



# Dialogue Mapping: Breaking the Chains of Linear Process

---

Dr. Jeff Conklin  
CogNexus Institute  
[cognexus.org](http://cognexus.org)

# Overview

---

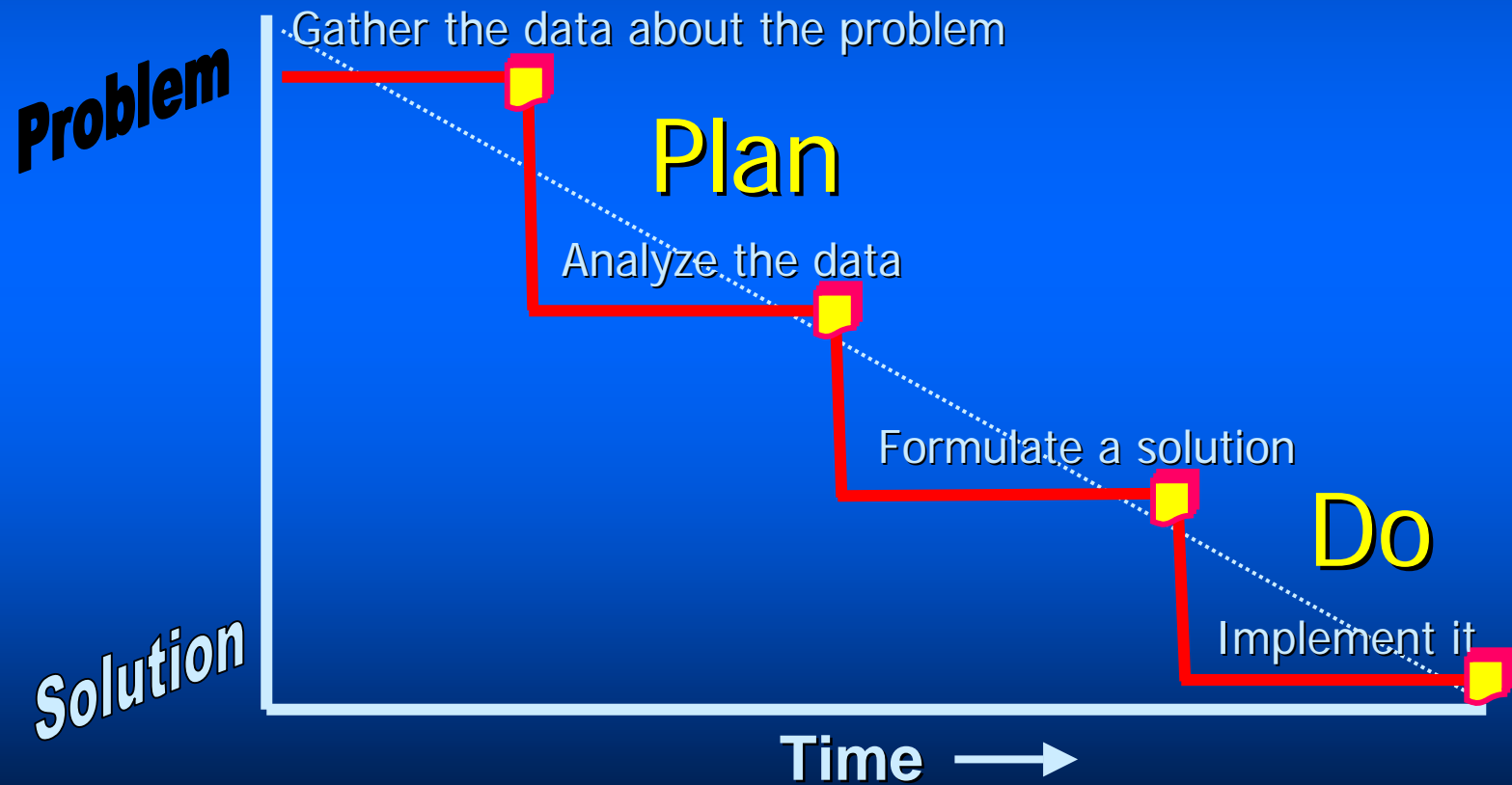
- You and I are engaged in 'knowledge work'
- Our tools do not support knowledge work
- Knowledge work is ...
  - Design (creating something new)
  - Sense making ('don't know what we don't know')
  - Non-linear (creative, not mechanical)
  - Conversations (not documents)
  - 'The perfect is the enemy of the good'
- Dialogue Mapping & Compendium support this kind of work

