CO-CREATIVE WORKSHOP

CO-CREATING SYSTEM MAPS

Using the know-how of a group of invited participants to create system maps.

Duration	**Preparation:** 1–2 hours (depending on group size and amount of data) **Activity:** 2–8 hours (depending on group size, amount of data, and system complexity) **Follow-up:** 1–4 hours (depending on complexity and intended fidelity of personas)
Physical requirements	Paper, pens, masking tape, paper templates (optional), research data as input and inspiration for participants
Energy level	Middle
Researchers/Facilitators	Minimum 1
Participants	5–20 people with good knowledge of ecosystem and chosen perspective (e.g., customers, different departments)
Expected output	Drafts of system maps (physical or digital), workshop photos, quotes of participants (audio or text), videos of workshop progress

Define a specific perspective (e.g., from a customer's or an employee's perspective) for each workshop and invite participants with a sound knowledge of the ecosystem either from a shared perspective (such as customers for a customer's perspective) or from differing perspectives (such as various internal departments if you want to map the internal stakeholder system). It helps to have a clear scope (e.g., a specific situation within a journey map) as well as the situational context if applicable (e.g., weekdays during daytime). This will help workshop participants to get on the same page.[01]

In addition to the know-how of the workshop participants, a second important factor for any co-creative workshop is the qualitative research

01 See also #TiSDD 3.4, *System maps*, and #TiSDD chapter 10, *Facilitating workshops*.

you do beforehand. As a rule of thumb, the more valuable data you bring to a co-creative workshop (through a research wall, a simple mind map, or a research report), the more representative your outcome will be.

Be careful if you conduct workshops like this with participants who only have a superficial or abstract knowledge about the system. The results might look convincing, but often they are very biased. For example, if a management team without prior qualitative research and without deep knowledge of the daily lives of employees conduct a co-creative workshop on their internal stakeholder system, the outcomes tend to represent more their idealized organizational structure than the existing formal and informal network.

A

B

A Paper templates often help participants to get started and to take a task seriously. The more familiar they become with a tool, the less important templates are for them.

B Value network maps quickly can become quite messy. Try to give a map a specific focus to keep an overview.

Step-by-step guide

1 Plan and prepare
Determine who you'll invite as workshop participants and prepare your invitations. Describe the aim of the workshop, set expectations for your workshop, and think of an incentive for participating in the workshop if appropriate. Prepare the room (or any other venue you choose for your workshop) and write a list so that you don't forget any essential material (templates, sticky notes, pens, research data, personas or journey maps, etc.). Write a facilitation agenda and establish facilitation guidelines to create a safe space through warm-ups and so on.

2 Welcome and split into smaller groups
Start your workshop with a welcome, describing the workshop's aim and agenda, and facilitate a round of introductions. After a warm-up, split the participants into subgroups of 3–5 people and give them clear instructions on what to do.

3 Create initial stakeholder maps
Create a first version of a system map per team. The facilitator should check that all teams have a common focus and are following the same instructions, such as:

— **List actors/stakeholders**
Catalog the actors or stakeholders that are (potentially) part of the ecosystem you want to visualize. Use a list or sticky notes to write down or sketch the actors or stakeholders.

— **Prioritize actors/stakeholders**
Prioritize the actors/stakeholders based on common criteria. Either give participants the criteria or let each group define their own.

— **Visualize actors/stakeholders on map**
Arrange the actors/stakeholders on the map according to the prioritization. If you use one sticky note per stakeholder, you can simply move the sticky notes around.

— **Illustrate relationships between stakeholders (optional)**
Sketch relationships between actors/stakeholders to visualize interdependencies within the ecosystem.

4 Present and compare
Have each group present their system maps. Hang the different versions on a wall beside each other to compare them with the whole team.

5 Discuss and merge
Give the participants some time to reflect. Discuss similarities and differences between the system maps. Let the group agree on one

map, but make notes on different opinions and insights – they might be handy later. Merge the different maps into one that most participants can agree on.

6 Test different scenarios within the ecosystem (optional)
Split the group again and let them test different scenarios within the created stakeholder map.

7 Iterate and validate (optional)
Do some quick research to check any open issues you discussed during the workshop. Also go through your notes and check different positions taken by your workshop participants. You could repeat the workshop with different invitees to identify patterns between different participants.

8 Follow-up
Index the generated data and highlight important passages. Sometimes it is useful to schedule follow-up interviews or further workshops with some or all participants. If needed, process your journey map into a format that is easier to comprehend (physical or digital). Write a short workshop summary that includes your conflated key findings as well as the journey map and raw data you collected during the workshop from your participants, such as quotes, photos, or videos.

Method notes

→ You can use stakeholder mapping during a first client meeting to understand their internal formal and informal structures (e.g., to test how customer-centric the organization is). Without mentioning the customer focus, let them visualize everyone involved in, for example, a B2B sales process prioritized by "importance." If the "customer" or "user" is not in the center of this map, you just learned a lot about how customer-centric this organization really is.

→ Instead of paper templates, you can use a stakeholder constellation in a co-creative workshop on system mapping. Use real people or figures to illustrate stakeholders and arrange them in a room or on a stage. This is much more interactive, and participants often can easily empathize with some stakeholders. You might even be able to use theatrical tools like investigative rehearsal to explore specific relationships.[01] ◀

01 See #TiSDD 6.7.3, *Ideas from future-state system mapping*, for more on stakeholder constellations and *Investigative rehearsal* in 7.2, for an explanation of investigative rehearsal.