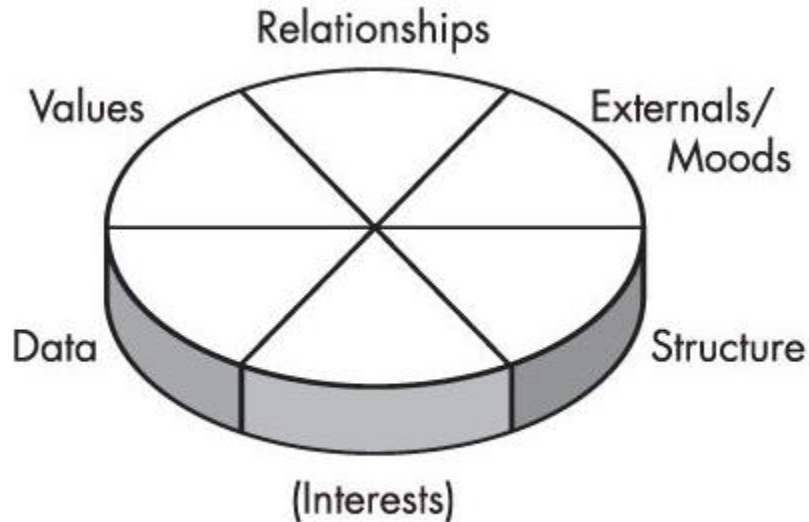Information and Worksheets taken from the book *The Conflict Resolution Toolbox: Models and Maps for Analyzing, Diagnosing, and Resolving Conflict* by Gary T. Furlong, 2005.

The Circle of Conflict

The Circle of Conflict helps to categorize the underlying reasons for conflict or divergent perspectives. It is a tool that provides guidance for navigating diverse perspectives in a productive way. The model is shown below. It outlines five categories. The model, as well as the chart below it that outlines what falls under each category, are taken verbatim from the book.


Circle of Conflict: Diagnosis

Relationships	Values
• negative experience in the past • stereotypes • poor or failed communications • repetitive negative Behaviour	• belief systems • right and wrong • good and evil • just and unjust
Externals/Moods	**Data**
• factors unrelated to substance of dispute • psychological or physiological • "bad hair day"	• lack of information • misinformation • too much information • collection problems
Structure	
• limited physical resources (time, money) • authority issues	• geographical constraints • organizational structures

Furlong's book further explains data with an example of "connect the dots", which is shown on the following page. At the top of the page, are dots that have not been connected. Next, two examples of how people with different perspectives may choose to connect the dots are shown. Finally, at the bottom of the page are two examples that are reflective of two different people or teams holding different pieces of the picture, but not connecting effectively in order to draw the full picture.
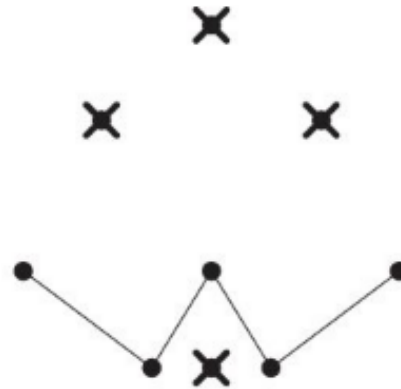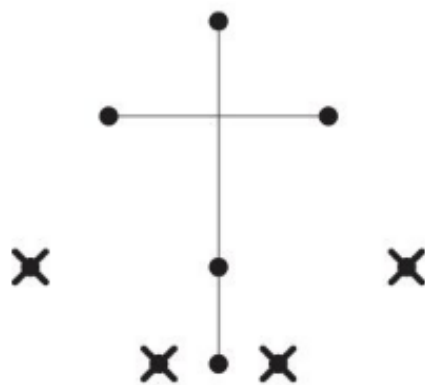
Blank "Connect the Dots" open to many possibilities:
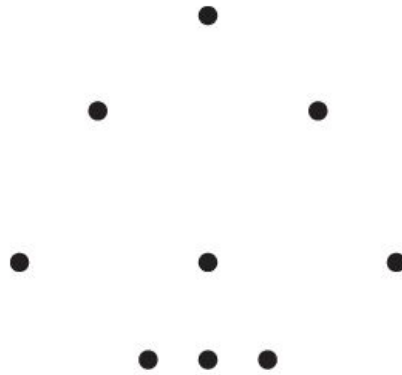
Two possible "Connect the Dots" outcomes:
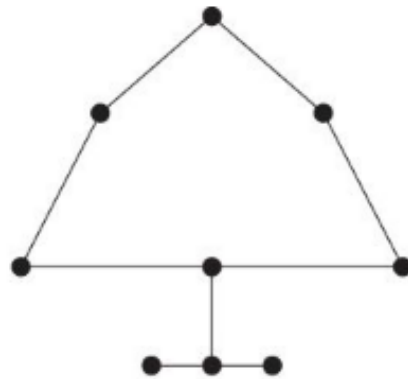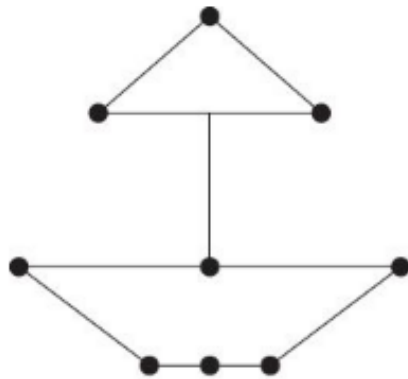
When two people or parties miss opportunities to collaborate effectively:

The Conflict Resolution Toolbox: Models and Maps for Analyzing, Diagnosing, and Resolving Conflict suggests that the way to collaborate and maximize the value of divergent perspectives is to keep the team's focus below the line that divides the Circle of Conflict in half (shown below). The premise is that subject matters found above the line are outside our control, and are therefore set in stone. The zone located underneath the line is an area where modification and collaboration can flourish.
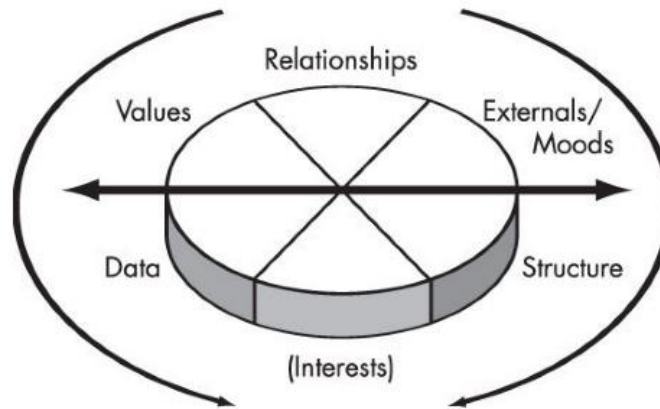
Circle of Conflict: Strategic Direction

Below is an excerpt from the book that explains strategies for the three categories found on the bottom of the circle, as well as a two page worksheet to use as a tool for successfully managing divergent perspectives.

Circle of Conflict: Strategic Direction

By keeping the focus below the line on the model, parties have the best opportunity for collaborative work; by letting the focus stay on the Value differences, the Relationship problems, and the Mood/External problems that they don't control, the conflict tends to escalate and become intractable.

Some strategies in working with Data problems are:

- Have each party explain, challenge, and correct erroneous data;
- Jointly assess the data;
- Surface assumptions around the parties' assessment of data;
- Challenge assumptions made about other parties' motives;
- Jointly gather data that each party will agree to accept and rely on.

Some strategies in working with Structure problems are:

- Identify structural issues both parties face, and brainstorm solutions jointly;
- Negotiate a ratification process if authority is a problem at the table;
- Negotiate who needs to attend for both parties to most effectively resolve the issues;
- Renegotiate priorities for both parties that are more compatible and workable;
- Brainstorm ways to maximize use of scarce resources.

By far, the Interests slice is the most important area to help parties focus on. Some strategies in working with the Interests of the parties are:

- Identify the full range of interests the parties have in relation to the issues they face;
- Identify and focus the parties on their common interests;
- Look for solutions that maximize meeting each party's interests;
- Help the parties creatively solve the problems by trading low priority interests for more important ones.

