CONFLICT ANALYSIS TOOLS

Key Messages

• A conflict can be understood as an incompatible interaction between at least two actors, whereby one of the actors experiences damage, and the other actor causes this damage intentionally, or ignores it.

• Conflict analysis can support orientation for future action. Conflicts are dynamic systems. Any intervention becomes part of the system and should focus on supporting the creative, positive energies, in the system or related to the system.

• Conflict analysis can be used individually or in a participatory manner in a group. The analysis does not lead to an objective understanding of the conflict. Rather it makes one’s subjective perceptions transparent. This way they can be reflected on and clearer communicated.

• Conflict analysis can entail: 1) verifying if one is dealing with a conflict, 2) determining the conflict system boundaries, with the option of revising these later on, 3) using conflict analysis tools (presented below) to focus on certain aspects of the conflict and organize information.

INTRODUCTION

This conflict analysis Tip Sheet summarizes seven tools that can be used to assess different characteristics of a conflict in a structured way. It focuses our attention on particular aspects of a conflict, to bring order into a confused conflict perception. Conflict analysis is not an “objective” art. It is influenced by different world-views. The Harvard Approach, the Human Needs Theory and the Conflict Transformation approach are frequently used instruments:

1. The Harvard Approach emphasizes the difference between positions (what people say they want) and interests (why people want what they say they want). It argues that conflicts can be resolved when actors focus on interests instead of positions, and when they develop jointly accepted criteria to deal with these differences.

2. The Human Needs Theory argues that conflicts are caused by basic “universal” human needs that are not satisfied. The needs should to be analyzed, communicated and satisfied for the conflict to be resolved.

3. The Conflict Transformation approach sees conflicts as destructive or constructive interactions, depending on how conflicts are dealt with or “transformed”. Conflicts are viewed as an interaction of energies. Emphasis is given on the different perceptions, and the social and cultural context in which reality is constructed. Constructive conflict transformation seeks to empower actors and support recognition between them.
Once we have decided that the situation we are dealing with is a conflict, we need to decide on the system boundaries. What actors and factors do we want to focus on, which ones shall we leave out for the moment? One can focus on various “systems”. Every conflict is a sub-system in a larger system – its context (or super-system). A conflict in one sub-system may only be a symptom of a conflict located in the “context” of a larger system. Domestic violence, for example, may be part of a conflict between two land-use systems, which is embedded in an ethno-political conflict in one country, which in its turn is affected by different international policies dealing with economic trade. A conflict is often enacted at a system’s weakest point, not necessarily where it is caused. Thus whenever analyzing conflicts, we must consider the system boundaries we have set, and reflect on how they relate to the environment the conflict is embedded in. Depending on where we set the boundaries, the conflict will present itself differently. The boundaries have to be revised periodically, to make sure we are working where we have the best leverage. After setting the conflict system boundaries, we can use one or more of the following tools to deepen our insight onto various aspects of the conflict.

HOW TO USE THE CONFLICT ANALYSIS TOOLS

All the conflict analysis tools are structured in the same way: 1) description of the tool, 2) aim of the tool, and 3) step by step instructions on how to use the tool. The tools can be categorized according to their focus on dynamics, actors, causation, structures, issues and options/strategies. The Conflict Wheel summarizes all the tools and helps you decide which tool to use for which aspect.

SUMMARY OF CONFLICT ANALYSIS TOOLS

1. Conflict Wheel: Introduces six important dimensions of conflict analysis (dynamics, actors, causation, structures, issues and options/strategies). It organizes the other conflict analysis tools and is a “meta” tool.

2. Conflict Tree: The conflict tree deals with the difference between structural and dynamic factors, visualizing how conflict issues link these two aspects.

3. Conflict Mapping: The conflict mapping focuses on actors and their interrelationships. It is a good tool to start analyzing a conflict. Power asymmetry can be represented by the relative size of the actors circles. Animosity and alliances are symbolized with lines.

4. Glasl’s Escalation Model: The model aims to fit our conflict intervention strategy to the conflict parties’ escalation level. The message is that it is pointless to talk to a suicide bomber, or shoot people who are shouting at each other.

5. INMEDIO’s Conflict Perspective Analysis (CPA): The Conflict Perspective Analysis (CPA) focuses on the different perspectives of the various parties, by putting them side by side, one can see where there are differences and things in common. CPA follows the phases of a mediation. It is a good preparation for a mediation, can also be used to coach one conflict party. CPA does not look explicitly at structures or context.

6. Needs-Fears Mapping: Similar to the CPA, this method focuses on actors and their issues, interests, needs, fears, means and options. It allows for a clear comparison of actors similarities and differences in the form of a table.

