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Purposes of a Map

Think about the purposes for which a map will be used. Who would want to use a map? Why might someone want to use a map? What could the map show? To make these ideas more concrete, consider a map of your state. Make a list of all the different things a state map could be used for.

Things a map of the state could be used for:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

After you make a list on your own, meet together with several other students in a small group and discuss the similarities and differences in your list of map uses.

For a homework assignment, draw two different maps of the same location; each map is intended to be used for a different reason. For example, you could draw:

- ✓ a map of your house, that could be used under normal circumstances or for emergency exit in the event of a fire.
- ✓ a map of your neighborhood, that could be used by out-of-state visitors or a burglar.
- ✓ a map from your home to school, that could be used for a bicycle or car.
- ✓ a map of your school, that could be used by a full- or impaired-movement student.

How do these maps differ? How are they the same? How well would they work if they really were being used as a source of information?

Maps show information, but not all this information is equally important. Look again at the maps you have made. Is there a way to distinguish or highlight the most useful information?

- **CONTEXT**
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- ALTERNATIVES
- **TRADEOFFS**
- NEGOTIATION

How much information do you show on the map? How much information do you need to show?

One thing to consider is that more information is not always better. Benefits often are associated with showing more information on a map but there also may be costs, such as confusion that results from too much complexity or the extra time it takes to draw a complex map. What is included in a map should depend on the context and the types of situations and decisions in which it is used.

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Teaching Note: Purposes of a Map

This exercise encourages students to think about the purposes for which a map will be used. Who would want to use a map? Why might someone want to use a map? What could the map show? To make these ideas more concrete, ask students to consider a map of their state and to make a list of all the different things a state map might be used for.

Guide the discussion toward an understanding of the significance of the decision context. The context refers to the setting of the decision, who is making the decision, the purpose of the decision, and the set of alternatives that might be considered. For example, considering the state map, the decision context for a truck driver hauling merchandise to warehouses is quite different from the context of a bicyclist riding across the state. Different contexts clearly require different kinds of information, and in this situation that may mean quite different maps.

For a homework assignment, students are asked to draw a map from two different perspectives. Ask some of the students to present their maps to the class. See how different students approached the issue of purpose. Encourage discussion of topics such as the following:

- ✓ how much information is needed in a map?
- ✓ what are the benefits and costs of showing more information?
- ✓ does more information always lead to better decisions?
- ✓ will showing more information cost money or lead to confusion?
- ✓ is all information in a map equally important? How do you distinguish more important and less important information?
- ✓ is the key to the map clear and easy to follow? That is, can someone easily obtain the information that the map is intended to present?

Encourage open discussions of these topics. Also, connect the idea that how good or bad something is depends on the context within which the evaluation is made—a map that is good for one purpose may be bad for another.

Another thing to emphasize in the class discussion is that more information is not always better. Showing more information on a map can be beneficial, but doing so may entail costs, for example confusion or annoyance due to a map that is too complex. What is included in a map should depend on the context and the types of situations in which the map will be used.

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An effective approach is to encourage students to test their maps. For example, if one of the map assignments shows wheelchair access to classrooms, perhaps a wheelchair could be brought into the school and students can try using the map while playing the role of a wheelchair-bound student. Alternatively, a student who uses a wheelchair, or is blind, could provide comments on maps drawn for a movement- or vision-impaired person.

Vocabulary: decision context, benefits, costs, information

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