

Abstract:

Traditional approaches to problem solving and design have asserted that the problem should be clearly defined before solutions are considered. However, cognitive studies have shown that, when faced with a complex and novel problem, even very bright and experienced people use an exploratory process that careens all over the problem solution space, learning about the problem and possible solutions in parallel. This insight helps clarify the situation when a problem is “wicked”: proposed solutions primarily serve to illuminate hidden aspects of the problem, there are many stakeholders, “immutable” constraints change, and there is no definitive solution. Seen in this light, large projects succeed or fail on the project team’s ability to overcome communication barriers and to collectively make sense of a dizzying array of conflicting points of view and inconsistent “facts.”

This talk presents *Dialogue Mapping*, a new approach to project work in which collective intelligence is achieved through framing powerful questions and conducting a **comprehensive** and **creative** exploration of their possible answers. The methods have been proven in strategic planning, product development, aerospace project planning, environmental planning, policy formulation, and system design.

In Part 1 of the session, Jeff Conklin introduces the key concepts:

- **Wicked problems:** you must come up with solutions in order to understand what the problem really is ... what the real issues are ... and the problem definition depends on *whom* you ask!
- **Social complexity:** the number and diversity of stakeholders whose participation is essential.
- **Opportunity-driven problem solving:** empirical evidence says creative thinking does not follow a linear process!
- **Shared understanding:** overcoming fragmentation requires forging shared understanding about all aspects of the problem-solution space.
- **Issue-based structure:** the deep structure of conversations, debates, documents, and blogs is issue-based (i.e., organized by questions); disagreement and conflict can be represented and explored quite naturally at this deeper level of structure.

In Part 2 of the session will role-play participants in a meeting, working on an issue such as “What can we do about global warming?”, and you get to directly experience the dialogue mapping process.

Part 3 of the workshop will be for Q&A. Often people don’t really know what their questions are about dialogue mapping until they’ve had a chance to experience it.

Bio:

Dr. Jeffrey Conklin has over two decades of experience and an international reputation in the fields of hypertext and collaborative technology research, and years of professional experience as a facilitator, consultant, and teacher. Dr. Conklin is perhaps best known for his work with the Issue Based Information System (IBIS) method and extensions of it, such as research tools ("gIBIS") and commercial products ("CM/1™", "QuestMap™") that support IBIS. He is advisor to the Compendium Institute, which distributes the open source Compendium mapping tool, and Director of CogNexus Institute (<http://cognexus.org>).

Dr. Conklin also developed the *Dialogue Mapping* facilitation technique, a radically inclusive approach to knowledge management that allows groups to capture and make sense of unstructured knowledge during project meetings. Dr. Conklin has taught *Dialogue Mapping* to many hundreds of people all over the world. He has facilitated thousands of meetings, with such clients as the World Bank, the United Nations, the US House of Representatives, the City of Washington DC, NASA, FAA, CIA, the General Services Administration (GSA), as well as Southern California Edison, AOL, Verizon, BP, AOPA, Doug Engelbart's Bootstrap Alliance, and other high-tech organizations.

Dr. Conklin's research on collaborative and facilitation technologies has been published in numerous academic journals and conferences. His book about this work, *Dialogue Mapping: Creating Shared Understanding of Wicked Problems*, was published 2 years ago by John Wiley and Sons (http://cognexus.org/dm_book.htm). His current research is on the construction of web-based tools for sustainability policy discussion that foster the creation of knowledge "meta-maps" that are broadly inclusive yet coherent.

