



Social Analysis Systems² OM

Concepts and Tools for
Collaborative Research and Social Action

<http://www.sas-pm.com/>

Name of this technique: Gaps and Conflicts

Author(s) and correct citation: Jacques M. Chevalier, 'SAS² 1.0: Gaps and Conflicts,' in *Social Analysis Systems² 1.0*, <http://www-sas-pm.com/>.

Acknowledgements: *Gaps and Conflicts* is a SAS² adaptation of a technique used in the field of participatory research (see in particular K. Means et al. in *Readings and links*).

What is the goal of Gaps and Conflicts?

This technique helps you find out if your key problem is mostly about gaps or conflicts in power, interests (gains and losses), moral values, or information and communication.

What are the guiding principles of Gaps and Conflicts?

- You can understand a social problem by looking at whether it involves issues of power, interests (gains and losses), moral values (norms and principles), or information and communication.
- These 4 kinds of issues may take one of two forms:

A gap involving a lack of resources; the absence of interest (gains or losses); a failure to appreciate the moral worth or value of something; a shortage of information and effective communication; or

A conflict over who has the power to decide and how decisions are made; how gains and losses are distributed; the values that people believe in; the information that is given out and the ways that people communicate.

Here's how to use Gaps and Conflicts

1. Identify a **key problem** where you need to use *Gaps and Conflicts*. Define the problem as clearly as possible, and clarify the purpose of your analysis.
2. Identify the **main causes of your key problem**. Write (or draw) each cause on its own card. *Freelisting* or *Timeline* may help you identify these causes.
3. For each cause, ask what **kind of issue** it involves: one of power, interests (gains and losses), moral values, or information and communication. Use the definitions provided below (see Attachment A for examples of the forms these issues can take). Discuss and clarify the definitions, using local examples and terms, if needed.

Power is your ability to achieve what you want by influencing others and using resources you control. These resources include:

- Economic wealth;
- Political authority (an office, position or role recognized by an institution or by local customs);
- The ability to use force or the threat of force;
- Information (including knowledge and skills), and the means to communicate.

Make sure that participants do not confuse the idea of 'power' with the use of force only.

Interests are the gains and losses that you will experience based on the results of ongoing or proposed actions. These gains and losses affect the degree to which you control assets such as economic wealth, political authority, the use of force, information, the means to communicate, legitimacy, or social ties. Make sure that participants do not confuse the idea of 'acting in one's *interest*' with 'taking an *interest* in something'.

Values are beliefs, judgments, norms or principles about what is important, and the degree to which something is good or bad, right or wrong. Make sure that participants

do not confuse the idea of ‘value’ with the price that something is worth on the market.

Information is what you know “for a fact” and believe to be true. **Communication** is how you exchange information and make your views known to others.

4. On each card that describes a different cause, write the kind of issue it represents. Use a short sentence or key words (or drawings) that are concrete and clear to everyone. If the cause raises more than one issue (such as power *and* interests), write the same cause on two or more cards and record a different issue on each card.
5. Take each card and decide whether it involves a **gap or a conflict** (see definitions on page 1). Record and explain your assessment on each card.
6. Create a *Gap and Conflict* table. Write the four kinds of issues in the first column. Write Gaps, Conflicts, and Ranking in the top row. Place each card in the appropriate column and row. Here’s an example of a table showing gaps and conflicts associated with a proposal to privatize communal lands in an indigenous community.

Causes	Gaps	Conflicts	Ranking
Power	Those who want to privatize communal lands are not organized.	Ranchers occupy communal lands and control municipal politics.	1
<i>Interests</i> (gains and losses)	This is not important for the federal government and makes no difference to them.	The landless will gain, the ranchers will lose.	2
Moral values		Opposite values are used to justify communal and individual property systems.	4
Information & Communication	We don’t know what the legal procedures are.	Municipal authorities refuse to let people speak when the village meets.	3

7. Use the last column to **rank the row issues** according to the number and the importance of the cards that appear in each row. Use a ranking scale of 1 to 4.
8. Discuss the results of your analysis and your priorities for action. Compare your results with the issues listed in Attachment A.

Be aware that the act of filling a *gap* (such as getting information on land ownership) can sometimes lead to a *conflict* between parties. Also participants often define as priorities those issues where they are already strong (such as filling information gaps, in the case of an NGO doing applied research).

