

Constructing the Path: Utilizing Journey Mapping to Understand Local Food Systems and Beyond

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Introduction

Journey mapping originated as a market research tool but has since been implemented to understand public services. (Crosier & Handford, 2012). As a methodology, journey mapping visually depicts an individual's encounters with a service, across various aspects of their lives (Ly et al., 2021; Young et al., 2023). Individual journey maps can become an advocacy tool by allowing patients, customers, or clients to determine what went wrong in their experience and why their experience was unsatisfactory. An example is the journey of individual patients as they navigate the healthcare industry or of students pursuing a bachelor's degree. A new avenue is being investigated in journey mapping is to understand the system as a whole. This method allows stakeholders to understand how participants navigate the network of organizations and agencies holistically (Joseph et al., 2020). This type of journey mapping gathers collective knowledge on how the parts of the system interact as someone navigated that system. Instead of an individual's experience navigating a system, it is the system reflecting on itself. The mapping process visualizes how individuals flow through the system. Barriers to successfully navigating the system are more easily identified, allowing a collective group to address those barriers by working together to provide needed services, navigation tools, or creating new programming.

How it works

Journey mapping can be performed to understand systems either by collecting individual information or by gathering a group of people. When working with groups, it is important to include both those using the system and those providing services within it. Facilitating the journey mapping includes small group and large group discussions. The facilitator needs to work to ensure that fair discussion takes place. The discussion should involve all participants, thus allowing each participant to share fully. The facilitator collects the data from the journey mapping workshop. The facilitator should provide discussion topics that dive into the system to identify strengths, gaps, or barriers. Questions should cause participants to reflect on the system's different phases or aspects. Through each phase or aspect of the system, participants need to be asked the following questions: 1) how did they help, 2) what did they struggle with, 3) resources present, and 4) challenges faced? As participants answer these questions, they craft their journey through the different phases or aspects of the system. After participants are given ample time to answer the questions, facilitators should give small groups time to discuss the topics created from these questions. Facilitators should then allow the entire group to discuss small group discussion topics. Records will need to be kept during the group discussion to capture the overall recurring themes of the participant's journey in the system.

Results to date

Journey mapping has been implemented in projects looking at an individual moving through a system, but through a collective or collaborative journey mapping approach, the system itself can identify gaps, challenges, or barriers within a system. To provide evidence of how this works in a setting. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln set up a focus group to do a journey map of the local food system. Both food producers and providers were brought together to outline their journey through the food system. The results of this journey mapping have enabled researchers,

facilitators, and active members of the food system to understand the issues producers and service providers face. This information will be used to address those issues, leading to a more robust and sustainable food system for local and regional communities.

Future plans

Using journey mapping to understand food systems, facilitators will work within the system from the journeys collected to develop plans to address the barriers discovered. We recommend that those looking to identify gaps, challenges, or barriers in any system implement journey mapping. Due to its versatility, journey mapping can be utilized across any system from extension, education, marketing, or community. Other organizations and systems that utilize journey mapping will find similar results, providing them with information on vulnerabilities in their system.

Cost

The direct costs of in-person journey mapping are as follows:

Item	Cost
Meeting Room	\$0-\$100
Meal/Refreshments	\$500
Materials: makers, posterboards, etc.	\$10
Total	\$510-610

The indirect cost of journey mapping would be participants taking time off work to be a part of the meeting or time away from family. Expert opinions are invaluable to ensure that significant data is collected. There is a need to ensure enough participants to gather sufficient data.

Facilitators and researchers can reduce the costs by conducting journey mapping via Zoom using online platforms to construct a visual map.

References

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