Practitioner's Worksheet for the Circle of Conflict Model

1. Diagnose and list the causes of your conflict situation using the Five Drivers: Values, Relationships, Moods/Externals, Data, and Structure.

Relationships Drivers:

Values Drivers:

Externals/Moods Drivers:

Data Drivers:

Structure Drivers:
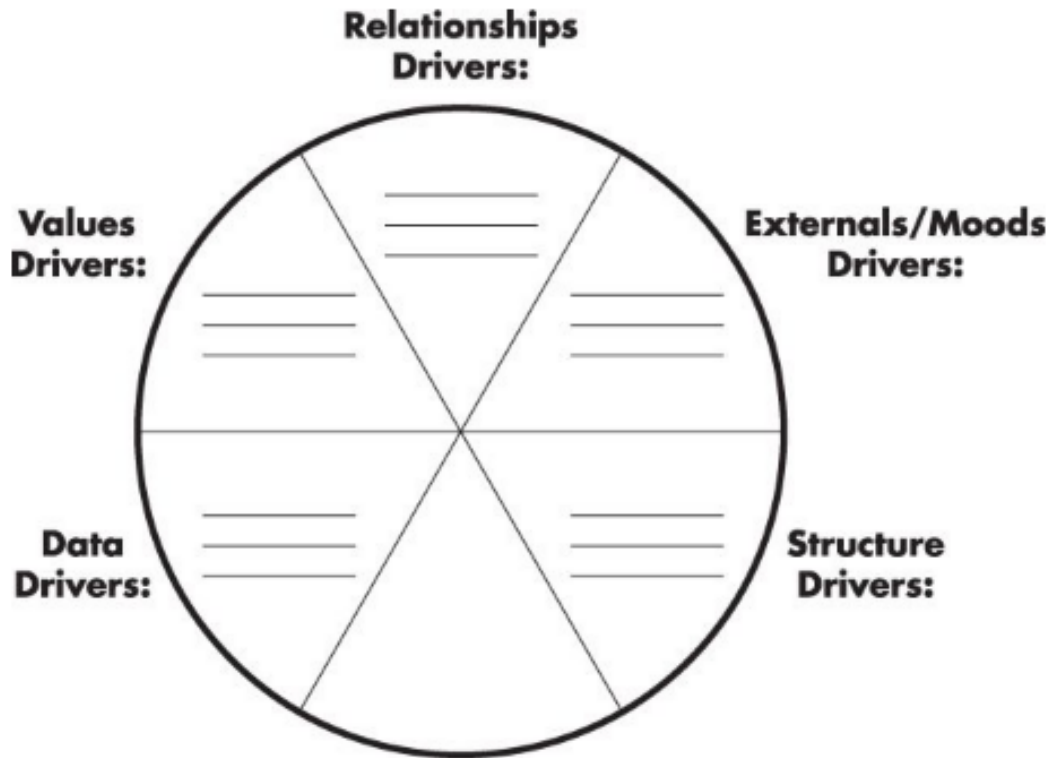
2. Develop a full list of each party's Interests (wants, needs, fears, hopes):

Party A:	Party B:
Interest:	Interest:

3. Guide the intervention to focus on the bottom half of the Circle—Data, Structure, and Interests:

Data Strategy Questions:

What Data is different between the parties?	
What Data can be collected jointly?	
What "connect-the-dots" assumptions or interpretations are the parties making about the Data?	
What assumptions about other parties' motives are being made?	
What Data substantiates the assumptions?	
What Data contradicts the assumptions?	
Other Data issues:	

Structure Strategy Questions:

What limited resource problems are the parties facing? What other resources can the parties bring to the table?	
Where is lack of authority a significant problem? What process can be used to address the lack of authority?	
How divergent are the parties' priorities? What is the process for aligning the parties' priorities?	
Other Structure issues:	

Interest Strategy Questions[6]:

What is the full range of the parties' Interests?	
Given the parties' full range of interests, what are their Common Interests?	
Where can the parties "dovetail" their Interests?	
Other Interests issues:	