# Overview

---

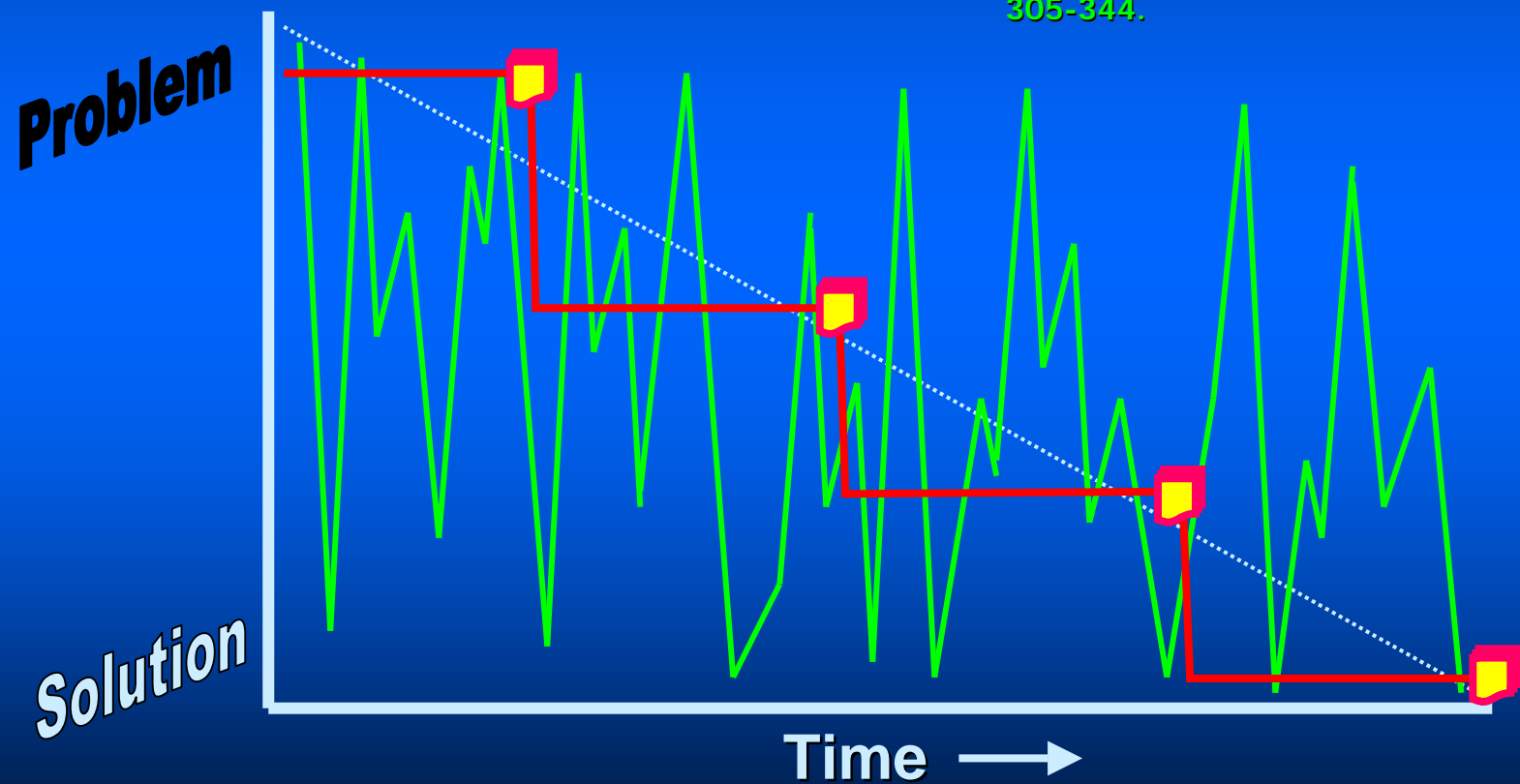
- Dialogue mapping features:
  - Process control *and* creative dynamics
  - Stakeholders who disagree strongly
  - Conflicting, contradictory information
  - Large amounts of data
  - Non-linear process
  - Context of decisions, actions

