



Ideos

EMPATHY MAPPING

*A Guide to Creating People-First Systems
Change*

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WHY EMPATHY?

Empathy is a mindset and behavior that helps us identify key social challenges and develop just, effective, and sustainable solutions for communities, groups, and even whole societies. Every single person is an expert in their own experience, and empathy allows us to better understand that experience from their perspective, so we can better work with and support them.

What is Community (or Group) Empathy Mapping?

Like product- and design-based approaches, community empathy mapping is a simple mapping exercise that forces you to think from someone else's perspective. The empathy map ladder works by facilitating perspective-taking of communities and groups. As you summarize their "perceptual world" of thoughts, feelings, actions, and experiences, you begin to see and feel the world from their perspective.

Traditional human-centered empathy mapping was developed as a way to get closer to what people (i.e. consumers) really think and feel about a product, service or situation. Similarly, community empathy mapping helps us better understand the perspectives of key populations and identify knowledge gaps to be further addressed through research, observation, and engagement with that population. It's a powerful visualization tool designed to help teams use emotional intelligence to gain insight into a community or group.

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As a tool, community empathy mapping offers a series of prompts to help identify a target group's thoughts, feelings, motivations, desires, and needs. This shifts the focus from the solution to the people who will benefit from it. As we identify what the community or group wants and needs, we gain a more holistic idea of their culture, norms, beliefs, values, needs, and desires, and even their worldview. This then allows us to design ideas and solutions that respond to their needs rather than our own.

Through community empathy mapping we gain answers to the following questions and more:

1 Perception

What does this population perceive about the world around them? What are they seeing, hearing, and thinking?

2 Action

What are they doing? What are their emotions and reactions?
How are they physically interacting with the world around them?

3 Feel

How do they feel? What are the underlying emotions for those feelings?

4 Need

What are their wants and needs? Their goals?
What are they trying to achieve?

HOW IT WORKS

An empathy map becomes a useful tool whenever you need to see something from someone else's perspective.

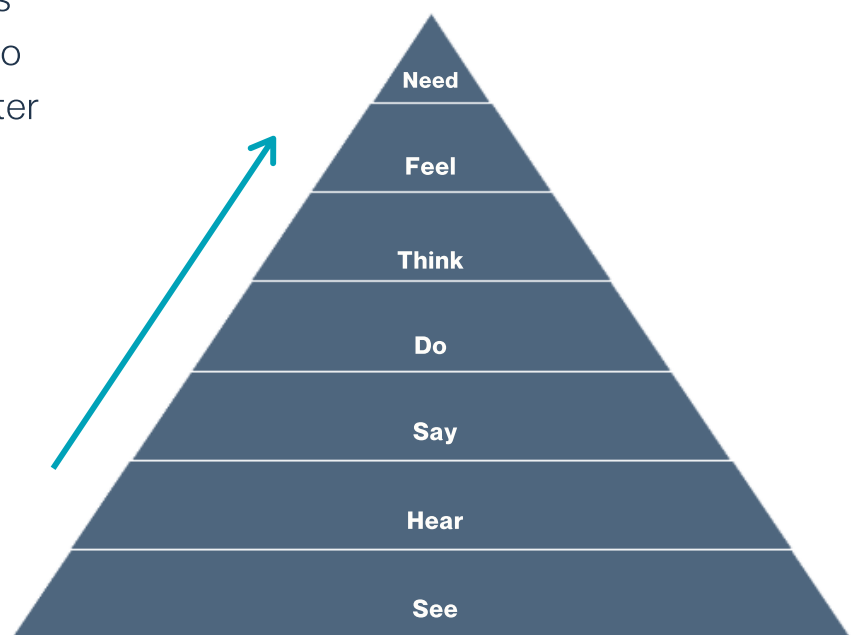
This includes community members, constituents, clients, colleagues, or consumers. We find our community empathy mapping tool particularly useful when attempting to solve social issues because they help sensitize us to the people or groups at the center of the issue itself.

