HOW-TO DRAFT:

SYSTEMS MAPPING TOOLS FOR CAMPAIGN DESIGN

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This doc is a work in progress that is meant to evolve over time with input from campaigners and organizers. At the moment, the tips and ideas here reflect the voices of the contributors/reviewers listed below. We are always looking to add more voices of folks that have knowledge and experience on this topic. If this is you, please contact us here: blueprintsfc@gmail.com.

Summary

Systems mapping is an important element of any strategy for systemic change (see our guide on Systems Thinking for more on this). Since systems are made up of a complex web of forces and relationships, and underpinned by mental models (values, beliefs and assumptions), then "mapping" these forces, relationships and mental models can be a key step towards developing an understanding of the system you want to change and developing effective strategies to shift it. This guide dives into three tools that can be used for this purpose as part of a campaign design process: system maps, network maps and narrative power analysis.

If you're new to systems thinking, then we recommend starting with our more general guide on Systems Thinking for Campaigning and Organising before delving into this one.

Who's doing it?

Organisations such as MobLab, Greenpeace, the Center for Story-based Strategy, and New Tactics for Human Rights have integrated different variants of systems mapping tools into their campaign-design methodologies.

A diverse range of organisations have applied a variety of different system mapping tools and methodologies to design their campaigns, including but not limited to the ones

developed by the organisations mentioned above. These include Re-Amp (who conducted an extensive system-mapping process for their campaigning and organising work on the energy transition in the U.S.), Amnesty International (who have applied systems approaches to various campaigns, including on the criminalization of activism in Puerto Rico and on surveillance capitalism), The One Campaign (who have applied a systems approach to some of their global health campaigns), Greenpeace (who have applied systems approaches to a range of of campaigns, including one on Eco-agriculture in the Philippines), Save the Children (which used network mapping to develop an advocacy strategy on infant mortality in Nigeria) and Serjus (who applied system thinking tools to participatory advocacy planning processes with local CSOs in Guatemala).

Impact / Why do this?

Systems mapping is an important element of any strategy for **systems change**, a key goal of many campaigns (if you're in need of an introduction to systems change approaches, we recommend this guide by NPC). The logic goes that, if we want to drive systems change, then we first need to develop a basic understanding of the underlying structures that currently hold the system we want to change in place. Since systems are made up of a complex web of forces and relationships, and underpinned by mental models (values, beliefs and assumptions), then "mapping" these forces, relationships and mental models can be a key step towards developing this understanding.

To bring out the value of systems mapping, it helps to contrast it with other established approaches. Many existing campaign design methodologies use conventional problem / situation analysis tools, such as problem trees and power maps, to help campaigners develop a better understanding of the issues they plan to campaign on and design more strategic interventions. Whilst such tools can certainly be useful, they also have some important limitations that systems mapping tools can help to address.

For example, problem trees (and similar variants such as fishbone diagrams) are often used in campaign design to get to the "root causes" of a problem campaigners want to address. Whilst these tools can be useful for "drilling down" into a problem, they also

lead to reductionist thinking, in that they break up a problem into more manageable chunks and focus on these elements individually rather than how the relationships between them interact to sustain the current situation.

Another issue with conventional tools is that they also promote linear thinking about problems, when reality is often more complex and characterised by nonlinear relationships. To give a simple example, a problem tree analysis of the problem of money's excessive influence on politics might identify the ability of corporations to donate unprecedented amounts of money to election campaigns as a key *cause* and the approval of economic policies that benefit the biggest corporations as an *effect* (depicting a *linear* chain of cause and effect). However, such economic policies can also enhance the abilities of these same corporations to spend money on elections, creating a "vicious cycle" (an example of *nonlinear* relationships). Tools such as **system maps** can help to overcome these limitations as they focus on the interactions between the elements of a problem and can facilitate an analysis of nonlinear relationships.

Another commonly used tool in campaign planning is power mapping, whereby stakeholders are mapped on a matrix according to their degree of alignment and power in relation to your campaign objectives. However, such tools can oversimplify the situation, as they only focus on the relationships between the stakeholders and your campaign goals, breaking down the world into an us vs. them scenario, rather than analysing the relationships *between* these stakeholders. Such relationships can be critical obstacles or opportunities for a campaign.