# Cognition of Design: The Old View

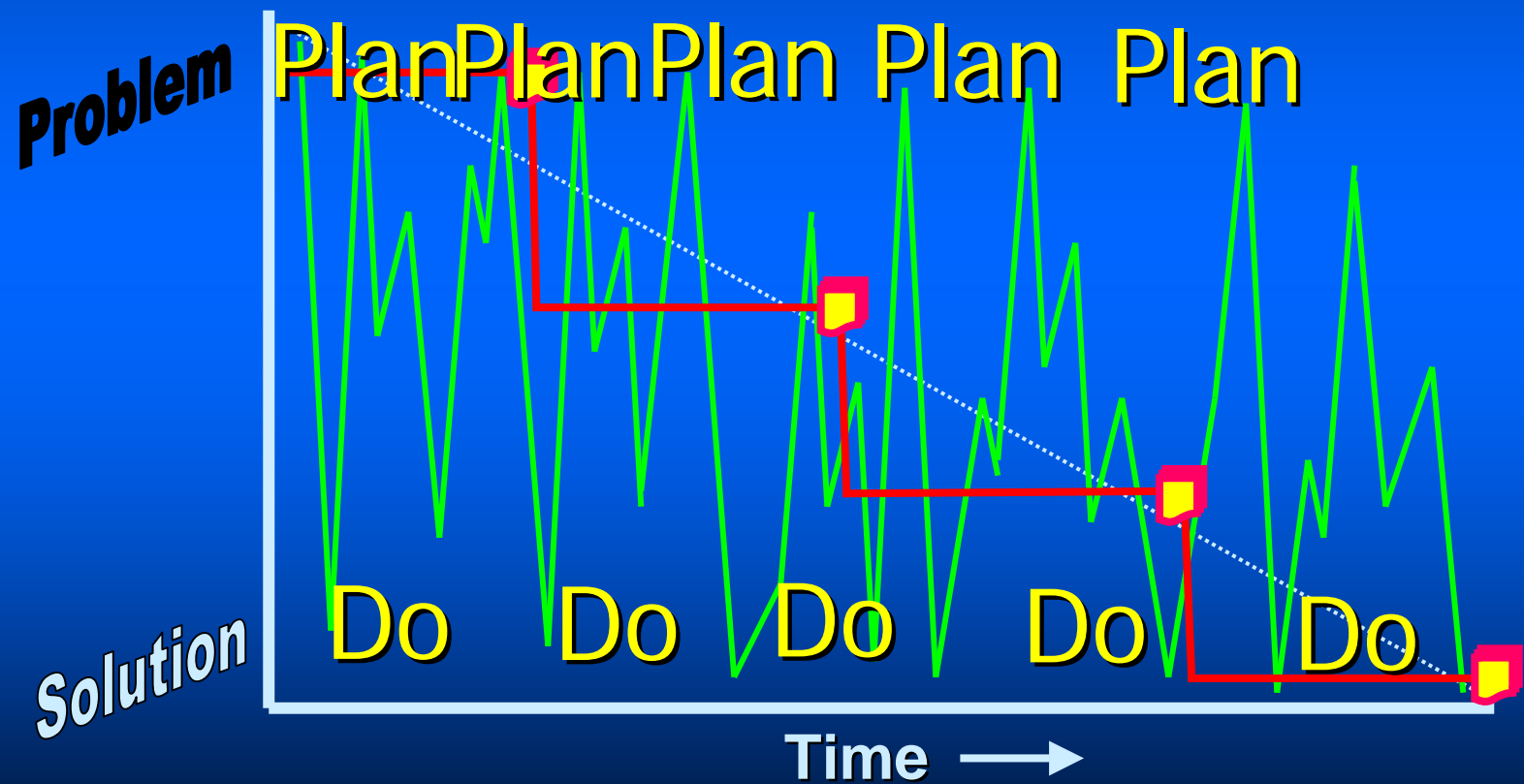


# Cognition of Design: The Data

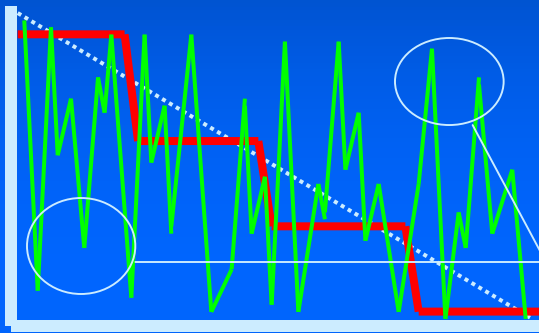
Guindon, R. (1990) "Designing the Design Process: Exploiting Opportunistic Thoughts", *Human-Computer Interaction*, Vol. 5, pp. 305-344.



