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Conflict Frontiers

Moving Beyond Intractability

Conflict Frontiers
Massive Open Online Seminar

Map the Basic Conflict Elements

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Hi! This is Heidi Burgess. This is the first of a set of videos on conflict mapping. In this video, I'd like to talk about two different approaches to conflict mapping.

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Conflict Mapping – 2 Approaches

Prose Based

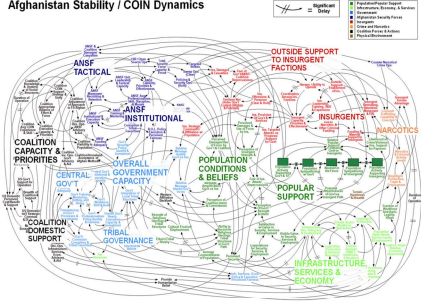
Paul Wehr's Conflict Map Elements*

- Conflict Context
- Parties
- Causes and Consequences
- Contrasting Beliefs and Values
- Goals and Interests
- Dynamics
- Functions
- Regulation Potential

*From Paul Wehr. *Conflict Regulation*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1979 and Paul Wehr. BI [Conflict Mapping Essay](#).

Graphical

Afghanistan Stability / COIN Dynamics



The first one I call prose-based and the second one is graphical conflict mapping. The prose-based approach is an approach that I first learned from Paul Wehr back in the 1970s. He's the first one that I know of to use the term "conflict mapping," but many other people of talk about a similar process, referring to it as "conflict analysis" or "conflict assessment."

What it amounts to is having a list of elements--such as the one that Paul generally used--and you wrote a prose essay or story about each one of these elements. So when you are looking at a conflict, you would first look at the context in which the conflict was being played out. You would look at who the parties were and the attributes of the parties. You would list the the causes of the conflict and the consequences, the contrasting beliefs and values of the parties, and their goals and interests. Next, Paul suggested mappers list the dynamics of the conflict—whether the conflict was escalating or de-escalating, for example—and the functions of the conflict (the benefits it brought to the people involved). Paul's last element was the "regulation potential." In other words, the potential to use negotiation or mediation or such processes to manage or transform or resolve the conflict.

This is the way that most people did conflict analysis or conflict mapping until about 10 years ago. Then some people –such as Peter Coleman and Rob Ricigliano--started experimenting with something that I call graphical conflict mapping. This involves examining the same elements, but then putting these elements into a picture.

This is a picture that I showed in the last video that was something of a joke because it's considered to be impossible to understand. Actually, if you look at it fairly carefully, it isn't all that difficult to understand. It is not nearly as complex as it looks like it is. But there are better ways to do graphical conflict mapping that are a lot more intuitive and a lot clearer. I will be talking about those in upcoming videos.

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Advantages & Disadvantages	
Prose-based Conflict Mapping	Graphical Conflict Mapping
Advantages: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Easy to create• Easy to understand	Advantages: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interactions between elements obvious if map is well done.• More information can be presented and gleaned more quickly.• Group creation process can be beneficial.
Disadvantages: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hard to see interactions between elements• Easy to miss key elements	Disadvantages: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Skill takes awhile to learn.• Can quickly turn into "spaghetti diagram."• May not be as intuitive as prose-based mapping—but if well done, it can even be more so.

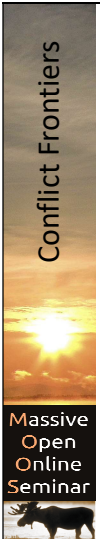
There are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches. The advantages to prose-based conflict mapping are that it's easy to do and it's easy to understand. The disadvantages are that it is hard to see the interactions between the elements and it's easy to miss key elements.

These disadvantages are the advantages of the graphical approach: here the interactions between elements are obvious if the map is well done. People who like graphical conflict mapping, point out that it's actually the relationships and the interactions between the elements that are more important in determining the course of conflict than the elements themselves.

In addition, more information can be presented and gleaned more quickly with a well-done conflict map. Lastly, the group map-creation process can be beneficial. When conflict maps are drawn as part of a conflict intervention, facilitators often get people from all sides of got conflict to sit down and try to map the conflict together. Just the discussions that take place in the process of trying to draw the picture can elucidate a lot of the agreements and disagreements between the parties. And these things can be hashed through just in the process of drawing the map. So I often tell my students that the process of making a conflict map is actually more important than the end result because you will learn a lot about what's going on with the conflict and your views towards it, as well as the other sides' views about it, when you work in a group to create the map.

The disadvantages of graphical conflict mapping are that it takes a while to learn, the results can quickly turn into what I call a "spaghetti diagram," and it may not be as intuitive as prose-based conflict mapping, although well if it's well done, it can be even more intuitively understandable.