Additionally, if not complemented by other power analysis tools or frameworks, power maps can paint a somewhat one-dimensional picture of power rather than facilitating an analysis of the different kinds of power that stakeholders can exert and why. They can also leave uncovered more invisible forms of power that are not exerted by individual stakeholders but rather through dominant worldviews and underlying assumptions.

Systems-mapping tools can help to overcome these limitations. **Network maps,** which focus on the relationships between stakeholders, can facilitate an analysis of the ways in which stakeholders can exert different kinds of power through their relationships with others. **Narrative power analysis** on the other hand can help you to understand how power is exerted through the assumptions and worldviews of dominant narratives.

When to do this

These tools can be used for any campaign design process when you want to understand the relationships, forces and mental models that are sustaining a problem that you want to change. However, they are most useful when your campaign is grappling with wicked, messy problems that are particularly resistant to strategies to change them (more on this in this section of our systems thinking for campaigning guide).

System mapping tools can be integrated into any overarching methodology for campaign design / planning and either used as alternatives or complements to other suggested tools for problem, situational or power analysis in a campaign design process. Having said this, they are most effective when underpinned by the principles of a broader systems approach to campaigning. Additionally, you may find them more useful if integrated into a systems analysis that follows the logic of the systems "iceberg model", one of the key systems thinking frameworks (see this section of our systems thinking for campaigning guide).

What this requires (people, resources, etc.)

Systems practice mindsets

As mentioned above, systems mapping is one of the principal systems thinking tools, used to help people make sense of the complex, wicked problems they are grappling with and to design more effective strategies to drive systemic change. However, systems thinking is not just a collection of tools but also encompasses a particular approach to understanding and engaging in social change. Consequently, systems mapping tools should be used within the context of a broader *systems practice* (or systems approach), underpinned by some core systems thinking principles that we cover in our Systems Thinking for Campaigning and Organizing guide.

A workshop setting (offline or online)

As mentioned in our systems thinking for campaigning and organizing guide, systems practice is an inherently participatory and collaborative approach. This means that systems mapping is best conducted collaboratively between a group of people who plan to work together to drive systemic change on a particular issue. Deep conversations are an integral part of systems mapping (and systems practice more generally), which means that, ideally, they should be developed together in real-time in a workshop setting, either in-person or online.

If you are doing systems mapping in a workshop setting then the basic materials you will need is flip-chart paper (and/or a whiteboard), post-it notes and colored marking pens. If you choose to do systems mapping remotely through an online process, then you can use a combination of video-conferencing software such as Zoom and either a specific online system mapping tool such as Kumu, Plectica or Loopy, or a generic online whiteboard tool (see here for some options). You can also effectively adapt google slides for some elements of this, which has the benefit of much less friction for new users.

A group of people with diverse perspectives

One of the core principles of systems approaches is that they should involve people with a diverse range of perspectives and experiences in relation to the problem you want to address. This is essential for system mapping as involving people with a diversity of perspectives will enable you to develop a more holistic understanding of the system you are trying to change. Integrating multiple perspectives into a systems mapping process will often mean involving people outside of your organisation or movement (for example, people directly impacted by the issue in different ways, allied organisations tackling the problem from a different angle, etc.).

A decent amount of time

Systems mapping can be time consuming. Whilst it is possible to develop a basic system map in a single workshop, they are best developed iteratively over a number of weeks, in order to allow sufficient time for deep conversations to happen between participants and to update the map as you fill knowledge gaps and gain more insights about the system you are trying to shift. To give you an idea, the Omidyar Group's Systems Practice guide recommends a minimum of 2 - 4 weeks of work over 1-2 months for a complete system mapping process for strategy development, although some organisations have spent much longer than this (Re-Amp for example, dedicated a whole year to their system mapping process). Crucially, however, during this period you can begin some campaigning activities based off of an initial, quicker mapping process, as part of a probe-sense-respond cycle (described in our Systems Thinking for Campaigning and Organizing guide), as a way to help you deepen your understanding and add detail and depth to your system mapping in response to what you learn through your campaigning activities.

A willingness to test, update and adapt your analysis

Another key principle of systems approaches is that they are grounded in ongoing processes of learning, reflection and adaptation as you test different tactics, see how the system responds and adapt your overall strategy accordingly. Consequently, even when you begin your campaign, it's essential to see your system maps as works in progress you continually revisit and build on as you learn more about the system from the campaigning tactics and activities you are implementing on the ground to change it.

