Empathy Map: Explainer

APM Enabling Change Specific Interest Group

Lead author information: Matt Lawrence,   
APM Enabling Change SIG Committee Member

Date: 26 June 2023

**What is an empathy map?**

An empathy map is a stakeholder analysis tool which can be used to help project professionals understand a stakeholder in more detail – this could include identifying the thoughts, feeling, behaviours, needs, actions, expectations and desires of the stakeholder.

**Why should I use an empathy map?**

Effective stakeholder engagement is the cornerstone to successful project management. An empathy map offers the ability to build a comprehensive understanding of a specific stakeholder. These insights can be used to inform engagement/communication approaches, project design and change support strategies. An empathy map also provides the capability to capture stakeholder information in a visually appealing format.

**When should I use an empathy map?**

Empathy maps are most commonly used at the beginning of a project, or during delivery. Completing an empathy map in the planning stage of your project will allow you to use the information to adapt,and tailor, your approach to running the project and engaging your stakeholders. Empathy maps are an excellent tool to use in the initial stages of a project to reveal and record how different stakeholders are likely to react to your project.

**How do I use this empathy map template?**

Firstly, decide on the stakeholder(s) that you wish to create an empathy map for – this may be those that you consider to be the most resistant to the changes. Empathy maps can be used for groups of stakeholders butthe larger the stakeholder group, the more variation that will appear in the map. Depending on your project, you may choose to complete an empathy map in collaboration with your stakeholder group or as an imaginative exercise based on your existing knowledge of the stakeholder.

To use this template, first decide on the stakeholder you would like to analyse and enter the name and short description into the central circle. Complete the numbered boxes in sequence, answering the prompt question in each box. You may find it valuable to change this sequence or the questions themselves to suit the characteristics of your project and stakeholders. You may also find it helpful to draw pictures, diagrams or arrows on your empathy map to explain concepts in more detail and demonstrate connections/relationships between different parts of your map.

**What do I do once I have completed the empathy map?**

If possible, you should display the empathy map in a place where it is visible to the project team – having frequent sight of this will act as a reminder of your key stakeholders and focus thoughts on the perspectives of those stakeholders as you complete the project. Revisiting and updating the empathy map as your project progresses will allow you to reflect on the evolving experience and situation of different stakeholders.

**Neurodiversity and empathy**

Neurodiverse people may experience empathy differently to neurotypical people. When completing the empathy map template, it is valuable to include a range of different perspectives, and this includes neurodiverse ones. The following advice will help you to complete this exercise in a way which values neurodiverse thought:

* In addition to defining information about a stakeholder, the group should also seek to make the implicit reasons why that stakeholder may feel or act in a certain way so that people who experience empathy differently understand how certain situations may have an impact on an individual.
* Considering what body language, tone of voice and actions the stakeholder may take is equally as important as identifying how they may think and feel.
* Provide information on the stakeholder prior to the empathy map exercise so people have time to process.
* Schedule a short follow-up meeting so that people can process information and return with their thoughts.