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Elements to Map

<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Paul Wehr's list:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conflict Context• Parties• Causes and Consequences• Contrasting Beliefs and Values• Goals and Interests• Dynamics• Functions• Regulation Potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Burgess additions:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Power (sources and strategies)• Ricigliano's SAT elements• Core Conflict Elements and• Overlay Conflict Elements
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*From Paul Wehr. *Conflict Regulation*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1979 and Paul Wehr. BI [Conflict Mapping Essay](#).

What to map? I already gave the list that Paul Wehr had. A number of years ago, the Conflict Consortium gave a small grant to one of the people who was working with us on Beyond Intractability to compile all of the different templates that had been created for conflict mapping and conflict assessment and try to put them all together and come up with a master list. He came up with at least 200 different templates and kind of blew a fuse before he ever came up with that master list. So there are lots of options—just google “conflict assessment” and you’ll find lots!

When I have students do conflict mapping, I generally start with Paul’s list and then add a few things. One of these is power -- both the sources of power that the parties have and the power strategies that they’re using.


Another element comes out of Rob Ricigliano’s book *Making Peace Last*. Rob has a model that he calls the SAT model--which stands for structural, attitudinal and transactional elements. I sometimes have students map the structures that are contributing to the conflict (or helping to contain it); the attitudes of the parties, which is very similar to Paul’s elements “contrasting beliefs and values,” as well as “goals and interests,” and finally the transactions, which relates to the dynamics and how the parties interact with each other.

We also often have students map what we call the core conflict elements and the overlay conflict elements. I talked about the core/overlay distinction a while ago in a couple of posts and I’ll be talking about them more in the next two posts. But very quickly, let me give you a reminder of what that’s all about.

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Burgess’s Conflict Core and Overlay (Complicating) Factors



The diagram illustrates the internal structure of the Earth. It shows a cross-section of the planet with various layers labeled. From the surface down, the layers are: Atmosphere, Hydrosphere, and the Crust (divided into Continental crust (granitic) and Oceanic crust (basaltic)). Below the crust is the Rigid mantle, followed by the Asthenosphere and the Stiffer mantle. The core is divided into the Outer core (liquid) and the Inner core (solid). The diagram also shows the Ice cap at the top, and the Continent and Ocean at the bottom. The word 'earth' is written in a stylized font on the right side of the diagram.

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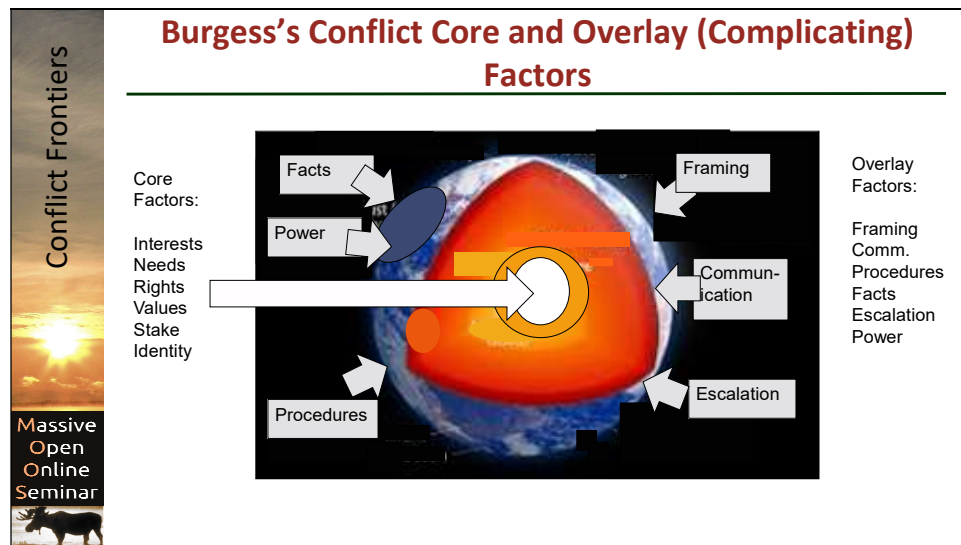


I liken conflicts to the earth as shown in this diagram. The earth has a crust and an inner core, which is hot and the crust is cool, but hides the hot core. Taking this diagram and changing it for our uses, you might come up with a picture that looks like this.

Photo Credit: From Wikipedia:

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The core factors in the center are the parties, interests, needs, rights, values, the stake that they have the conflict, or in the elements in the conflict, and identity factors. Those are what I call the "core factors" that tend to be in dispute.

The overlay factors are framing, communication problems, procedural problems, and factual disagreements. I put power in here because your sources of power, and, more importantly, your power strategies have a big effect on how the conflict plays out.

And lastly, the biggest overlay factor of all is escalation and, wrapped in with that, polarization. So those are the overlay factors and I find it very useful to map both the core factors and the overlay factors and the way these things interact together. I'll be talking more about how to do that in coming videos.

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