Making this process work for you

For simpler versions

- Focus on the most important causes only.
- Leave out the distinction between gaps and conflicts.
- Don't rank the causes.

For more advanced versions

- During the exercise, record the explanations that parties provide when categorizing the causes.
- Take more time to find the information you need to justify how you categorize each cause.
- Increase the number of causes.
- Read Attachment A before doing the exercise.
- Use *Rating* to evaluate the importance of each cause.

Links and readings

Means, Katherine and Cynthia Josayma, with Erik Nielsen and Vitoon Viriyasakultorn, *Community-Based Forest Resource Conflict Management: A Training Package*, Volume 1, Section 3.2, <http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/005/Y4300E/Y4300E00.HTM>, and Volume 2,

Activity 12, FAO, Rome, 2002,
<http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/005/Y4301E/Y4301E00.HTM>

Mind Tools, “Pareto Analysis – Selecting the Most Important Changes to Make,”
http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_01.htm

Problem List 1: Complicating Factors,” The International Online Training Program On Intractable Conflict, Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, USA,
[“http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/!overlay_problems.htm](http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/!overlay_problems.htm).

Attachment A:

Checklist of Issues and University of Colorado Links

(http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/!overlay_problems.htm)

POWER

Illegitimate or Excessive Use of Force: This kind of confrontation involves the unnecessary, excessive or illegal use of violence. The conflict itself is marked by fear, hatred, and a desire for self-defense and revenge. See also Violence.

Human Rights and War Crimes: One group violates another group's basic human rights (through murder, torture, or kidnapping, for example).

Upheaval Conflicts: Groups that are deeply divided fall into massive, uncontrolled, and often violent conflict.

Violence Ineffective and Without Limiting Mechanisms: This situation is marked by unlimited violence that does not meet the goals of those inflicting the violence. It includes using military force that does not lead to victory. See Absence of Violence Limiting Mechanisms; Lack of Viable Military Options.

Tyranny: Individuals or groups consistently make selfish decisions that do not uphold the interests of society, using force as they please, without any concern for legitimacy. See also Dictatorial Process.

Domination Conflicts: These conflicts are based on who is on top within a social, political, and economic structure.

Power Imbalances: When two parties try to negotiate or make decisions, the process reflects the unequal power distribution between them.

Meaningless Public Involvement: The parties confront each other after deciding that participating in a process to resolve disputes was meaningless.

Ostracizing Losers: The losing parties are treated as second-class citizens who are subjected to scorn and discrimination.

"Into-the-Sea" Framing: Parties want to push their opponents "into the sea." They may use extreme force or demand concessions that their opponent cannot possibly accept.

Polarization, Coalition Building: To build a power base while pursuing or resisting plans that include violence, the parties create networks where many interest groups agree to help each other as they follow distinct objectives.

Tactical Escalation: Both parties decide to increase the level of conflict to build support. Excessive force may be used by both sides. See also Contention Dynamics.

Extremists: Some members of a group speak in favour of extreme and violent tactics and claim to represent the views and tactics of the larger group. This encourages opponents to respond with extreme tactics of their own.

Out-Group Enemy: This kind of conflict is based on a shared opposition to some enemy or "out-group." It is often used to maintain the loyalty of group members and overcome internal opposition.

Counter-Threats: Both parties respond to threats with counter-threats rather than submission. See also Deterrence.

Stalemate: This situation is also called a standoff. Neither party has the power to win and neither party is willing to admit defeat.

Sacrifice Trap: This kind of conflict is marked by huge sacrifices. Because leaders cannot admit that the sacrifices were unnecessary, they continue to use violence in dealing with the conflict.

Neglecting Costs and Risks of Using Force: Leaders encourage their supporters to ignore the costs and risks of using force, so they can build support for confrontation.

Misunderstanding the Relationship Between Threat and Force: Some parties may issue threats too often and in ways that limit their ability to advance their interests.

Submission: Parties that do not have the power to resist may decide to simply accept defeat.

Flight (Refugees): Parties respond to overwhelming force by fleeing.

Defense: The defending parties prevent others from using force against them but they do not successfully use force against their opponents.

Subversion: One party uses deception to avoid submitting to the demands of the forceful or threatening party.

