

Activity 3.8 Mapping Complexity¹

Description

Discussions often get bogged down in the complexity of the issues under discussion. Comments can go off in many directions, leaving the participants frustrated and unable to focus. Without a structure for dealing with complexity, discussions may never reach the desired outcomes. In this activity, participants will learn a structure for dealing with complexity that puts the various dimensions of an issue in a visual format.

Learning Goals

- Learn how a fishbone diagram can be a tool to help groups discuss a complex issue without losing focus.
- Practice visualizing the complexity of issues for the purpose of better organizing and structuring thought.

Practice (65 minutes)

Step One	A fishbone diagram can be a simple and useful way to unpack the complexity of an issue so that it can be discussed productively. <i>Read the scenario White Water Rafting or another scenario from the What IF...Scenarios.</i>	5 min
Step Two	In small groups and using the Fishbone Diagram , start to fill in the complexities of this scenario. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In the head of the fish (at the right), place a 2-4-word description of the issue or topic being discussed.• Then identify the major dimensions of the issue (approx. 4-5 items). Place these in the boxes that form the body of the fish.• Then identify specific aspects of each dimension. These form the bones of the fish.	20 min
Step Three	Once the fishbone diagram is completed, identify the prominent contrasting aspects and dimensions of the fishbone diagram . For example, the local entrepreneurs may be hurt by the interest of the larger companies. In contrast, the larger companies could increase the impact on	10 min

¹ **Citation for this activity:** Jack Byrd (2023). Mapping Complexity. In Hartman, Britt, & Byrd (Eds). *The Interactivity Foundation Collaborative Discussion Toolkit*. Retrieved from <https://www.collaborativediscussionproject.com/module-3-critical-collaboration>

	the local economy by bringing much larger resources to increase the customer base.	
Step Four	Discuss these contrasts as a large group . Explore where there are common themes. Recognize the areas of major contrast. Are there any outlier topics? Which dimensions stood out? As a group, what is missing from these diagrams?	20 min
Step Five	As a group, develop a summary statement of the discussion . Think of the summary statement as a compilation of the insights gained from the discussion, highlighting the different dimensions that emerged. For example, one summary statement for the White Water Rafting scenario might be “While opening up the White Water Rafting to larger national companies could increase economic activity, the community may not be ready for the changes that such an increase would bring about.” Typically, the summary would include 5 to 7 statements.	10 min

Reflection Assignment

- Think of discussions that you have been involved in that seemed to be “all over the place.” What was the outcome of the discussion? How could incorporating a Fishbone Diagramming exercise have improved the outcomes?
- What’s another mapping approach you might use to help visualize the complexity of an issue? Demonstrate it using this topic or another topic.

Practice Journal

This week, practice using a fishbone diagram on a topic relevant to your work, school, or home life. Think of a topic or issue that is somewhat complex. Try mapping it out. Reflect on how the diagram helped to categorize and order your thinking.

Dive Deeper: Additional Resources

- Forthcoming