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Robert E. Horn is a visiting scholar at the Human Science and Technology Advanced Research Institute (H-STAR), Stanford University, and is author of *Visual Language: Global Communications for the 21st Century*. He has also taught at Harvard and Columbia and is the founder and ex-CEO of Information Mapping, Inc. His major activities are focused on the use of visual tools to aid the analysis of public policy strategy.

Can Visual Language Help Us With Some of Our Social Messes (aka “Wicked Problems”)?

Abstract:

Social Messes are defined as "interrelated groups of problems and other messes." Social messes have many of these characteristics:

- contain much complexity and ambiguity
- are embedded in considerable uncertainty – even as to what the problems are, let alone
- what the “solutions” might be
- have great constraints
- tightly interconnected, economically, socially, politically, and technologically
- - are seen differently from different points of view, and from quite different
- world views
- contain many value conflicts
- are often a-logical or illogical.

We have innovated a new, highly visual, facilitated group process that enables multidisciplinary task forces to get a better understanding of the complexity and “wickedness” of the issues they are confronted when assigned the job of doing something about messes. We has used this mess mapping™ process with such diverse social messes as: Sustainable development issues, delivery of mental health services (in Portland OR); long term care of the elderly (in Alameda County CA); planning for the avian flu (internationally); national health services delivery (Scotland).

At Stanford the past few years, the presenter has pioneered the exploration and use of visual language that is expanding rapidly through the internet, PowerPoint and other media. This talk will be illustrated with numerous examples of mess map™ diagrams and other large visual info-murals he has used on such projects as: disposal of nuclear waste; climate change; energy security.