

Empathy Mapping Process

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RESOURCE	Guide

What is Empathy Mapping?

Empathy mapping is a critical step in the design thinking process and the key to collecting qualitative data. These maps are easily understood charts that visually represent the behaviors and attitudes of a user or those you have conducted an empathy interview with.

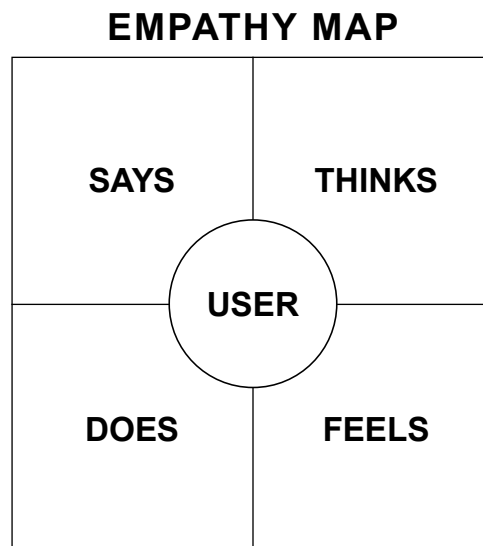
The creation of a visual representation of the user's thoughts, feelings, and experiences allows for limited miscommunications and misunderstandings when using this data in the next steps of defining the problem and ideating solutions to prototype and test. In line with the overall design thinking philosophy, empathy mapping supports the designers in considering the issue through the eyes of the user.

Mapping Steps

There are a variety of options and structures designers can use to map the feedback they receive during an empathy interview as part of the 'Empathy' stage of design thinking. Below is the most common approach. You will find additional templates at the end of this resource.

Single-User Empathy Map Grid

In this approach, designers make a map per user, focusing on the experiences of each individual interviewed. This can help the designer distill a single person's thoughts, feelings, and traits in a digestible format using their interview notes.



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Step 1: “User” – Include the provided name of the person interviewed in your empathy map. This is helpful as designers will likely have multiple empathy maps occurring at once. You are also able to easily refer back to the empathy interview script when all documentation is organized.

Consider: What name did they choose to use?

Step 2: “Says” – This is the quadrant you will insert verbatim quotes from the interview, noting exactly what the person said. Do not summarize what they said as that can lead to inserting designer bias or perspective rather than truly getting the user’s input. Consider things the person said multiple times throughout the interview or had special emphasis on specific challenges they stated.

Consider: What did the user say during the interview? What defining words were used? What are the key elements of their story?

Step 3: “Thinks” – In this quadrant, you can summarize thoughts shared by the user, even if they didn’t say it directly. In “Thinks”, designers are able to add feelings the user conveyed through body language, tone, or other noticeable indicators and can make inferences for some of these thoughts but without making assumptions about the user. Remember, you can always ask your user for clarification on their body language or perceived feelings during the interview particularly if they are contradictory to the user’s words.

Consider: What might the user be thinking? What occupies the user’s thoughts? What does this tell you about their beliefs, values, or motivations?

Step 4: “Does” – Include steps, actions, activity, measures, work, or effort the person interviewed shared throughout the interview in this quadrant. These are tangible deliverables they speak about.

Consider: What was the user doing in the story they shared? What actions (to include body language and facial expressions) and behaviors did you observe during the interview?

Step 5: “Feels” – State the feelings the user expressed and context on their emotional state. Note, these feelings may overlap a bit with notes included in “Thinks”. These can be feelings stated by the user explicitly, or feelings the designer took note of during the interview through body language, tone, facial expression, or mannerisms.

Consider: What worries the user? What does the user get excited about? How does the user feel about the experience? What emotions might the user be experiencing?

Multiple-User Empathy Maps

When using a multiple-user, or aggregated empathy map, designers are seeking to create a visual representation showcasing a group of user’s similar thoughts, opinions or qualities. This is done by creating multiple single-user maps, as described above, then combining the maps where users expressed similar things into a new empathy map.

The insights on multiple-user empathy maps allows designers to identify themes in order to better emphasize with the groups they are designing for and with. A map per user, focusing on the experiences of each individual interviewed, can help the designer distill a single person’s thoughts, feelings, and traits in a digestible format using their interview notes.