7. Multi-Causal Role Model: This model focuses on causation, on the different quality of reasons, triggers, channels, catalysts, and targets. Content and actors, dynamics and structures are also considered.
CONFLICT ANALYSIS TOOLS

TOOL 1: THE CONFLICT WHEEL

Description: The conflict wheel is a “meta” conflict analysis tool, introducing the others tools. Each of the six sections of the wheel can be further analysed using tools presented below (or references to other Tip Sheets). The Wheel gives a first overview of a conflict, before analysing specific aspects. The Wheel symbolizes wholeness and movement, once the various aspects have been examined, they need to be brought together again, to get the conflict analysis “rolling”.

Aim: ➔ To organize the other conflict analysis tools
➔ To serve as an overview when first approaching a conflict.

1. Actors/Relations: Actors or “parties” are people, organizations or countries involved in a conflict. If they are directly involved in the conflict they are called “conflict parties”, if they become involved transforming the conflict, they are called “third parties”. Stakeholders have an interest in the conflict or its outcome, but are not directly involved.

Conflicts by definition refer to frictional relationships between parties.
2. Issues are the topics of the conflict; what people discuss or fight about.
3. Dynamics refer to the escalation level of the conflict, the intensity of interaction, the “temperament” and the energy of a conflict that transforms people.
4. Context/Structures: The conflict context and structural factors are often outside the conflict system one is looking at. Structural violence refers to violence that is not directly caused by people, but by the economic and political systems in place, e.g. causing poverty.
5. Causation: Conflicts are never mono-causal, but multi-causal and systemic factors interact. Instead of saying that everything is related to everything, it is helpful to differentiate between different “causes” or influence factors.
6. Options/Strategies: This point examines ways to deal with the conflict, strategies that are used or could be used, conflict party or third party efforts to de-escalate the conflict.

Step by step instructions:
1. Draw a wheel, list the various aspects in the six sections of the wheel.
2. Choose further conflict analysis tools for those aspects you want to examine in more depth.
**TOOL 2: THE CONFLICT TREE**

Description: The conflict tree is a visualizing and sorting tool. The tree visualises the interaction between structural, manifest and dynamic factors. The roots symbolise structural “static” factors. The trunk represents the manifest issues, linking structural factors with the dynamic factors. The leaves moving in the wind represent the dynamic factors.

**Dynamic Factors:** Dynamic factors include the form of communication, escalation level, relationship aspects etc. Working with dynamic factors involves a short time horizon; reactions to interventions are quick and at times unpredictable. Examples are diplomatic interventions, or multi track conflict transformation dealing directly with the form of interaction between the conflict parties. Quick money is often more important than big money when addressing dynamics factors.

**Issues:** Issues are what the conflict parties want to talk about, the “topic” of the conflict.

**Structural Factors:** Root causes are the basic “reason” of the conflict. They are difficult to influence on a short time basis, if they are avoided, however, the conflict may pop up again later. This is the typical area for development cooperation, longer-term involvement and the prevention of structural violence (Human Needs Theory).

**Aim:**  
➔ To initiate reflections on the links between root causes, issues and dynamic factors  
➔ To differentiate the time horizons of various conflict transformation approaches

**Step by step instructions:**
1. Draw a picture of a tree, including its roots, trunk and branches – on a large sheet of paper or a flipchart.  
2. Each person gets several index cards, on which they write a word or two, or draw a symbol or picture, indicating important factors of the conflict as they see it.  
3. Invite people to attach their cards to the tree:  
   • on the roots, if they see it as a root cause  
   • on the trunk, if they think it is a manifest issue, a “topic” of the conflict  
   • on the branches, if they see it as a dynamic factor influencing the conflict  
4. Someone facilitates the discussion on where the factors are placed on the tree. There is no absolute “right” or “wrong”. Placement of factors is partly subjective, may be different in different conflicts, and may change over time. Nevertheless, try as a group to create a common snapshot of the conflict as the group sees it.  
5. People can visualise their own conflict transformation efforts (e.g. as a bird or worm) and place this on the tree in relation to the factors they are currently working on.  
6. Discuss the links between root causes and dynamics factors and how to address these.
TOOL 3: CONFLICT MAP

Description: Similar to a geographic map that simplifies terrain so that it can be summarized on one page, a conflict map simplifies a conflict, and serves to visualize 1) the actors and their “power”, or their influence on the conflict, 2) their relationship with each other, and 3) the conflict theme or issues. A conflict map represents a specific view point (of the person or group mapping), of a specific conflict situation (it should not not be too complex!), at a specific moment in time, similar to a photograph.