If you decide to do a mapping on your own:

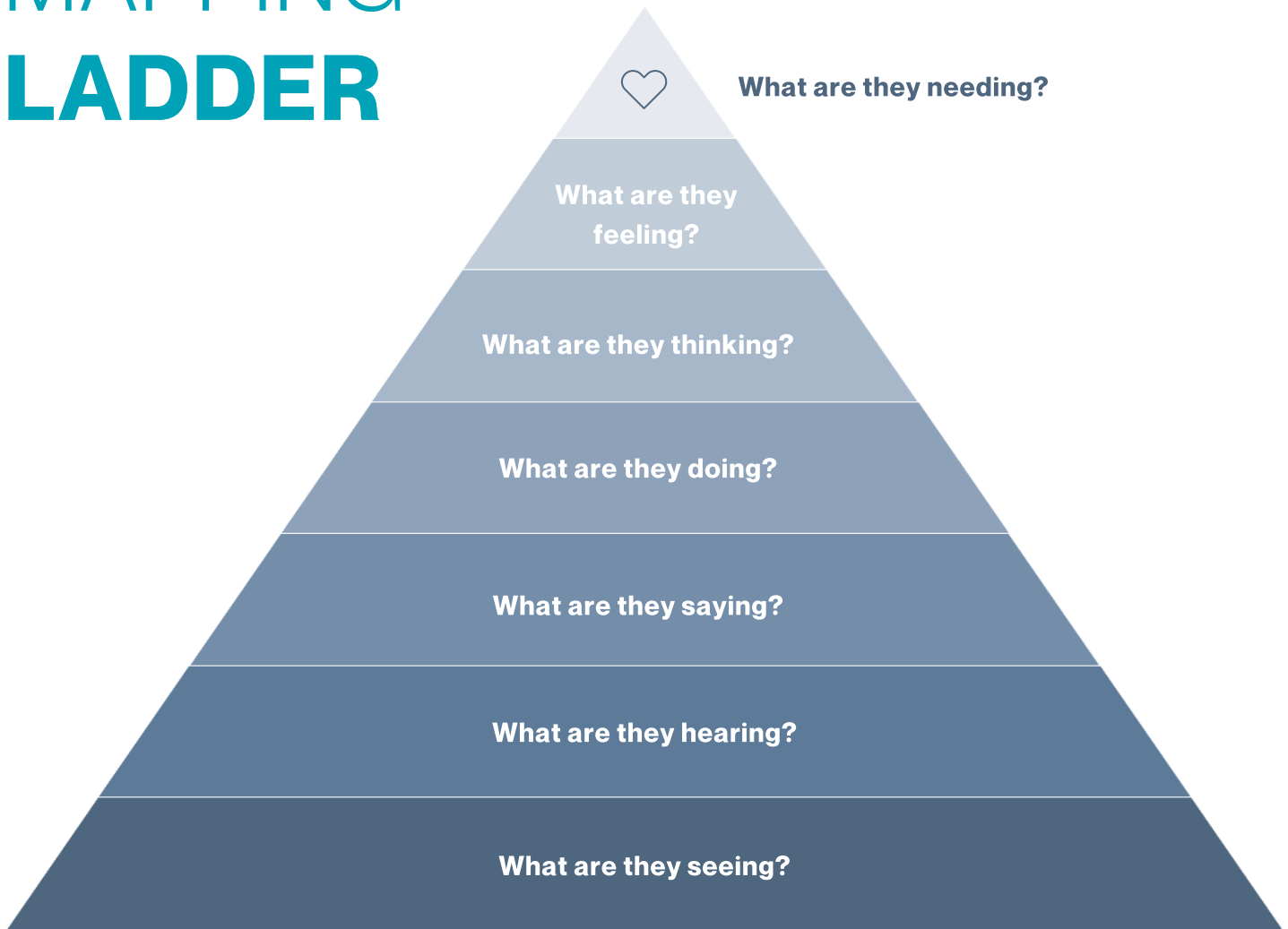
For best results, we recommend you begin from the bottom of the ladder and work your way to the top.

You can conduct our empathy mapping process in two ways:

- 1 On your own.**
Reference our Empathy Mapping Ladder on the next page. You can walk through the exercise yourself!
- 2 Sign up for a specialized consultation with us.**
We can help you conduct your own Empathy Mapping process in your community, organization, or company.



EMPATHY MAPPING LADDER



Questions to Consider

With a group or persona in mind, review these guiding questions and come up with at least 3 bulleted responses to each prompt. Use a separate piece of paper to record your answers.

