

When we make an effort to understand something, we begin creating a meaningful pattern in our mind of which elements are involved and how they fit together. However, in any issue or situation we are considering, whether personal or work-related, there are usually more factors and people involved or affected than we might initially recognise. And they can interact in ways we might not imagine.

Putting our mental map on paper/screen, as we're thinking, helps to:

- reveal the parts, interconnections and sequence;
- discover the natural and realistic boundaries to an issue;
- keep all the parts visible so that we don't overlook or forget something important;
- make sense of matters more quickly and easily so that we won't waste time, effort and emotion going over the same ground again and again and again; and
- build shared understanding and cooperation when an issue is collectively mapped and discussed.

As we work with and revise the map, we develop a diagram which indicates the factors and relationships that are relevant as well as the consequences which might logically be expected.

This book presents two mapping techniques, how to use them and how to check the reasoning they represent.

Entity-Relationship+Question (ER+Q) Maps to represent a snapshot of an issue or situation in terms of which factors are involved or affected and how they interact.

Causal-Systems (CS) Maps which are a dynamic representation of a system within a larger environment.

These two techniques should not be confused with flowcharts or mind-maps.

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