Defiance: An opponent responds to a threat with defiance rather than submission, forcing the threatening party to carry out the threat or admit that it was false.

Strategic Delays or Rushed Decisions: One party delays a dispute resolution because they want to avoid the hard issues or reject a decision they do not like. See also Procrastination of Response.

Requests to Abandon Power Options as a Precondition to Negotiation: Both sides are asked to abandon violent options before they will be allowed to participate in a dispute resolution.

Representatives Unavailable or Illegitimate: Negotiation or Mediation cannot begin because there is no one to represent the other party, or it is undertaken with the wrong people—those who do not have authority to decide or do not really represent the groups they are supposed to represent. See Wrong (or Missing) Parties at the Table; No Legitimate Party to Negotiate With.

INTERESTS

Excluding Parties and Their Interests: Some negotiations favour small groups of people or those that are more visible and vocal, overlooking the interests of others who may be

strongly affected and may emerge later to block a proposed agreement. See also Failing to Identify All of the Other Parties; Vested Interests.

Excessive Competition: Parties seek the best possible results for themselves, without considering how this win-lose approach will affect others. See Overly Competitive Approaches to a Conflict.

Third Party Not Credible, Conflict of Interest: The parties doubt whether a third-party mediator is fair, or they question whether the conclusions of experts are valid (because they believe to the experts may benefit from providing misleading information). See Conflicts of Interest / Lack of Credibility; Third Party Not Effective or Credible.

Overlooking Non-Material Needs: Parties define the conflict in material terms only, without understanding that one or more groups cannot meet their basic human needs for identity, security, dignity, or control. See Confusing Material Interests With Fundamental Human Needs; The Denial of Other Human Needs.

Better Alternatives to Negotiation: Parties are unlikely to accept any agreement that is worse for them than the outcome they think they can obtain in another way (such as through force). They assume that they know the benefits that will come from their better alternative and they may try to negotiate an agreement when other key parties are not ready, or they may not negotiate honestly because they believe they can rely on their alternative plan to get what they want. See Limits to Agreement: Better Alternative; Poor Timing.

Reasons not to negotiate in earnest: Parties may refuse to accept a proposed agreement or negotiate honestly because they are too attached to confrontation. They may wish to pressure an opponent into making major concessions. They may believe the stakes are too high. They may wish to negotiate non-negotiable issues. They fear they will be forced to compromise, or they believe that negotiations will require enormous resources and be a waste of time. See Refusal to Negotiate; Attempts to Unfairly Distribute the Benefits of Agreement; All or Nothing Approach; High Stakes Distributional Conflicts; Overlooking Ripe Moments for Negotiation; Attempting to Negotiate Non-negotiable Issues.

VALUES

Confusing Interests with Positions: The parties are committed to a single principled position (what they say they want) and fail to consider whether this is likely to allow them to achieve their interests (what they really want).

Incompatible Frames: One party defines the conflict in terms of values, rights or basic needs (which are non-negotiable), while the other defines it in terms of interests that can be negotiated.

De-Humanization of Opponents: The parties dehumanize each other to the extent that no one has legitimate rights. All atrocities are then justified.

Prejudice / Discrimination: The parties have distorted views of opponents, based on racial, ethnic, or national differences.

The Denial of Identity: One party denies the other's sense of self, or the legitimacy of that party's group identity.

Overlooking Differences in Value Systems: The parties may not grasp their opponents' views on conflict and matters of right and wrong (or good and evil) when those views are based on different cultural, economic, or religious beliefs or value systems. See Failure to Understand an Opponent's Perspective; Differences in Values.

Lack of Legitimacy or Trust: Attempts at conflict resolution may not be effective because the individual or group making the appeal are not viewed as legitimate or because the parties do not trust each other. They feel that they cannot rely on their opponents to keep the promises they may make. See Distrust.

Personal Attacks: Parties attack the integrity and character of their opponents, creating a conflict based on personal hatred and spite.

Differing Definitions of "Justice": Some conflicts involve different definitions of justice, with the group that has the most power being most likely to define the term.

Blame the Other: One party wants to change the other's behavior, but does not accept its own responsibility for the problem. See Not My Problem.

Conflict Is Unacceptable: All conflict is labeled abnormal and bad, regardless of how people deal with it. See Framing Conflict Itself as the Problem.