Tips and Tricks to Mapping

- Research your target audience and gather their feedback through an empathy interview
 - When empathy mapping, a ‘user’ is an individual that the designers are seeking to understand and support in their experience
 - Your audience and user may be student employees, student employee supervisors, or even leadership at your institution based on the problem you are looking to solve
- Note taking
 - Conducting research through empathy interviews brings about a lot of data in what is said as well as what was not said and clues related to body language and facial expressions
 - Having good notes from the empathy interview allows for more honest and detailed empathy mapping
- Consider additional user details
 - Having note of your user’s demographic information such as department, gender, class standing, etc. as well as their needs, wants, goals, and behaviors can be helpful when mapping
- Gain perspective
 - Noting small details in the interview can lead to large themes in the empathy mapping process
 - Consider all details and don’t discount anything
- Flexibility in categories
 - Each designer may categorize thoughts and behaviors of the user differently
 - Allow for team driven mapping where consensus is made by working together or individual categorization with time to discuss together as a team and work through any major disagreements
- Adapt the map
 - Based on the user’s experience, all categories may not make sense
 - The importance is creating a map that successfully represents the unique experiences, behaviors, attitudes, and values of the user and that may mean adding or subtracting categories on the map
 - Consider including goals, pains, gains, in your empathy map to gather even more information for design making

Benefits of Empathy Mapping

- Simplified data: After an interview, the data will be complex and dense and empathy maps allow designers to break down the data into manageable pieces that tell the story of the user experience, attitudes, behaviors, values, feelings, and thoughts effectively
- Close-up user examination: Through empathy mapping, designers are asked to consider the user’s real experiences across all stages and provide insight into pains, gains, and problems
- Campus-wide utilization: Though a single design team is creating the empathy maps, they can be utilized across campus as a universal tool that different departments and offices can analyze and use

Using the Data

Empathy mapping allows designers to collect experiential data by examining the user experiences and exploring their thoughts and feelings. This map brings categorization of findings and ease in noticing user patterns. You now have a clear picture of how your user feels about their situation and what they need!

This should lead to the next step of the design thinking model of defining a problem, ideating solutions, prototyping and testing these solutions, and continually refining and perfecting the solution. If carrying out empathy mapping as a stand-alone activity, you now have qualitative data to influence your next steps towards a user-centered change through action.

Qualitative data is tricky to gather and empathy mapping gives the perfect avenue. Use this data in conjunction with quantitative data at your institution such as surveys to consider the entire user experience and provide opportunity for holistic data-driven decision making.

Empathy Map Canvas

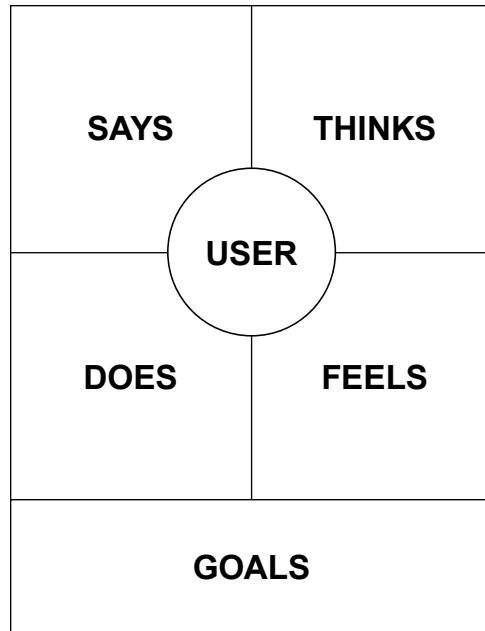
Designed for: _____ Designed by: _____ Date: _____ Version: _____

The diagram is an Empathy Map Canvas shaped like a profile of a person's head. It is divided into seven numbered sections:

- 1 WHO are we empathizing with?**
Who is the person we want to understand?
What is the situation they are in?
What is their role in the situation?
- GOAL**
- 2 What do they need to DO?**
What do they need to do differently?
What job(s) do they want or need to get done?
What decision(s) do they need to make?
How will we know they were successful?
- 3 What do they SEE?**
What do they see in the marketplace?
What do they see in their immediate environment?
What do they see others saying and doing?
What are they watching and reading?
- 4 What do they SAY?**
What have we heard them say?
What can we imagine them saying?
- 5 What do they DO?**
What do they do today?
What behavior have we observed?
What can we imagine them doing?
- 7 What do they THINK and FEEL?**
PAINS
What are their fears, frustrations, and anxieties?
GAINS
What are their wants, needs, hopes and dreams?
What other thoughts and feelings might motivate their behavior?
- 6 What do they HEAR?**
What are they hearing others say?
What are they hearing from friends?
What are they hearing from colleagues?
What are they hearing second-hand?

Additional Templates: (xplane.com, Dave Gray, 2017)

Last updated on 16 July 2017. Download a copy of this canvas at <http://gamestorming.com/empathy-map/> © 2017 Dave Gray, xplane.com



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Helpful Links:

[Empathy Mapping](#)

[Building an Empathy Map](#)

[Empathy map: A guide to user attitudes and behaviors](#)

[When to Use Empathy Maps: 3 Options](#)