Setup + stages

In this section, we explain how to apply three system mapping tools as part of a campaign design process. System maps and network maps can be used to map the underlying structures of a system[1] (the relationships that exist between the elements of the system) whilst narrative power analysis can be used to map the mental models that underpin a system (the values, assumptions and beliefs that shape the system).

Applying each tool follows a similar process: First we map the key elements of the system and the relationships between them, and then we analyse the map and look for *leverage points:* sensitive places in the system where small changes can bring about large shifts in system behaviour. Finally, we devise campaigning tactics, activities and narratives to shift the leverage points we want to focus on through our campaign (this last activity is not covered in this guide since it can be done using any campaign design methodology for developing campaign tactics and plans).

Prior to using these tools, it is assumed that you have identified the issue or problem that you want to focus on for your campaign. This can be done following any campaign design methodology; however, it is recommended that you follow the overarching systems approach to campaign / organizing strategy development that we present here. This involves identifying the system you want to change and then working your way to the "systems iceberg" model until you get to systems structures and underlying mental models where the following tools can be used.

1. System maps

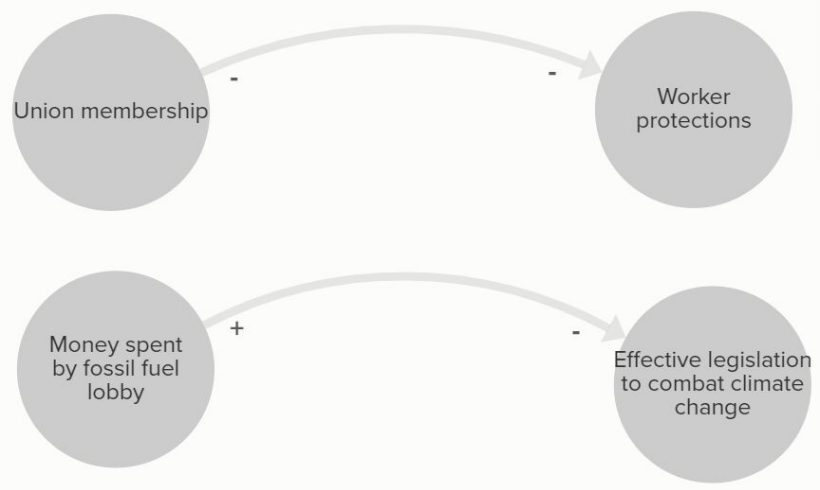
System maps[2] (also known as relationship maps or causal loop diagrams) are a way of representing the complex and interdependent web of causal relationships between the elements of a system. They are made up of factors, or variables (individual elements within the system) and causal relationships (represented by arrows).

[1] Note that in our Systems Thinking for Campaigning and Organising Guide we provide an overview of some different tools that you can also use to map underlying systems structures

[2] "Systems map" is a broad term that can encompass lots of different techniques. In this guide we use it to refer specifically to causal-loop diagrams, one of the most widely used systems thinking tools.

A key difference between the factors that make up system maps, compared to other problem analysis tools like problem trees, is that they are written in *neutral terms*; framed as *nouns that can increase or decrease*. So rather than writing, for example, “More and more money spent by the fossil fuel lobby” or “Decline in union membership” you would write “Money spent by the fossil fuel lobby” and “Union membership.”

The causal relationships in a system map are represented using arrows with + and - signs at the beginning and the end of each arrow.[3] A “+” sign indicates more of the factor it corresponds to (an increase) whilst a “-” sign means less of that particular factor (a decrease). So two diagrams below can be understood as “A decline in union membership leads to a decline in workers’ protections” and “Increasing amount of money spent by the fossil fuel lobby reduces the effectiveness of legislation to combat climate change.”



Additionally, delays can be incorporated into a system map in order to indicate when there is a notable time gap between when a change in one factor brings about a change

[3] Note, some system maps only use one “+” or “-” symbol per arrow. In these cases, the “-” indicates an *inverse* causal relationship between the two variables (so an increase in the originating variable would lead to a decrease in the other variable, and vice versa) and the “+” sign denotes a *positive correlation* (so an increase in the original variable will also lead to an increase in the other variable, and vice versa). Other system maps replace the “+” and “-” signs with “s” and “o” signs in order to communicate how one variable affects another: with “s” symbols indicating a change in the *same* direction, and “o” denoting a causal change in the *opposite* direction. However, we recommend the method described above as it makes it easier to communicate your narrative / analysis of how the underlying forces and structures interact to shape the system.

in another factor that it is connected to. This is typically represented with "||" sign along the arrow, as illustrated in the diagram below (which can be interpreted as "an increase in carbon emissions results in a delayed rise in global temperatures"):

In system maps, causal relationships are woven into *feedback loops*. This allows system maps to capture nonlinear chains of cause and effects that we frequently find in the complex systems our campaigns and organizing strategies operate in.

