

Circle of control, influence and concern



Introduction

There is no question that those working in education have busy jobs and busy minds. This is often in addition to busy personal lives.

Our *Teacher Wellbeing Index* reported that school staff are feeling overwhelmed, and this is causing stress.

There can sometimes be a misconception that the more we do, the more we'll achieve, and by doing more we can alleviate some of the job pressures. But there can come a time when tasks and worries start to pile up, and the burden of things we feel we have to do becomes too heavy.

But we can lighten the load by shifting our focus away from the demands that are making us feel anxious, and toward our responses to those demands. Using the circle of control, influence and concern tool is a useful way to shift that focus.



What is the circle of control, influence and concern tool?

The circle of control, influence and concern tool is a management tool that enables individuals, and teams, to consider the challenges they are facing and three ways in which they can think about the challenges and respond to them.

The challenges can be work related or for individuals, challenges related to their personal life, as both impact on mental health and wellbeing at work.



Circle of concern

Circle of concern:

This circle helps teams and individuals identify the elements of challenge/s that they can neither control nor influence, but that they are concerned about and need to adapt to.

Circle of influence

Circle of influence:

This circle helps teams and individuals identify the elements of challenge/s that they can't control, but can influence.

Circle of control

Circle of control:

This circle helps teams and individuals identify the elements of challenge/s that they can control.



This tool was developed by Stephen Covey, in The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, 1989.

How to use the circle of control, influence and concern tool within teams

They'll be times when staff are facing the same challenging situations so using this as a way to frame the challenges, and talk about them, can be very useful. Below are some simple steps to take if you are using this tool within a team setting.

STEP 1: Set some time aside to discuss the challenges, concerns or issues that you will be using the tool for. Give staff members adequate time ahead of the session to come prepared, as allowing enough time to think ahead will make for a more effective session. Be mindful that people may bring different challenges, in addition to those they share with each other, so allow enough time for everybody to input.

STEP 2: Start with the circle of control. Allow team members to identify the issues or elements of the situation that they can control and make a list of ways that plan to do this. This can form a team action plan that everybody has ownership of. You may be able to allocate resources to solving a particular issue for example if team

members are struggling with a deadline, they can take control by discussing this with their line managers.

Even in situations where circumstances make it difficult for staff to take control, they can still control how they respond to them.

STEP 3: Move onto the areas where staff can have influence. Even when staff can't control their circumstances, they may still be able to influence them. Maybe they have specialised knowledge that can help others to solve a particular problem, for example. It's important to say that influencing a situation doesn't mean they have to take charge. It can simply mean knowing who to turn to for help or advice.

STEP 4: Ask staff to identify the things they are concerned about, but have no control over.

The coronavirus is a good example of something staff have been concerned about but haven't been able to control or influence. Staff may not be able to change the situation, but they still have the power to change their response to it.

At this stage you can discuss with staff how they can accept or adapt to the challenge that they can't control. Doing this shows them that they are able to move past problems rather than get stuck on them.

STEP 5: Agree what has been discussed and communicate the next steps clearly.

If you are a line manager you can use this tool, and the five steps, with staff members on a one-to-one basis. Individuals can also use the tool for themselves.



Dedicated worry time

Even if staff recognise the things they can't control, and accept these, they may still be worried about them. This is human nature and it's unrealistic to expect worries to disappear altogether.

By allocating dedicated worry time staff can still acknowledge that they are worried and have time to process the worry, but also put boundaries around the worry so that it doesn't become burdensome or something they ruminate about all day, every day.

Dedicated worry time can be half an hour every day, half an hour each week or even less. It will be different for each individual, but encouraging staff to allocated dedicated worry time for the things outside of their control can have a positive impact on their wellbeing. Use the hints below on how to create effective worry time:



Create a comfortable space



Make a cuppa!



Write down your concerns



Practice not trying to find solutions



Talk them through if needed, with somebody you trust



Put away out of sight once time is up.