One Acceptable Strategy Only: Parties may be so accustomed to resolving conflict in certain ways (such as force, mediation, legal action) that they assume there are no other options or value systems. See Failing to Identify Available Options for Dealing with the Situation.

INFORMATION-COMMUNICATION

Communication

Misinterpretation of Communication: One party says does not interpret the other party's statements as they were intended. This may occur because one party thinks it knows all it needs to know about the opponent and believes the opponent's motives are more extreme and hostile than they really are. See Misinterpretation of Communication; Misinterpreted Motives; Misinterpretation of Communication; Inaccurate and Overly Hostile Stereotypes.

Poor Listening Skills: Misunderstandings may occur because the parties do not listen actively and carefully (which involves asking questions and confirming interpretations to make sure each understands what the other means).

Cultural or Linguistic Barriers to Communication: People from different cultures can misunderstand each other because of language, different ways of expressing themselves, the substance of what they say, and the style of communication. See Cultural Barriers to Effective Communication; Language Differences.

Reasons Not to Communicate: Parties cannot communicate reliably with opponents because they do not want to contact their opponents, are afraid to contact them, want to protest after a unpleasant incident, or are involved in a crisis where the pace of events and

high hostility makes it very difficult to communicate. See Lack of Communication Channels/Avoided Communication; Crisis Communication.

Erosion of Social Bonds and Problem Management Mechanisms: The conflict causes a breakdown of social structures and institutions that create a sense of community (which could be used to help resolve conflicts). See Erosion of Traditional Conflict Management Institutions; Integrative System Does Not Exist or Is Very Weak.

Lack of a Negotiating Forum: There is no place or forum where negotiation can be conducted.

Communication Scale-Up Problem: Small groups and their constituents do not have the ability to communicate and negotiate beyond the immediate circle of participants. They cannot include larger constituencies or populations. See Constituent Communication Problems; Scale-Up Problem.

Poor Mediation Process: Mediation fails because of poor timing, poor process, a poor mediator, or because the procedures used in the negotiation were flawed. This can happen even when the potential for a win-win outcome exists. See Poor Process or Structure; Failed Mediation.

Neglecting Opportunities for Persuasion: Parties do not take advantage of opportunities to use persuasion because they do not consider it to be a key source of power.

Ineffective Persuasion: The parties' attempts at "persuasion" are selfish and really consist of demands for their opponents to comply with their wishes.

Inflammatory Statements or Media: Communication, publicity or media coverage that is threatening, hostile or extreme can make a conflict worse and cause problems at all stages of the negotiation process (before, during or after). See Inflammatory Statements; Inflammatory Media.

Information

Insufficient Information Gathering and Analysis: The time or resources the parties need to gather or analyze information that will help them understand how a conflict was handled in the past or how it relates to ongoing political, economic, social, or cultural conditions are limited. Parties may then use unreliable sources such as rumor and media stories. See Ignoring the Conflict History or Current Related Disputes; Inadequate Information Gathering; Inadequate Information Gathering/Time Constraints.

Inexperienced or Poorly Informed Parties: Some parties may not be trained to negotiate or they may not have the experience they need. Some leaders may be new and thus do not understand of the conflict's history and the current situation. See New, Poorly Informed Participants, Inexperienced Parties.

Contradictory Experts: When experts make opposite statements about important facts, people may reject expert analysis or fact-finding in favour of believing what they want to believe.

Understanding the Meaning of Facts: The parties or the public may find it difficult to understand facts and analysis, or to implement an action plan because the material is too complex and/or technical. See also Complexity Muddle.

Extreme-case assumptions: In times of crisis, when there is a lot of uncertainty and limited information available, the parties may assume that their opponents are acting in the most threatening way possible. Under normal circumstances the parties may also incorrectly assume that there is no alternative to violence and may respond to the use of force with equal or even greater force. One party may take an extreme view of the opponents' intentions, believing that the opponents will fight to the end or simply give in and not fight back. See Failure to Identify Opponents' Options; Failure to Anticipate Opponent Reactions and the Backlash Effect; Pursuing Force to the Bitter End; Assuming Force is the Only Source of Power; Assuming Monolithic, Worst Case Opponents; Crises.

Alternative Options: Parties may not recognize that they often have many options, some of which can be more effective than others (such as taking legal action to protect their rights

instead of using violence to resist). See Failure to Recognize Available Force-Based Options.