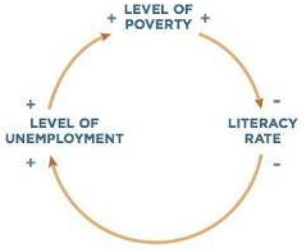
Feedback loops come in two flavours, *reinforcing* (which reinforce a particular change) and *balancing* (which resist a given change). A simple example of a reinforcing loop is a saving account, where money generates interest which increases the balance of the savings account and therefore creates more interest. A simple example of a balancing loop is a thermostat, which regulates the temperature of a house by heating or cooling it if the temperature changes above or below the desired level (for this reason these loops are also called "goal-seeking" loops as they seek to maintain a system in a specific, desired state).

Reinforcing and balancing loops can be further divided into two additional categories, as shown in the diagram overleaf, taken from the Systems Practice Workbook (the two types of reinforcing loops are at the top and the two kinds of balancing loops are below).

TOOL

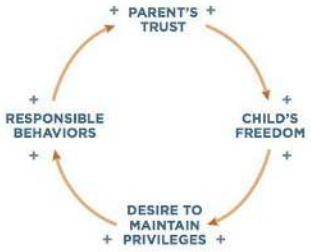
LOOP TYPE: VICIOUS
(Things are getting worse and worse)

When the **literacy rate** is low, qualifying for jobs becomes difficult which increases the **level of unemployment. High unemployment** leads to the number of households existing at or below the **poverty level** to increase. As poverty increases people are more likely to prioritize income-generating activity over education, which further decreases the **literacy rate**.



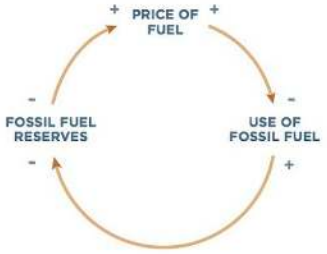
LOOP TYPE: VIRTUOUS
(Things are getting better and better)

When a **parent** extends **trust** to a child, the **child's freedoms** are increased. As the child experiences the enjoyment of increased freedoms, their **desire to maintain** these extra privileges increases. As their desire to have **privileges** increases, their **responsible behavior** is also increased, which in turn increases the parent's trust in the child.



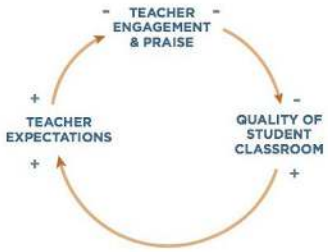
LOOP TYPE: STABILIZING
(Keeping things from getting worse)

As the **use of fossil fuel** increases, the **reserves** of **fuel** are depleted, which leads to an increase in commodity **price (of fossil fuel)**, which then results in a decrease of fossil fuel use.



LOOP TYPE: STAGNATING
(Keeping things from getting better)

When a student shows an improvement in the **quality of** their **classroom behavior**, the **teacher's expectation** of that child's behavior increases (now they know what the child is capable of!). As the teacher's expectations rise, the likelihood that the **teacher** will make the **effort to engage and praise** the child is diminished. When the child does not receive praise for their effort, their behavior deteriorates.



An easy way to determine if your loops is balancing or reinforcing is to simply count the number of "-" signs in the loop. If there is an *even number* the loop is *reinforcing,* if there is an *odd number* the loop is balancing.

System maps are best developed in a workshop setting among multiple stakeholders, using flipchat paper or a large whiteboard and post-it notes so you can easily arrange and rearrange the different elements and connections. However, after the workshop you may want to digitalise your map using a tool like Kumu or Plectica to make it easier to share with others. This was the approach used by Serjus when they used systems

mapping to identify opportunities to increase public investment in smallholder agriculture in Guatemala.

It's important to take into consideration that a good system mapping process is time intensive. Although it's possible to develop a basic system map in a single workshop, some campaigners have opted for much longer timeframes in order to really get to the bottom of the complex systems they are trying to shift. The Re-Amp Network, for example, dedicated a year to their system mapping process (their final system map can be seen on p7 of the link above).