# Cognition of Design: The New View



# How We Humans Actually Approach Novel Problems

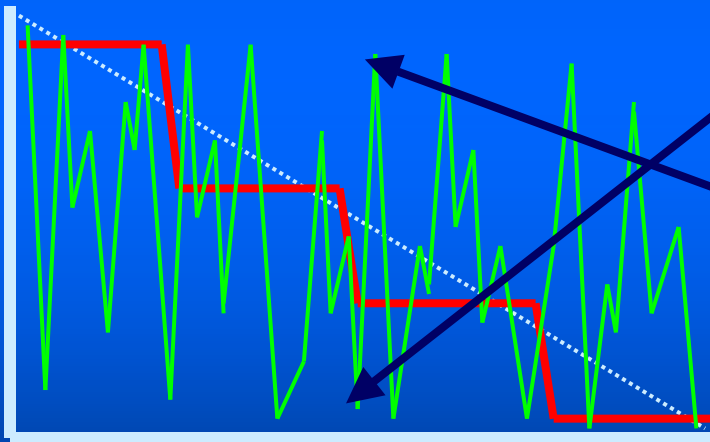


- Design process is non-linear, 'Opportunity-Driven'
- Early attempts at solutions
  - Experiments
  - Prototypes
  - Hunches
- Late efforts to understand the real problem

# Key Characteristic of "Wicked" Problems

*Versus "Tame Problems"*

Conklin, J. (2006) "Wicked Problems and Social Complexity", white paper, Chapter 1 of *Dialogue Mapping* book



Every proposed solution ...  
... exposes new aspects of  
the problem.

You have to "do" to "plan".

The **red line** fails on wicked problems!



# Most wicked problem solving happens in ... Meetings

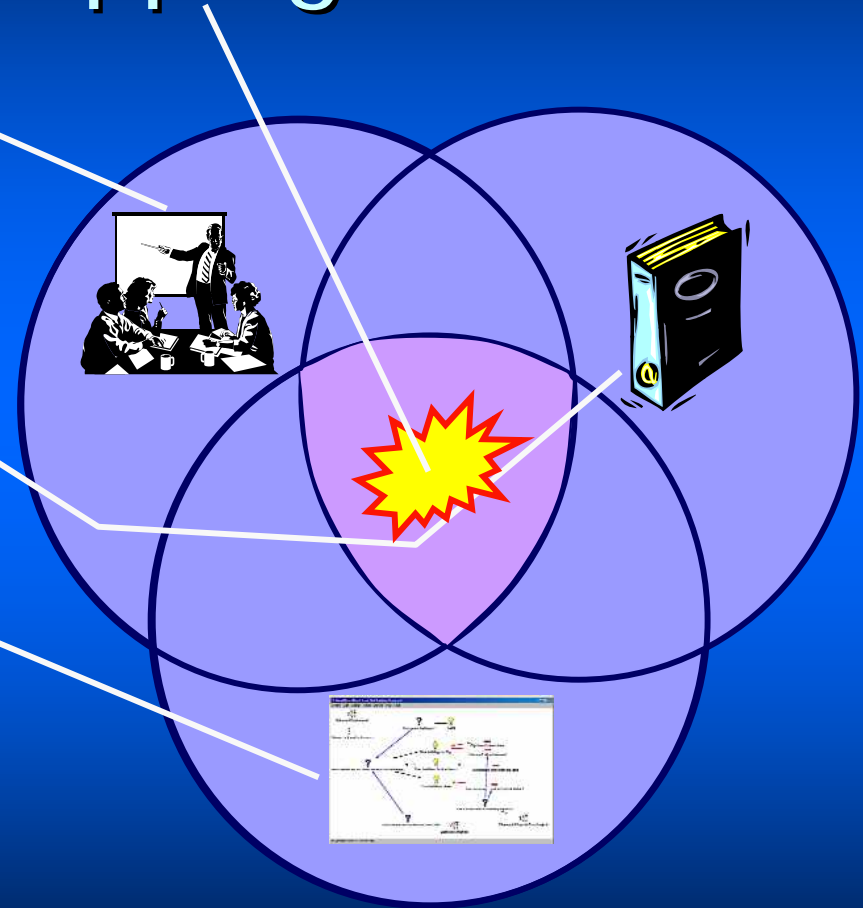
- Social Complexity
- "Symmetry of Ignorance" (Rittel)
- Intense social dynamics
  - Politics, hidden agendas, power moves
- Debate instead of dialogue
- Truth by repetition
- Ineffective and inefficient process
- But ... it's all we've got! ☹

