Empathy Mapping

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WHAT IS IT?

An empathy map is a collaborative tool teams can use to gain a deeper insight into their users. Much like a persona, an empathy map can represent a group of users. The map can effectively communicate knowledge about the users to provide a shared understanding of their needs and to support you and your team in decision-making. Compared with personas, empathy maps are generally quite quick to create, especially if done on your own, but is rather good fun when created in a workshop setting.

WHY DO YOU NEED IT?

- Empathy maps can be used whenever you find a need to immerse yourself in a user's environment, elaborating on the user persona.
- They also produce an artefact that can be used to communicate the user type to others.
- Always take the time understand the user before you get into product requirements.

WHEN DO YOU NEED IT?

Early, before you get into product requirements – it should be at the beginning of the design process.

HOW DO YOU DO IT?

Firstly, you should define the scope and goals of the mapping exercise:

- Are you mapping one or more personas? If so you'll be creating multiple maps?

Consider the purpose of the exercise:

- Is it because you want to analyse the information you have already collected through research?
- Is it primarily designed to align your team?

If for the team, you want to be sure they are involved in the exercise. As with many of these discovery and analysis activities, it is good to include a broad team of stakeholders and individuals who can contribute to the insights from their own contact with users, for example, Sales, Support, Marketing, Product and Technical. Aim to have half a dozen participants per persona.

You'll need the usual workshop gear: whiteboard, markers, sticky notes. Mark-up the white board or large A0 size paper pads with the empathy map template.

The traditional visualisation includes the sections: Says, Thinks, Does and Feels. However, what you tend to find is that participants struggle with Thinks and Feels and there is overlap between Says and Does. Several UX practitioners have revised the traditional empathy map with clearer sections to overcome this issue. In particular Paul Boag documented a more useable map. His map comprises the following:

- **Tasks** – What tasks are users trying to complete? What questions do they need answered?
- **Feelings** – How is the user feeling about the experience? What matters to them?
- **Influences** – What people, things or places may influence how the user acts?
- **Pain points** – What pain points might the user be experiencing that they hope to overcome?
- **Overall Goal** – What is the ultimate goal for the user? What are they trying to achieve?

As your team may not have a lot of knowledge of the users, ensure you have adequately prepared qualitative data collected from research through user interviews, field studies, surveys etc. The preparation could simply be individual quotes from users stuck all over a wall.

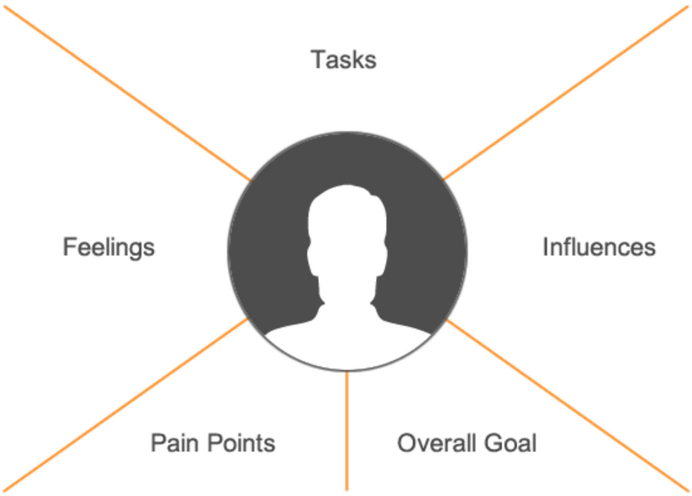
Ensure that you have talked through the plan for the session and the mapping template. Break the group up into enough teams to cover the personas you're mapping. You are now ready to begin the activity.

1. Arm the participants with a marker and stack of sticky notes.
2. Allow all to read through the research individually – the amount of time to do this reading depends on how much data you have, but don't let this period go on too long as engagement may begin to wane.
3. As each participant digests the data, they fill out sticky notes that align with the template sections.
4. Now bring your participants back together and into their teams around the template. One-by-one they go through their sticky notes, explain what and why they wrote on the note and stick it to the section being discussed. Once one section is done, move to the next and so forth.
5. There will naturally be some duplication, so these can be clustered. If there are similar but not identical notes, consider clustering and providing a theme that covers these. You may also find that the research is incomplete and you don't really know enough to, for example, determine feelings or influences. This is okay and points to areas where more user research is required. As you gather more research, don't forget to revisit your empathy maps – keep them current, reference design materials.
6. Post-workshop, you can finesse the empathy map by presenting it in a more readable and shareable format. Don't forget to display it in your workspace too.

Through this activity the team members will have been engaged and learning a great deal about the data they have synthesised, providing the desired shared understanding, putting the user into the frame when making design decisions going forward.

EXAMPLE

The template can be used for adding the sticky notes and then digitalised for sharing with the wider team.



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