No Action Without Certainty: Fact-finding efforts are limited by unskilled experts and do not remove key uncertainties. This causes endless delays and problems such as "analysis paralysis" (no action until there is enough information, conducting study after study) and 'delay-default' (maintaining the status quo because it is familiar). See Inability to Deal with Uncertainty; Analysis Paralysis/Delay-Default.

Goals Unclear: Parties or their representatives are confused about the content and goals of complex conflicts or mediation processes. They do not know how to identify the main issues. See Ambiguous Goals; Lack of Clear Goals; Complexity Muddle.

Overlooking Important Issues: The parties overlook issues that are important to others and that must be addressed. See Failing to Identify All of the Issues in a Conflict.

Emotions: Strong emotions make it difficult for the parties to calmly assess the situation and work together to solve the problem.

Secrecy and Deception: Important information is deliberately distorted or not made available to all parties.

Source: edited version of Problem list, International Online Training Program On Intractable Conflict, Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/!overlay_problems.htm.

Illustrations

Ubud, Bali, World Neighbors and DFID, April 2003

	Kesenjangan	Konflik	Rongk
KEKUATAN	DANA	KETERWAKILAN PARA PIHAK	
KEPENTINGAN	PERBEDAAN KALENDER KESUADAH PARA PIHAK	SIAAPA YG JADI INISIATOR	KETIDAK JEKHEMANGAN PEMDA
Nilai-Nilai	PERBEDAAN PERESTI THD PRIORITAS MASALAH	KETERWAKILAN PARA PIHAK	
Komunikasi/ Info	BAGAIMANA MEMBANGUN KOLABORASI/ KOMITMEN.	KETERWAKILAN PARA PIHAK	
		MENJAGA MOMENTUM & KESINAMBUNGAN	

	Kesenjangan	Konflik	Rongk
Power	Pemerintah (DPR) masih m. jabatan pener. akan pada lama.		
Kepercayaan	Tidak terdapatnya partisipasi masyarakat dalam bentuk secara/ tidak.	Tidak ada bentuk organisasi yang terdapat.	
Info	Tidak terdapatnya pemahaman kearifan lokal.		
Komunikasi	kurang terdapatnya sarana/mekanisme komunikasi.		
	kurang informasi mengenai akar masalah.		

Summary of this example: These two tables indicate that the major issues in this case involve not conflicts (Column 3) but rather gaps (Column 2) in power, interests, values, information and communication.

Hue, Hue University, Vietnam, May 2003

To understand Local-level Priority

PROBLEMS	TYPES	GAPS	CONFLICTS	RANKINGS
Over-exploitation	Value types - Over exploitation - Pollution - Discarding waste	→ +		3
Discarding waste	Interest types - Pollution - Discarding waste	→ +	+	1
Pollution	Value types - Over exploitation - Pollution - Discarding waste	→ +	+	2

To build assets for the poor

ISSUES	GAPS	CONFLICT	RANK
POWER	Lack of capital Less agricultural land	(Woman's power) Gender issues	IV
INTERESTS	Lack of capability (Subsistence) Less time (Research)		II
VALUES		Customs (Dresses, values, belief...)	I
INFO. COMM	Low education Language barrier Skills of ones holding (Research)		III

Summary of this example: The first table identifies gaps and conflicts over information and communication concerning the problem of pollution. The second table shows that values expressed through local customs are the main issue that parties must address when trying to build assets for the poor.

Hue, Hue University, Vietnam, May 2003

Improving community capacity

ISSUE	GAPS	CONFLICT	RANKING
POWER	Fund Management		1
INTEREST	efficiency management		4
INFORMATION	Knowledge Rural/area	Access Language	2
VALUE	Knowledge Awareness	Customs	3

TO DEVELOP A CBORM MODEL

	Gaps	Conflicts	Rankings
POWER	lack of alternative livelihood	resources use conflict	1
Interest	low education level low cooperation among vill.		4
Values	low education level Insufficient law-enforcement		2
Inf-Com.	low under low education level		3

Summary of this example: Both tables identify gaps in power as the main issue that parties must address when trying to build local capacities (first table) and to promote community approaches to managing natural resources (second table). In both cases, gaps clearly outnumber conflicts in power, interests, values, information and communication.