- 1** What are their needs, wants, and goals?
- 2** What barriers or challenges exist that might prevent them from achieving these goals?
- 3** How can we address these barriers and challenges to help them achieve their goals?

THE MAPPING PROCESS

1 Always do a one-to-one mapping

Follow the rule, “one group or persona*” per map. This means, if you have multiple groups or personas, there should be an empathy map for each. Mixing different groups or personas will muddy the valuable insights our community empathy mapping process uncovers.



*Persona Map:

A persona map is a process of mapping the basic demographics of a particular community or group. Though we should never make assumptions about certain populations based on demographics alone, personas can provide helpful information. The level of segmentation enabled through persona mapping helps us identify similarities and differences between parts of a broader group or community, such as generation, gender, race, or even socioeconomic status. It can also help us come up with the right questions that lead to the information we need to know about that specific group or population. Using readily available information such as surveys, social media monitoring, data platforms, government data, as well as personal knowledge is a great way to begin the persona mapping process.

THE MAPPING PROCESS

CONTINUED

2 Create context

Begin by defining who will be the subject of the empathy map, what their goals are, or what they want to achieve. It's worth mentioning where the subject is located when trying to accomplish that goal. For example, are they in an urban or rural environment, in a desert or rainforest, in a diverse or homogenous community? The point of creating context is to make sure you can understand their perspectives and experiences..

3 Add basic characteristics

Before you start asking questions, it's essential to ensure you are ready to be empathetic about the group or community you are interested in. Here are a few simple tricks that will help make the group or persona feel more real:

Create a user profile.

This can include demographic information like age, gender, socio-economic profile, race, religion, or even a job title if in an organization or company.

Use visual cues to make the group or persona more real.

Pictures, artwork, printed statements viewable by the entire group can make for a much more personal experience.

THE MAPPING PROCESS

CONTINUED

4 Seek out insights and ideas from other sources

After you define the essential characteristics of a group, community, or persona, it's time for the meat of the mapping process. Begin by brainstorming group or personal characteristics by answering questions like "What are their wants or needs; what are their pain points?"

Write your responses on post-it notes and stick them to the map. If doing this in a group, have each team member talk about their sticky notes as they place them on the empathy map. Encourage other team members to asking questions to reach more profound insights — such as why team members really think the way they do — which can be valuable for the rest of the team.



TIP

Instead of writing directly on the map, use post-it notes and stick them in sections. Sticky notes can be easily removed, changed, or grouped. This will help you move insights around and cluster similar notes together that belong to the same category or idea. It's also better to use colored post-it notes and assign a color to each topic or question. This will help improve the process and the results of mapping.

THE MAPPING PROCESS

CONTINUED

5 Summarize the results

At the end of the session, review the completed empathy map and discuss any patterns. If a group, encourage team members to share their thoughts about the session. Ask them what new insights they learned or what hypotheses they have about the people or communities they are interested in. Once you collect all the information, organize it into a summary and share it with others.

✓ Things to do after the session:

The benefit of the empathy map doesn't end with the workshop itself. As a design artifact, an empathy map can serve as the foundation for deeper work or as a living, breathing document to further your work in the future.

✓ Use the empathy map as a reference:

Empathy maps can also be used as design documentation. An empathy map can be a guiding light in times of uncertainty; or when you need to test the validity of an idea or solution. It can also be a vital tool when regularly revisited and updated as you learn more about the group or community.

✓ Turn your empathy map into something that lasts:

It's possible to create a nice reminder of what the community empathy mapping process unearthed by turning the results into a piece of art. Whether it's a poster, cards, or a printed journal, make sure they are easily and publicly viewable and accessible. This helps ensure your empathy map process and the ideas that were uncovered remain in your or the group's mind.

ABOUT IDEOS



As a global leader in Empathic Intelligence

(MQ), our work spans spaces and topics. Rather than applying our approach to a singular issue, we leverage the power of MQ to bring people together in the co-design of redemptive solutions to our world's greatest challenges.

Our mission

We help people move past division and polarization and begin the process of healing and reconciliation.

Our vision

Our pursuit of empathy works at the intersection of faith, dialogue, and civic engagement so that the dignity, experiences, and perspectives of all people are included in efforts to solve our greatest challenges.

The Ideos Institute is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the understanding and application of Empathic Intelligence (MQ) in cultural and communal reconciliation.