# Dialogue mapping for nonlinear process



# The "Secret Sauce" of Dialogue Mapping

- Facilitation and mapping
  - A designated listener
- IBIS (Issue Based Information System)
  - *Question-based* knowledge representation
- Shared Hypertext Display
  - Shared: Depersonalizes conflict
  - Hypertext: Non-linear





# IBIS:

## The Deep Structure of Conversation

---

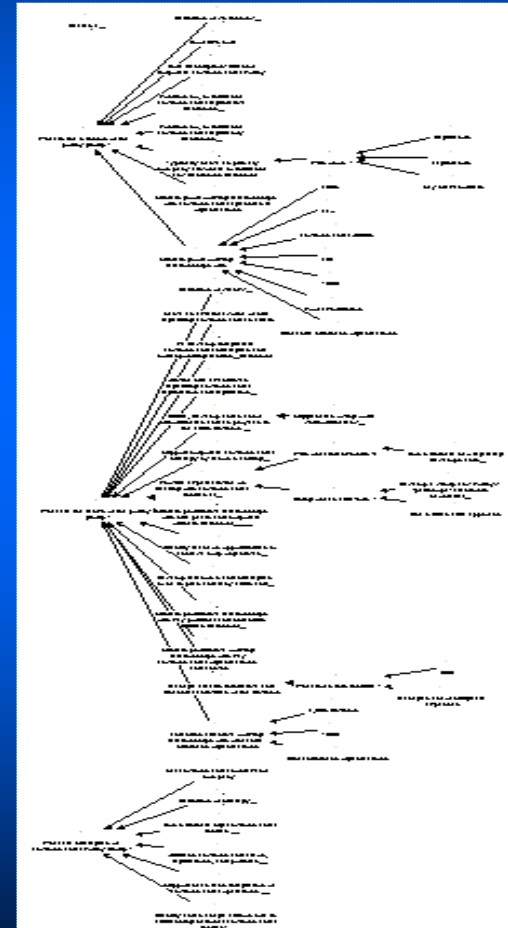
- The basic elements of design conversations:
  - Questions
  - Ideas (possible answers)
  - Arguments
    - Pros for and Cons against Ideas
- Robust representation of design process
  - Allows for inconsistent facts, incompatible options, contradictory points of view
- Preserves context of action items and decisions

# Demo

What should we do about global warming?

# Getting Traction in Deep Mud

- **Action items** are followed up and results captured ("Do")
- **Decisions** and their rationale are captured in context ("Think")
- **Repetition** is dramatically reduced
- **Hypertext**: Maps embed, structure scales, links connect
- **Networking**: Maps publishable as outlines, web-sites, pictures, ...



Further information go to ...

<http://cognexus.org>

[Buy the book](#)

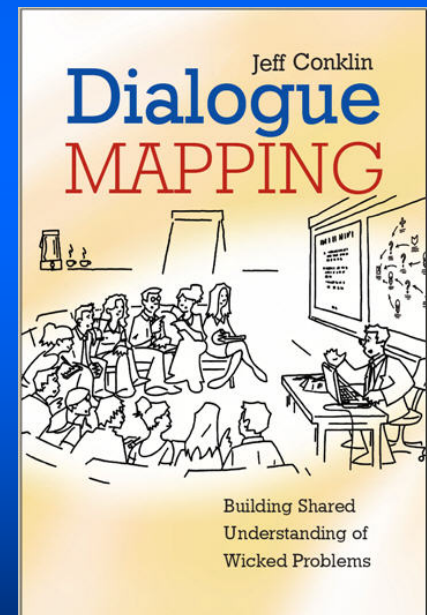
[Download \*Compendium\*](#)

White papers on our website:

“Wicked Problems and Social Complexity”

“The Age of Design”

“Designing Organizational Memory”



Dialogue Mapping is an inclusive, visual facilitation process that creates a diagram or "map" using the IBIS grammar that captures and connects participants' comments as a meeting conversation unfolds. It is an outstanding tool for building shared understanding and shared language. It is especially effective with highly complex or wicked problems that are wrought with both social and technical complexity as well as a sometimes maddening inability to move forward in a meaningful and cost effective way.