However, if you are short on time then a simpler tool you can use are *multiple cause diagrams*. These are similar to system maps as they enable you to capture feedback loops; they just do not specify the particular kinds of feedback loops in the map.

Identifying leverage points in your system map

When analysing system maps, The Omidyar Group recommends looking for leverage points by identifying places on the map that meet any of the following criteria:

- Where is the system frozen? Look for places where system behavior is deeply entrenched and unlikely to change in the near future.
- Where is there pent-up energy for change? Look for places where energy is disrupting the status quo or trying to reorganize and cause new patterns to emerge.
- Where are places that seem like a mixed bag? (Meaning places with both good and bad elements.) Look for places that could swing either positive or negative.
- Where are there places that seem like bright spots? Look for places where positive change is happening already.
- Where are you seeing ripple effects? Look for strong factors and dynamics which have the potential to affect many other factors or dynamics downstream.

Once you've identified areas on the map that fulfil any of these criteria, the next step is to, for each one, analyse opportunities to:

- Strengthen a positive dynamic

- Weaken a negative dynamic
- Shift a dynamic (from negative to positive)
- Create a new dynamic
- Shorten or speed up a time delay

For example, Re-Amp's system map enabled them to identify four critical leverage points for reaching their goal: stopping the building of all new coal power plants; retiring most of the region's existing coal plants; replacing coal-generated electricity with renewable power; and reducing overall electric consumption through increased efficiency. Additionally, their system map made them realise that "unless they coordinated to work on those four levers simultaneously, they wouldn't make progress."

In Serjus' case, their system's map helped them to identify three leverage points: one that became the goal of a shorter-term advocacy strategy and two others that formed the basis of a longer-term theory of change for progressively enhancing the quality of extension services provided by the Ministry of Agriculture to smallholder farmers engaged in agroecology.

2. Network maps

A network map**,** also called (social) network analysis, is a tool for analysing the web of relationships and the flow of resources between the key stakeholders for your campaign strategy.

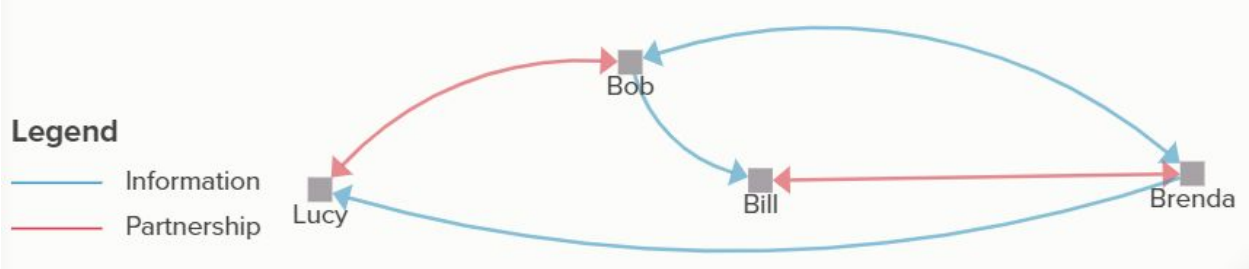
A network map consists of *nodes*, which in this case represent your stakeholders, and *links*, which represent the relationships between the stakeholders. As with system maps, links are represented by lines with arrows that represent the direction of the relationship.

The relationships you choose to analyse with a network map will depend on what is the most useful / strategic in the context of your campaign. To give just some examples of the types of relationships you can map:

- Power over / formal authority
- Alliances / collaboration / partnerships
- Conflict
- Membership / participation in specific spaces or coalitions
- Flows of information
- Technical support / advice
- Flows of money / funding
- Kinship / family relationships
- Exploitative relationships (where one actor is using their power to extract something from another actor)

You can choose to analyse one type of relationship or you can incorporate different kinds of relationships into a single map by, for example, assigning colours to different types of relationships. However, if you choose to map multiple kinds of relationships, it is advisable to use a maximum of five or your map may become cluttered and difficult to interpret.

To give a simple example, the network map below tells us that Brenda shares information with Lucy; Bob shares information with Bill and exchanges information with Brenda; and Lucy and Bob as well as Bill and Brenda are in partnerships with each other.

