



Tactical Mapping

The Center for Victims of Torture—New Tactics in Human Rights Project

The Tactical Mapping technique is part of the New Tactics in Human Rights Project, initiated by the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT). Since 1985, CVT has provided care and rehabilitative services to survivors of politically motivated torture from over 60 countries. Early in its existence, CVT conceived of its work as a potentially powerful new tool for the human rights community, and the treatment center approach has created new constituencies for human rights and reached policymakers in new ways. The New Tactics project has emerged from CVT's experience of developing new tactics, its management's previous experience in global human rights advocacy, and its success building and leading coalitions of human rights organizations.

The New Tactics in Human Rights project arises from a recognition that no single approach can disrupt the complex systems that sustain human rights abuses. To prevent and overcome human rights problems, advocates must make full use of the wide range of intriguing approaches that have been created, and must look for opportunities to combine diverse tactics into powerful strategies.

How Tactical Mapping Works

Tactical Mapping is a method of visualizing the institutions and relationships sustaining human rights abuses, and then tracking the nature and potency of tactics available to affect these systems, ultimately serving as a tool to monitor the implementation of strategy.

The process begins by understanding the relationship that a campaign seeks to change or disrupt (such as the relationship between a torturer and a victim), then diagramming the relationships in which this strategic target is embedded, using a series of symbols comparable to a flow chart or organizational diagram.

Once the diagram is complete, it is used to “map tactics,” to understand which relationship(s) each tactic is expected to affect, and how. These two processes create a diagnosis of the situation in the given country, including the key relationships surrounding human rights abuses, the impact of existing tactics in use, and the intervention points that are not being addressed.

For example, a torturer is connected organizationally, professionally, socially or through family to a number of individuals and organizations; the mapping process seeks to understand these relationships so they can be changed or disrupted. However, in order to create this change, it is important to understand which individuals or organizations are able to do so already, or could be put in place to do so. One tactic that has been used to capitalize on social and family relations, for example, is to picket outside the home of a torturer; in other circumstances, the torturers' membership with a police union might provide an opportunity to work through professional associations that stretch across national boundaries.

The tactical mapping approach can make a powerful contribution to a strategic effort to end human rights abuses. It offers greater clarity about the situation, anticipates potential responses, identifies areas that require additional attention, improves coordination of tactics, and provides an effective tool for assessment and evaluation.

The Uses of Tactical Mapping

Human rights abuses are sustained by a complex system of relationships that mutually reinforce the role of the abuser. Some of these relationships are hierarchical or otherwise structural; others are informal. Each of these relationships is a potential site of intervention that would respond to a different tactic.

Most organizations seeking to advance human rights can only accommodate one or two primary tactics within their institutional frameworks, due to the steep learning curve, the investment in staffing, the measurement of performance and effectiveness, and the difficulties of raising funds. This pattern is reinforced by the human tendency to “do what we know how to do.”

If human rights abuses will not yield to a single tactic, and if most organizations can only employ one or two tactics, then it is imperative to develop the capacity to collaborate on an overall strategy aimed at disrupting the system of relationships embedded in human rights abuses.

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