DATA VISUALIZATION, SYNTHESIS, AND ANALYSIS

MAPPING JOURNEYS

Visualizing specific experiences of a main actor, often exemplified by a persona, over time.

Duration	1–8 hours (depending on complexity and amount of data)
Physical requirements	Research data, personas, journey map templates (paper-based or digital), paper, pens, masking tape
Energy level	Middle
Researchers/Facilitators	Minimum 1 (a better approach is to have teams of 2–3 researchers)
Participants	2–12, with good knowledge of the research data or of the experience the journey map represents (optional)
Expected output	Journey maps

Journey maps can visualize either existing experiences (current-state journey maps) or new experiences that are planned but do not yet exist (future-state journey maps).[01] Unlike service blueprints or business process maps, journey maps focus on human experiences, illustrating the story of a specific actor as a sequence of steps.[02]

The basic structure of a journey map consists of steps and stages defining the scale of the visualized experience. The scale can range from a high-level journey map that shows the entire end-to-end experience to a very detailed journey map showing only a few minutes. You can think of the scale of a journey map like the zoom levels of a map: a map of a whole country helps you to navigate on a bigger scale, while a map of a region or a map of a city helps you to find a specific destination. You need both if you want to drive from one place to another: you need to navigate on the larger scale and zoom in whenever necessary. With an increasing scale (i.e., a longer time frame), the level of detail for each step usually decreases: a high-level

01 Anke Helmbrecht of Deutsche Telekom describes their usefulness as follows: "We started to document all core customer experiences with current-state journey maps based on quantitative and predominantly qualitative research. Now that we know where we are, we can make educated decisions on what exactly needs improvement and why."
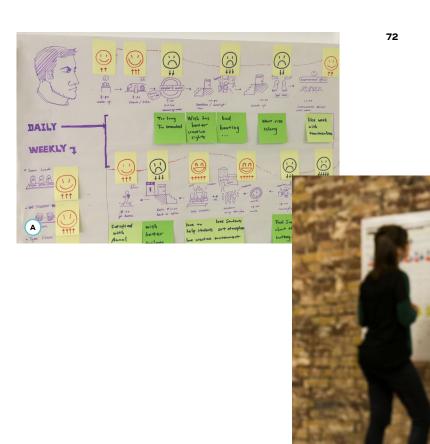
02 Service blueprints are often used in management and focus mainly on how customer actions relate to internal and external processes. Business process maps are often used in engineering and focus mostly on the technical process of a service and less on customer experience. There are many ways to visualize experiences as maps. See, for example, Kalbach, J. (2016). *Mapping Experiences: A Complete Guide to Creating Value Through Journeys, Blueprints, and Diagrams*. O'Reilly.

journey map gives an overview of the entire experience, while a detailed journey map focuses on the details. In addition to the basic structure of steps and stages, journey maps can be enriched with various additional lanes.[01]

Research-based current-state journey maps are a visualization of existing experiences based on research data. Another option is to create current-state journey maps that do not use research data, but are rather built on assumptions. Assumption-based journey maps are relatively easy and fast to put together. Therefore, teams are often tempted to work only in an assumption-based manner. This is risky as journey maps that are just built on our assumptions can be very misleading.

Sometimes, it makes sense to start with an assumption-based journey map to get an idea of how to structure the research process: who to ask what, when, and where. However, mind the risk of confirmation bias. If you start with assumption-based journey maps, constantly challenge your assumptions. Over time, assumption-based journey maps should develop into research-based ones with a solid foundation on research data.[02]

01 See #TiSDD chapter 3, *Basic service design tools*, for an overview of possible additional visualizations.

02 See #TiSDD 5.4.4, *Case: Illustrating research data with journey maps*, and 5.4.5, *Case: Current-state (as-is) and future-state (to-be) journey mapping*, for case studies detailing how to use journey maps in service design projects.

(A) A journey map visualizing two different scales of daily and weekly user activities. The map includes a sketched storyboard, an emotional journey, and user needs.[01]

(B) Journey mapping software helps you to quickly create professional journey maps with dispersed teams.[02]

01 Photo: Wuji Shang and Muwei Wang, MDes, Service Design and Innovation, LCC, University of the Arts, London.

02 Photo: Smaply.

Step-by-step guide

1 **Prepare and print out data**
Journey maps are often created iteratively together with data collection to gain a quick overview of your research data. Prepare the room with the materials you'll need to create your journey map, such as journey map templates, paper, sticky notes, pens, and of course your research data, as well as existing personas, journey maps, or system maps. Decide who should join you to co-create your journey map.

2 **Choose main actor (persona)**
Select the main actor of your journey map – into whose shoes do you want to slip? Alternatively, start without a dedicated persona and use journey mapping to cluster your data and discover different customer experience patterns shown by your customers. These might be a very useful indicator to help segment your customers and then build your personas.

3 **Define scale and scope**
Define the time frame of your story. Are you talking about an experience of 10 minutes, 2 hours, 5 days, or 10 years? Write down the stages of the customer journey. Stages are the high-level sections of an experience, such as "inspiration, planning, booking, experience, sharing" for a holiday. Then, cluster your research around these stages and again look to identify gaps in your data. Don't hesitate to go back and do some more research if you find gaps. This is an iterative process!

4 **Create steps**
Fill up the stages of your customer journey with steps. Root your steps in your data and use indexing to keep track. Sometimes it helps if you start with the most crucial steps and then ask yourself what happens before and what happens after these. Use simple sticky notes for this so you can easily add or discard steps, but also use the material from your research wall. Photos, sketches, screenshots, and artifacts help visualize the experience and can be added as a storyboard to the journey map.

5 **Iterate and refine**
Refine the journey by going through it from end to end to check if you missed a step or if you need more/ fewer details in certain parts. You can always break up a step into two or more steps or condense several steps to one. Depending on the project,

it might make sense to find a consistent level of detail throughout the whole journey map or to highlight a specific part of the journey in more detail. Invite real customers or frontline staff to give feedback and use their feedback to refine it.

6 Add lanes
Depending on the aim of the journey map, add more lanes to visualize specific aspects of the experience, such as a storyboard, an emotional journey, channels, stakeholders, a dramatic arc, backstage processes, "What if?" scenarios, etc.[01] A storyboard visualization of each step is often considered essential as it helps people understand the context of this step and get to grips with a journey map much faster. Also, an emotional journey is often considered a main feature of a journey map as it makes it easy to understand where the pain points are from the persona's point of view. Often, the research data at hand defines which additional lanes you'll need to add to be able to visualize this.

7 Follow-up
Document your progress with photos and write a summary of your journey map. If useful, create a well-visualized journey map that is easy to understand for people outside your team. Choose a format that you can distribute in your organization or to your client (physical or digital) and add enough context information to make your key findings clear.

Method notes

→ A customer journey always represents a single customer experience without mapping if/then decisions, loops, or decision trees and the like. Alternative routes not taken by the main actor can be added as possible options, but these should be mapped out in separate self-consistent journey maps.

→ To increase the rigor of research-based journey maps, they should include real data – in particular, first-level construct data, such as quotes from customers or employees, photos, or screenshots from videos. ◄

01 #TiSDD chapter 3, *Basic service design tools*, provides an overview of potentially useful additional lanes. See also the textbox *Dramatic arcs* in #TiSDD 3.3, which describes a great approach for analyzing existing experiences in current-state journey maps.