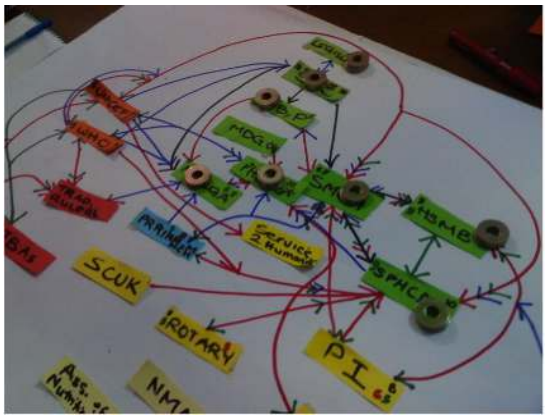


A network map can be developed to provide different levels of analysis. You can, for example, analyse the relationships between organisations and groups. This can be a particularly useful exercise when developing an organising, mobilising and/or coalition building strategy. This was the approach used by Greenpeace for their campaign on eco-agriculture in the Philippines (see p5) as they wanted to analyse the relationships and networks at the heart of farmers' decision-making processes on what to grow.

Alternatively, you can analyse the relationships between individuals within a particular organisation, institution or group (for example, a government ministry, a corporation or a specific network of people or organisations you want to lobby).

As with system maps, network maps are best drawn up through a participatory process in a workshop setting (after the workshop, you can then put your map into a program such as Kumu to make it easier to analyse and share with others). Don't worry if you don't have clarity on all the relationships in a map - an important part of this exercise is to also identify important gaps in your knowledge that could affect your strategy, so note any such gaps down as you identify them and follow-up with them later.

The above paragraphs describe a generic approach to develop a network map. However, there are some more specific tools based on this approach that have been used by campaigners. One is called **Net-Map Toolbox**, which has been used for advocacy planning by organisations such as Save the Children, who used it to inform an advocacy strategy to influence the budgeting and funding disbursement process for newborn survival in Katsina, Nigeria (see image to the right); and Serjus, which used it in participatory advocacy planning processes with local civil society organisations in Guatemala. This tool follows much the same process outlined above, but adds in two additional elements to the map: the overall level of influence exerted by each stakeholder in the given context (represented by "influence towers") and their goals (written next to each stakeholder). These additional elements mean you can incorporate the two variables used in a conventional power map into your network map: their level of power and their alignment in relation to your vision or goal.



Another is called **tactical mapping**, which was developed by New Tactics in Human Rights and was designed for human rights campaigning. This tool focuses on mapping out the web of relationships that surround human rights abuses in order to identify a pathway for change. This tool also has an online version.

Identifying leverage points in your network map

When analysing networks, we can identify leverage points by looking for key players who can wield different kinds of power within the network as a result of their relationships with other actors and/or their position in the overall network. Network analysis provides an array of metrics that you can use to identify such key players. According to these metrics, power and leverage within a network can be identified by looking for:

- **Network hubs** (degree centrality): These are the stakeholders with the largest numbers of relationships / connections. If they have lots of inward connections (indegree), then they are typically actors that are looked upon by others and receive a lot of information. If they have lots of outwards connections (outdegree) then they are good at mobilising others and spreading information.

- **Influencers of the influential** (eigen centrality): These are stakeholders who are connected to other actors with large numbers of relationships (i.e. stakeholders who are connected to multiple network hubs). Often these actors are less immediately visible than network hubs (sometimes fulfilling the role of "behind the scenes" influencers), as they can have a smaller number of direct relationships than others in the network. However, their connections with other influential stakeholders means that these actors are also very good at influencing and mobilising others, sometimes even more so than the network hubs.

- **Network bridges** (betweenness centrality): Actors who score highly on this metric are actors who others have to "cross" in order to reach stakeholders they are not directly connected to. They're often actors who are connected to (groups of) stakeholders that others are not connected to (hence serving as a "bridge" to those actors). They are therefore gatekeepers (and sometimes bottlenecks) who have control over the flow of information and can play useful roles as brokers when new relationships need to be forged between particular stakeholders.

- **Broadcasters** (closeness centrality): This metric is harder to gauge by eye (see below), but measures how "close" each actor is from all the other stakeholders (in terms of the number of connections it takes to reach them). Consequently, stakeholders who score highly on this metric can spread information and

resources most efficiently through the network and they are usually “in the know” with what is happening across the network.