Aim:
➔ To clarify relationships between actors
➔ To visualize and reflect on the “power” of various actors
➔ To represent the conflict on one sheet of paper, to give a first conflict overview

Step by step instructions:
1. Decide on the conflict you want to analyse. Set the conflict system boundaries.
2. Form groups of two or more people. One can make a conflict map by oneself, but in a group is better. If there are people in the group that know nothing of the conflict, they can help by asking clarifying questions, by being a person the involved actor can talk to and test ideas on.
3. Take a large sheet of paper and draw the actors as circles on the paper, or on cards that can be pinned on a paper, the size of the circle representing an actors’ “power”. Do not forget to put yourself as an actor on the page as well, if you or your organization is involved. List third parties as semi-circles.
4. Draw lines (see symbols below) between the circles representing the relationship between the actors.
5. In square boxes, or at the top of the map, list the main themes. For more details on each actor, use the Needs-Fears mapping tool.
6. Don’t forget to add title and date to the conflict map, and if not confidential, also the name or organization of the person mapping.

Possible symbols used in conflict mapping
- Circle = parties involved in the situation. The size of the circle symbolized the power of the conflict party in relation to the conflict. The name can be written in the circle.
- Arrow = predominant direction of influence or activity
- Zig zag line = discord, conflict. Lighting bolts can be added to indicate hot events.
- Crossed out line = broken connection
- Blank circle on edge = external parties, third parties
- Rectangular boxes = issues, topics or things other than people and organizations

Sudan North South Conflict
Issues: 1) Security, military arrangement, 2) Sharing power, 3) Sharing wealth, 4) The capital, 5) The 3 areas: Blue nile, Nuba and Abyey

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**TOOL 4: GLASL’S CONFLICT ESCALATION MODEL**

**Description:** Escalation is an increase in tension in a conflict. Initially, people in a conflict start by wanting something. After escalation we not only want something, but we also want to hurt our opponent. The final level of escalation is mutual destruction. Conflict transformation understood descriptively, refers to how we create conflicts, and the energy of a conflict also that changes, “transforms” us. Prescriptively, conflict transformation is understood as our efforts to de-escalate conflicts.

The dynamics of escalation can be analysed with the following model: Glasl differentiates between nine levels of escalation. He portrays escalation as a downward movement, where conflict parties get sucked into the conflict dynamics. They are pulled into a negative downward spiral. This is not a linear movement, but one over a series of stairs and falls. Parties may stay in one phase for a while, before plummeting down to a further level of escalation. As the level of escalation increases, the intervening party has to become more forceful in its form of intervention, because the potential for self-help of the involved parties decreases. The forcefulness of an intervention therefore increases from level one, where the parties may accept a conflict management intervention based on trust, to level nine, where parties often have to be forced to accept an intervention. Interactive forms of conflict intervention are suitable in low- or mid-level escalated conflicts where the involved parties are still willing to sit together to discuss the conflict.

**Aim:**  
➔ To find out how escalated the conflict is.  
➔ To decide how to transform conflicts.  

The form and force of conflict intervention in a conflict has to fit the level of escalation of the conflict.

**Step by step instructions:**

1. Analyse the escalation level of the conflict parties in question, using the table and graph below. Note that the level of escalation of the “group” may be different from the level of escalation of an individual member of that “group”. Conflict parties may be at a different level of escalation.

2. Once the level of escalation is determined, assess if the planned or implemented conflict transformation effort is potentially an adequate form of intervention. Refer to the graphic.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Hardening:</th>
<th>Positions harden and there is a first confrontation. The conviction still exists that the conflict can be solved in discussion. There are no fixed camps.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Actions not words:</td>
<td>“Speaking will not help anymore”. Strategy of “fait accompli”, presenting the opponent with facts on the ground, physical action. Empathy is lost, there is a danger of false interpretation of the other side.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Images, coalitions:</td>
<td>The parties manoeuvre each other into negative roles and fight these roles. Parties seek support from people who have not been involved so far.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Loss of face:</td>
<td>Public and direct attack, aiming at the loss of face of the opponent. A major escalation step.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Limited destructive blows:</td>
<td>The opponent is no longer seen as a human being. As a consequence of dehumanization, limited destructive blows are legitimate. Values are shifted, ones own “small” loss is seen as a benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Fragmentation:</td>
<td>Destruction and fragmentation of the opponents system is ones main aim.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Together into the abyss:</td>
<td>Total confrontation without any possibility of stepping back. The destruction of oneself is accepted as the price of the destruction of the opponent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONFLICT ANALYSIS TOOLS

Level of escalation:

