

Conflict Map

A worksheet for externalising a multi-party disagreement before deciding what to do about it. Use it alone first; compare with one trusted person before acting.

1. The presenting situation

Write a single paragraph describing what is happening, in the most neutral language you can produce. Avoid causal claims ("X is doing this because...") and avoid evaluative language ("the team is dysfunctional"). State only what an observer with no stake in the outcome could verify.

If the paragraph runs longer than five sentences, you are probably including interpretation. Cut it back.

Your version:

(write here)

2. The parties

List every party with a stake in the situation. Include people not currently in the conversation. For each, note:

- Their role in the situation, in one phrase.
- What they are protecting, in one sentence. Not what they are advocating for. What they are *protecting*. The two are often different.
- Their formal authority over the outcome, on a three-point scale: none, partial, full.

Party	Role in the situation	What they are protecting	Authority

If the table has fewer than three rows, you are probably missing parties. Common omissions: people who will be affected by the outcome but are not in the room, line managers of the visible parties, and stakeholders who are deliberately keeping their distance.

3. The tensions

A tension is a structural force in the situation that does not disappear when one party gets what they want. List the tensions in play. For each, note who is on each side, and whether the tension is *legitimate* (both sides are protecting something real) or *constructed* (the tension exists because of a process or framing choice that could be made differently).

Tension	Sides	Legitimate or constructed?

Most situations contain a mix of both types. Constructed tensions are often easier to address; legitimate tensions usually require trade-offs rather than resolution.

4. What is *not* the problem

This section is mandatory. List at least three things that look like the problem but are not. The list disciplines your thinking: it is much easier to propose interventions when you have first ruled out the things you should not be intervening on.

Examples of what often appears in this section: individual competence, the formal process, a single recent event, a personality difference. None of these is necessarily off-limits, but most are misdiagnoses on first inspection.

(write here)

(write here)

(write here)

5. What you do not yet know

A conflict map is more useful when it is honest about its blind spots. List what you would need to know to be confident in your reading of the situation, and how you might find out.

What you don't know	How you might learn it	Cost of asking

The cost-of-asking column matters. Some questions are cheap to ask and revealing; others are expensive and produce defensive answers. Distinguishing the two is part of the work.

6. Your standing

Before proposing an intervention, articulate your standing to intervene. Standing has three components:

1. **Authority.** Do you have the formal role to act here? If yes, in what scope?
2. **Relationship.** Have you done enough work with the parties involved to be heard?
3. **Information.** Do you understand the situation well enough that your intervention is grounded in what is actually happening?

Rate each on a three-point scale: weak, moderate, strong.

Component	Rating	What would strengthen it
Authority		
Relationship		
Information		

If two or more are weak, your intervention is probably premature. The right next move is to strengthen the weak component before acting.

7. The intervention you are considering

Describe the intervention you are inclined to make, in two sentences. Then answer:

- **What you expect to happen if it works.**
- **What you expect to happen if it fails.**
- **What it costs you to attempt it, regardless of outcome.**

Your intervention:

(write here)

If it works:

(write here)

If it fails:

(write here)

Cost regardless:

(write here)

If you cannot articulate the failure mode, do not run the intervention. The inability to describe failure usually means you are protecting the intervention from scrutiny, which means you do not yet trust it.

8. The conversation you are avoiding

Most conflict maps end with a question the author has been avoiding. Write it down. You do not need to act on it today. You do need to know what it is.

(write here)

How to use this worksheet

- Fill it in alone first. Compare with one trusted person before acting.
- Revisit it after the situation evolves. The earlier version is data on what you understood and what you did not.
- Do not share completed worksheets widely. The frankness required to fill it in usefully is incompatible with broad audience.

For an example of the worksheet completed against a real scenario, see [examples/conflict-map-filled.md](#).