



Empathy Mapping:

The Road to

Innovative Solutions

by Performance Frontiers

The business shift towards customer-centric innovation demands that we have a better understanding of our end user's needs and an expanded ability to delight them with the customer experience we can provide. This human-centred design approach uses the design thinking process to find inventive solutions and opportunities.

Why Empathy?

In most cases in business, the problems we are trying to solve are rarely our own. Therefore, we need to be able to put ourselves in the shoes of the people for whom we are designing solutions. Empathy is a word we hear a lot in leadership development. It's fundamental to clear communication, compassionate choices, as well as being the foundation of the design thinking process (empathise, define, ideate, prototype, and test). Through observing, engaging, and immersing with genuine empathy we can begin to deepen our capacity to take on another perspective, gain insight into human behaviour, and understand the people we are designing for. This is basis of good design.

Using empathy asks us to suspend preconceptions, assumptions or biases. In doing so we may discover new and surprising ways to solve difficult challenges, get a better understanding of a challenge or problem itself, or uncover new challenges we hadn't yet defined. This is how innovation is born. When we engage with empathy, we can:

- Uncover needs that people have
- Identify the right users to design for
- Gain insights on the emotions that guide behaviours
- Guide innovation efforts

Modes of Empathising

When engaging in a design thinking process, we can empathise with our customers by:

Observing what people do and how they interact with their environment - this gives us clues about what they think and feel.

Engaging directly with people - this reveals an enormous amount about the values they hold and their inner narrative. Good designs are built on a solid understanding of these kinds of beliefs and values.

Immersing ourselves in personal experience, so we can better understand the situation that our users are in. This might mean we stand in for our customers or end users.

Empathy Mapping

Designers have many techniques for heightening empathy, and empathy mapping is one such tool that will help us synthesise our observations of a user's needs and draw out unexpected insights. Keep in mind that thoughts/beliefs and feelings/emotions can't be observed directly. They must be inferred by paying careful attention to various clues and cues, such as body language, tone, and choice of words.

Identifying Needs

"Needs" are human emotional or physical necessities that help us define our design challenge. Needs are verbs (activities and desires with which your user could use help), not nouns (solutions). These may be explicitly stated, or you may have to deduce needs out of your end user's clues, or their stated "wants". Needs are the driving "desires" beneath the "wants".

Identifying Insights

An "insight" is a remarkable realisation about a customer that we can leverage to better respond to a design challenge. Insights often grow from contradictions between what a customer/user says and what they are doing, feeling, or thinking e.g. We might be saying that we want to spend more time with our family, but then insist on working (doing) excessive overtime. One way to identify the seeds of insights is to capture these tensions and contradictions.

Needs VS Insights		
Wants	Desires	Why
Want to travel more.	To do a space walk.	I want to lift my vision of belonging to something far bigger.
Want a job with more flexible working environment.	To spend more quality time with my children.	I want my children to feel emotionally connected to me, and feel loved.
Want to learn a musical instrument.	To be cool and creative.	I love bringing joy to people.
To do meditation a couple of times a week.	To be calmer at work.	I want to connect to my sense of purpose because life feels so chaotic right now

Empathy mapping can be employed for single users or can be used to aggregate responses from multiple users. However, it is a qualitative approach and best explored in smaller groups of less than ten people.

Empathy Interviewing

A common way to perform empathy mapping is through interviewing. Interviews can be conducted face-to-face in a conversational style, which gives us the opportunity to ask further questions. When interviewing in this manner, it's important we make the interviewee feel comfortable and that they are in capable hands. Here are some tips for the process:

- Introduce ourselves and our project
- Shift the focus to the interviewee
- Build rapport by seeking common ground
- Ask about specific instances. Encourage stories (“Tell me about the last time you...”)
- Look for inconsistencies or contradictions; what people say and what they do can be very different
- Observe non-verbal cues
- Don't suggest answers to questions
- Sound record the interview, or capture it verbatim (it's important that it is verbatim - don't short-hand as this leaves your data open to your unconscious bias and interpretation)

Face-to-face interviews can also present certain challenges: they are time consuming and not always logistically possible. As an alternative, we can deliver pre-populated interviews to users. This is both time efficient and allows us to work remotely; however, we are then not able to ask clarifying questions.

Empathy mapping helps us to uncover hidden user motivations and create an experience to which the user has a true emotional connection. If we understand the 'why' we can innovate differently than if we only understand the 'what'. This qualitative approach also builds user-confidence in our ability to deliver on their needs. It's an optimal starting point for innovation to exceeds our customers' expectations.



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