A network analysis tool like Kumu can measure these metrics (see here), however they can also be gauged by eye (although somewhat more crudely) if you are working on flipchart paper. It’s important to conduct this analysis in the context of the types of relationships depicted in your map - for example, if someone on your map has a lot of conflictual relationships with other stakeholders then this is telling you something very different than if all their connections represent partnerships with others!

You can also look for leverage by analysing the overall network, asking questions about:

- Which **key relationships** need to be affected to move your issue and strategy forward? Are there any positive / beneficial relationships that could be strengthened? Or are there any problematic relationships in the map (e.g. conflicts, financial dependencies, bottlenecks, etc.) that need to be addressed?
- Are there any **critical relationships *missing*** that need to be built?
- Which actors, or groups of actors, do we need to **mobilise or build alliances** with? Who is best placed to connect us to them and/or to mobilise them?
- Which **actors do we need to influence**? Who already has relationships with these actors, who has relationships with them (do we?) and how could these relationships be leveraged as part of our influencing strategy?

In the case of Save the Children’s advocacy strategy in Nigeria, the Net-Map process they undertook enabled them to identify two key leverage points that signalled the need for a two-pronged approach: on the one hand supporting actors in developing high quality health plans and on the other hand advocating to non-health actors for the release of funds.

3. Narrative Power Analysis

Narrative power analysis is a tool from the Center of Story Based Strategy that forms part of a larger process for narrative strategy analysis and development, covered in this Story-based Strategy 101 document. Whilst this tool wasn't originally conceived as a specific systems mapping tool per sé, it is particularly useful for mapping the "mental models" level of systems (see the iceberg model covered here), and has been used to this end by organisations such as MobLab as part of a broader systems analysis for campaign design.

A narrative power analysis involves breaking down the opposition's (and/or the status quo's) story into five key narrative elements that allow the story to operate:

1. **Conflict** - How is the problem being framed and how does this framing create conflict? Who or what is the conflict between? Are there good guys and the bad guys? What's at stake? *Conflict frames the problem, which in turn sets the scope of possible solutions; determines what is deemed "possible" or "politically realistic."*

2. **Characters -** Who are the specific victims? Which characters are portrayed as sympathetic and unsympathetic? Who are the messengers that tell the story? Do they get to speak for themselves or is someone speaking on their behalf? The *casting of characters in the story determines who matters, who is understood to be impacted and who has agency in the story.*

3. **Imagery (show don't tell) -** What powerful images does the story provide? Are there relevant metaphors, symbols or specific examples that embody the story? What values does this imagery evoke in its audiences? *The choice of imagery reflects and validates some experiences while invalidating others, wielding the power of normalization through repetition.*

4. **Foreshadowing -** How does each story show us the future? What is the vision that the story offers of how things will be if the conflict is resolved successfully? *Foreshadowing tells us what is inevitable, and is used positively or negatively, to cultivate hope or fear.*

5. **Underlying Assumptions -** What are the unstated underlying assumptions? What values or worldviews are reflected in the story? *Underlying assumptions*

establish and reinforce prevailing values, and tell us what are "normal" values or behaviors.

Once you've mapped out these core elements of the story, you can analyse how power operates through these elements to hold the current system in place by asking questions such as:

- How does the story make existing outcomes possible or inevitable?
- How does conflict in the opposition's story prevent us from talking about our desired solutions?
- What do we have to believe in order to believe their story is true?
- What foundational myths / assumptions are being activated by this story? (e.g. American exceptionalism, the "invisible hand" of the market, etc.)

After conducting this analysis, the Story-based Strategy methodology recommends conducting a thorough analysis of your audiences (the people you need to reach and persuade), identifying their key characteristics and traits, as well as their hopes, desires, fears and biases, so that you can see the opposition's story through their eyes.

Identifying leverage points in your narrative power analysis

When it comes to looking for leverage points[4] at the level of **mental models**, CSS' methodology proposes looking for specific areas in your narrative power analysis where you can challenge the *underlying assumptions and legitimacy* of the dominant story.