1. Hardening
2. Debates, polemics
3. Actions, not words
4. Images, coalitions
5. Loss of face
6. Strategies of threats
7. Limited destructive blows
8. Fragmentation of the enemy
9. Together into the abyss

Form of intervention:

Self-help, moderation
Facilitation
Process accompaniment
Classical mediation
Arbitration
Power intervention

Force of third-party intervention increases
Self-help potential increases
out of trust
Parties acceptance of intervention
through submission
TOOL 5: INMEDIO’S CONFLICT PERSPECTIVE ANALYSIS (CPA)

Description: CPA is a method to analyze a conflict in a step by step process, developed by Inmedio mediators in the micro (interpersonal) and meso (organizational) area. CPA focuses on the different perspectives of the involved parties; this helps conflict parties to broaden their view. Ulterior motives become more visible and seem less threatening. CPA can be used without professional help. The CPA steps follow the phases of a mediation. The Conflict Perspective Analysis can be used: 1) when counseling among colleagues, 2) as a preparation before a mediation or 3) as a coaching tool.

Aim:
➔ To separate facts from interpretations, people from problems, positions from interests/needs/fears.
➔ To enable a change of perspective, to “walk in the other persons shoes”, to make motivations of all actors plausible.
➔ To broaden perspectives.
➔ To elaborate hypotheses on new options, without taking the ownership of the conflict or solutions of the conflict away from the involved parties.

Step by step instructions:
CPA is described here as a tool for counselling among colleagues. The setting: a colleague is involved in a conflict, he/she wants your help to deal constructively with it:
1. Presentation: The person involved in the conflict describes the situation. What is it all about from their point of view? This should not take more than 10 minutes. For the rest of the time, the person concerned is silent, except if he/she has something important to add or is asked for an input. The effect of this first phase is to inform the “outsider” colleagues and to relieve the person concerned by being actively listened to, by the acceptance and recognition of colleagues.
2. Actors: The next step consists of the “outsider” colleagues identifying who is involved in the conflict. Analysis is easier with few actors. Focus on the main parties, possible stakeholders and potential third parties. List them on cards, place them on the floor or stick them on a flip chart.
3. Facts: What has happened? Who did what? Who said what? This step should be completely free of interpretations and perceptions. The aim of phase 3 is to focus on observable facts only, things that could be recorded on video, facts that are not debated by one or the other of the conflict parties. Write each fact or “O-Sound” (original sound = direct quotation) on a separate card, place it under the relevant actors listed in phase 2.
4. Background interests and motivations: What are the motivations behind the “facts” of phase 3? What are the interests of the actors, why did they say or do this or that? In this phase interpretations and hypotheses are sought. Possible interests, wishes, needs and positive emotions of the parties should be brought forward. The “outsider” colleagues should step into the shoes of the conflict parties and express their interests from their point of view, begin with “I, conflict party A, feel….”. Sentences which help to express “needs and wishes” are ‘I would like you to’ or ‘It would be important for me to…’. Also, the concerns, fears and emotions, such as ‘I am afraid…’, ‘If you do…. I feel…’, are important. Motivations may be contradictory, list all of them! Look for plausible motivations: there are often “good” motivations for “bad” behavior. If you find different motivations for party A and B, you can list them separately under the two parties’ names. If they are similar, they can be placed in the middle. The main aim of this phase is to understand each side, to “walk in his/her shoes for a few miles”. Don’t forget that all your work during this phase is hypothetical, empathy is needed.
5. Options: Only when the parties’ motivations have become plausible during phase 4, is a brainstorming on possible options and next steps suitable. Questions such as ‘which options cover as many interests/needs of the participants as possible’ or ‘which options get rid of as many fears of the participants as possible’ are helpful. To broaden the possibilities, the question ‘how can we implement the conflict parties’ interests differently than if we follow what the conflict parties originally demanded (their positions)’ is useful. Think of at least two options for each issue. Remember the brainstorming rules: all ideas are good, no corrections, no editing, no comments.
6. Reality check: Phase 6 is the place for editing and assessing. Possible concerns about the raised options can be thought through. What are the parties fears concerning possible next steps? Is there a need for optimisation of the proposed options?
7. New discoveries/Conclusion: The process of the CPA is wrapped up. The person who is involved in the conflict should give their opinion on whether it was possible for them to gain better insight into the other conflict parties perspectives, and on the added value of the CPA for them personally.
### Example of how a CPA can be visualised on cards

