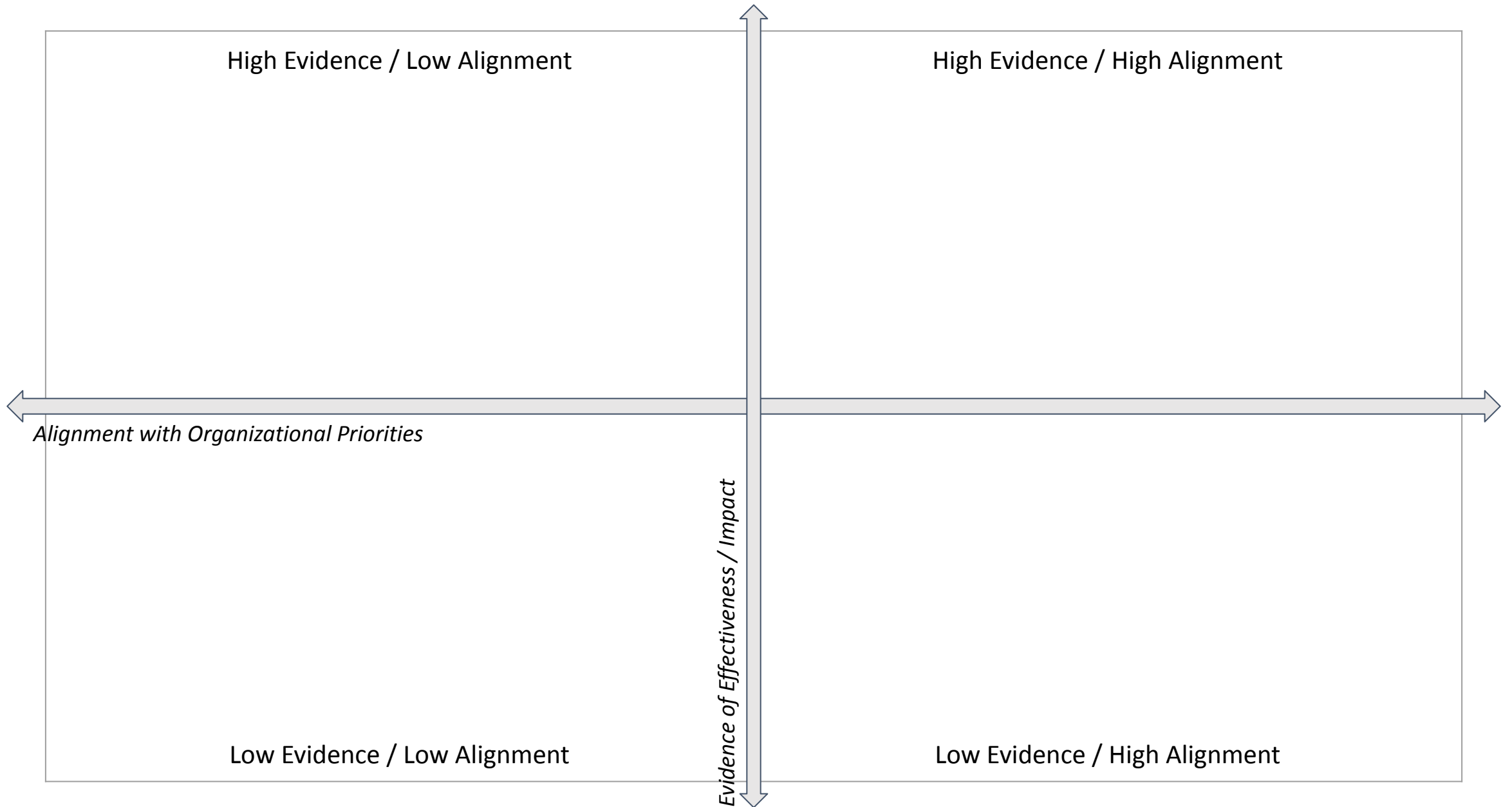
Criteria to be thinking through:

- Consumes significant time, resources, or attention
- Affects large numbers of stakeholders
- Creates implications for other plans and efforts

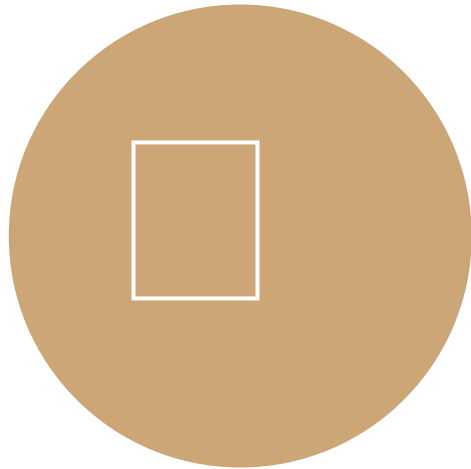
# Initiative categorization - 5 minutes



4-Box matrix to categorize the initiatives you've brainstormed



# Pressure testing an initiative - 15 minutes



Now, you're going to pick ONE of the initiatives and put it to the test through a subtraction "evidence ladder."

Pressure Test Component	Question Prompt	Participant Response
Intended Outcome	What student outcome is this supposed to improve?	
Theory of Action	How exactly does this initiative drive that outcome?	
Competing or overlapping strategies	Are other initiatives driving toward similar outcomes?	
Current evidence	What data do we currently use to claim it is working?	
Evidence quality	Is this causal, correlational, or anecdotal?	
Alternative evidence	What data might suggest it is NOT working?	
Length of investment	How long has this initiative existed in its current form?	
Confidence level of continued investment	High/Medium/Low - why?	
Sunsetting costs	If this were to go away, what other costs and/or changes should be planned for?	

# Small Group Pressure Testing

Present your initiatives and your “subtraction evidence ladder” while others respond.

# Whole Room Report Out

How did it feel going through this exercise?

How does your organization currently approach similar discussions?

# Some tips to leave you with:

While evaluating possible subtraction opportunities—

- Start with *importance + uncertainty*
- Find ways to *surface protected work* / “sacred cows”
- Follow the *energy drain* and *frictions*
- *Misalignment* with priorities and goals

# Happy Subtracting!

“Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication” - *Leonardo da Vinci*

“Instead of looking for reasons to discard an item, look for reasons to keep them” - *Marie Kondo*

## Thank You

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