Once you've surfaced the underlying assumptions you want to challenge, you can look for points of intervention in the surrounding system where these assumptions are mostly strongly reinforced, thus providing opportunities to expose and shift them. These could be:

[4] CSS calls these "points of intervention" (POIs) but they are defined essentially the same way as leverage points

- Points of production (where goods are produced; e.g. factories, farms, technology companies, etc.)
- Points of consumption (where products are purchased by consumers; eg. stores, restaurants, online spaces, etc.)
- Points of destruction (where something is destroyed; e.g. dumpsters, mines, clearcuts, landfills, jails, etc.)
- Points of decision (where powerholders are located and where decisions are made)

A final stage is identifying concrete opportunities to challenge the underlying assumptions at the chosen points of intervention. Such opportunities could be identified by looking to:

- Offer new futures (contesting the story's ending by taking action to forecast a different future)
- Reframe debates (e.g. make the unthinkable thinkable)
- Subvert spectacles (e.g. symbolic protests at important events or moments for the opposition's narrative)
- Repurpose existing popular culture narratives (appropriating popular culture narratives, imagery and characters to advance / popularize your own narrative)
- Make the invisible visible (looking at what's kept deliberately invisible in order to sustain your opposition's narrative and exposing it).

Tricky parts + fixes

Communicating your systems analysis to others

System maps can look a bit overwhelming when presented to someone who was not part of the original process (see, for example, Re-Amp's system map on p7 here). This

can be problematic because the most sophisticated, and possible “best” systems-based campaign strategy will accomplish precisely nothing if the folks needed to carry out the campaign aren’t aligned around it. This is why collaborative and participatory planning processes are so valuable -- that alignment and shared orientation is built into the process.

When that’s not possible, the work of walking new colleagues through the process that led to the given strategy becomes absolutely vital. There are two things that can be helpful to do in such circumstances. The first is to *trim down* your systems analysis and only present the parts of it that are essential for being able to understand the logic behind your strategy. Because systems analysis necessarily involves “casting a wide net” at various points during the process, this will often lead to you identifying many more elements and forces in the system than you eventually decide to directly engage with. Many of these can be left out when communicating your systems analysis to others - so you can focus on the minimum you need to communicate so that others can understand your analysis of why the system is currently producing the undesirable effects you want to address and how your proposed strategy can tackle these.

The second tip is to *break down* your systems analysis. Rather than trying to present your entire system map, break it up into smaller components and explain each of them one by one, building up your system narrative as you progress. Kumu has a useful presentation tool that can be used for this purpose (see, for example, this presentation from the Hewlett Foundation’s Madison Initiative or this presentation of one of Serjus’ system maps), but you can also achieve the same with a word document or powerpoint.

Further resources

For a deeper dive into the nuts and bolts of systems mapping, we recommend:

Free online guides and toolkits:

- The Omidyar Group's Systems Practice Guide
- Center for Story-based Strategy's Re-Imagining Change Guide (see also their Story-based Strategy 101 document for a summary version)
- New Tactics in Human Rights' Guide to Making a Tactical Map
- NetMap Toolbox Manual
- MobLab's Campaign Accelerator - see in particular, Module 1: Define
- Greenpeace's Systems Change Campaigning Toolkit
- Smart CSOs' The Systems Thinking Workbook
- The Systems Thinker's Pocket Guide: Guidelines for Drawing Causal Loop Diagrams

Books:

- Re:Imagining Change: How to Use Story-based Strategy to Win Campaigns, Build Movements, and Change the World (Patrick Reinsborough & Doyle Canning)
- Thinking in Systems: A Primer (Donella H. Meadows)
- Systems Thinking for Social Change: A Practical Guide (Peter Stroh)

Online courses:

- Systems Practice (Acumen+ / The Omidyar Group) - free
- Systems Diagramming (OpenU). See also these short and useful tutorials from the OpenU on different kinds of systems diagrams (both free).
- Systems Thinking with Causal Loop Diagrams (UDemy) - $20
- Systems Kumu eLearning Environment - free

Online tools:

- **Kumu** (system mapping and network mapping)
- **Plectica** (system mapping and other types of mapping)
- **Loopy** (system mapping)

- **Tactical Mapping** (online tool)

Articles & case studies:

- The Democracy Fund has some excellent interactive system maps on democracy in the U.S. (scroll down to “Our Maps”)
- Tactical Mapping: How Nonprofits Can Identify the Levers of Change
- Making systems more approachable, part 1 (part 2 here)
- Planning, Budgeting and Disbursing Funds for Newborn Survival in Katsina State, Nigeria – a Net-Map analysis
- Two approaches for combining theories of change and system maps
- Using Story to Change Systems
- Transformer: How to build a network to change a system. A Case Study of the RE-AMP Energy Network

Who can help with this?

- Mobilisation Lab
- Center for Story-based Strategy
- New Tactics in Human Rights

Attribution

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