**Conflict at a fair:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Gym Club</th>
<th>Boy scouts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facts</td>
<td>Destroyed scouts tent</td>
<td>Put tent up near Gym club’s market stand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interests, motivation</td>
<td>We feel threatened by presence of scouts</td>
<td>We do not want a bad reputation in the village because of the fight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We would like to be informed about tent</td>
<td>We want the cost of tent paid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We want to sell our cake at the fair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Options</td>
<td>Joint activity to show unity groups</td>
<td>Share cost of new tent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insurance pays for the tent</td>
<td>Official clarification of the misunderstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reality check</td>
<td>Insurance will not cover tent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following example is taken from the civil war context in Sri Lanka:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Interest/Needs</th>
<th>Fears</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irrigation</td>
<td>Financing of irrigation scheme</td>
<td>Income generation</td>
<td>Scheme will be stopped, they will have to leave their job</td>
<td>Political lobbying, shooting the cows or pastoralists</td>
<td>Join the dialogue process, suggest employment of pastoralists on the farms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>farmers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoralists</td>
<td>Access to water for their herds</td>
<td>Livelihood and survival</td>
<td>Their herds cannot survive, they will have to migrate</td>
<td>Political lobbying, pushing the herds into the irrigated area, shooting the farmers</td>
<td>Join the dialogue process suggest a corridor to the water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Implementation of project in a “Do no harm” manner</td>
<td>Wish to fullfill mandate, income and status at home</td>
<td>Project fails and the agency is blamed</td>
<td>Financial incentives, convening power</td>
<td>Bringing parties together to discuss issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Economic growth without social unrest</td>
<td>Re-election, popularity</td>
<td>Civil unrest, lack of development</td>
<td>Financial, political and legal means</td>
<td>Influence the dialogue process, compensation fund</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Step by step instructions:**

1. Draw a table with the following columns: Issues, interests/needs, fears, means and options.
2. a) A conflict party or third party fills the table in as a conflict analysis tool, the table is not viewed by the other conflict parties.
   b) In a moderated workshop setting, each conflict party fills in the table for their own situation. The joint table is discussed in the group. The facilitator clarifies the importance of focusing on interests (why people want something) and not positions (what people say they want). The options don’t necessarily need to be realisable in the near future.
   c) In a moderated workshop setting, each conflict party fills the table in for the other parties. This helps to switch perspective. It makes the actors walk in someone else’s shoes for a moment. Trust is needed, else stereotype pictures may dominate.
3. In the case of b) and c), discuss the table in the plenum. Allowing each conflict party to respond to the “self” and “foreign” image.
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TOOL 7: MULTI-CAUSAL ROLE MODEL

Description: The concept differentiates structural from actor-oriented factors by synthesizing system and actor approaches. Disputes have their roots in psycho-sociological, socioeconomic, political, and international conditions. There is normally a “syndrome of factors” that causes violence.

Aim:
➔ To trace causal mechanisms, patterns, to distinguish between the different quality and role of the various factors that lead to conflicts.
➔ To analyze both the content as well as the dynamics of a specific conflict.
➔ To facilitate the location of entry points for conflict transformation, to differentiate between short term and long term commitment needs.

Step by step instructions:
1. Focusing on your conflict, differentiate between the following factors:
   a) Reasons, the basic or root causes and structural factors of the conflict, perceived by the actor as “historical problems”. Reasons are related to a conflict parties’ interests and needs, but also to their perception of history, trauma, injustice etc. They affect content and dynamics of the conflict.
   b) Targets are the aims of the conflict parties, what the conflict parties say they are fighting about, the positions and expressed interests of the conflict parties. Targets affect the content of the conflict.
   c) Channels are lines of political, social, economic or national cleavage, that group people together, that form group-identity. Channels affect content and dynamics of a conflict. The channels are often not directly influenced by the root cause of the conflict.
   d) Triggers initiate a new level of conflict. In violent conflicts, for example, a trigger causes an actor who previously preferred non-violent solutions, to now favor violent action. The trigger influences the dynamics of a conflict. Triggers are hard to identify in advance, and are not easily influenced by a third party.
   e) Catalysts influence the rate, intensity and duration of a conflict once the conflict is underway, affecting content and dynamics of a conflict. Catalysts and channels together may transform reasons over time, for example when two groups begin by fighting over resources, and end up by fighting over ethnicity.

2. Once you have identified the various factors, situate the reasons, triggers, channels, catalysts, targets in a graph and link them with arrows.

3. On separate cards, see which conflict transformation efforts are addressing which factors and where there is need for a change or further efforts.
Footnotes

1 This Tip Sheet is based on the INMEDIO/SDC-COPRET “mediation” course and the referenced literature.


4 Conflict Transformation Approach:


– Lederach, J.P 2005 The Moral Imagination, the art and soul of building peace, Oxford University Press.


