

Concept paper: Conceptual mapping

Conceptual mapping is a method that can be used to help any individual or group to describe their ideas about a topic in a pictorial form proposed by a facilitator. Essentially, it is a structured process, focused on a topic or a construct of interest, involving input from one or more participants, that produces an interpretable pictorial view (the concept map) of their ideas and concepts and how these are interrelated.

This method is primarily useful in situations where teams or groups of stakeholders have to work together. The exercise is led by a trained facilitator, who helps the participant group to articulate their ideas and understand them more clearly. This method, through analysing individual inputs, allows the creation of an aggregated group product.

What methods/other tools/techniques can be used while implementing the tool?	Main aims while using the tool
Any group idea generation or analysis techniques can be used, in addition to tools such as workshops or seminars.	Conceptual mapping is used for a variety of purposes such as (for example) strategic planning, product development, market analysis, decision making, measurement development, formulating solutions, etc.
How can the tool be used in each phase of the process (when developing age-friendlier and green mobility solutions)?	
<p>As this method facilitates traditional brainstorming, brainwriting, nominal group techniques, focus groups, qualitative text analysis, and so on in order to work out a group outcome, it is best suitable for the planning and development phase.</p> <p>However, mapping is widely used as an evaluation tool itself, rather than a process to be evaluated, thus it would be suggested to evaluate the peripheral processes involved with conceptual mapping, i.e. how did participants respond? Were there any visibility issues/barriers? What was the feedback received during the process (did people disagree?) and at the end of the process? etc.</p>	
What is the aim of engagement with this tool?	
<p>Inform – It allows to transfer knowledge, advice and experience concerning specific subject.</p> <p>Consult – This tool gives opportunity to learn about all participants' ideas or points of view.</p> <p>Collaborate – Members of the group through their individual inputs create an aggregated group product.</p> <p>Empower – Participation in conceptual mapping can give people the feeling that their work, effort, and input may be included in decision making, so that they feel being empowered by having the possibility to be involved.</p>	
For how many people and how is the tool suitable (for one-time use)?	How much effort is required from the participant and what influences that?
The conceptual mapping process can have hundreds or even thousands of stakeholders involved, although it is usual to have a relatively small group of between 10 and 20 stakeholders involved.	Considerable effort required – the participants have to dedicate some time, be actively involved and open to collaboration with others. If the process is offline, the participant must be present at the specified place and time, or if an online technique is used, the participant must

	still contribute their time, although not necessarily at an exact time and location.
Time needed to <u>prepare</u> using the tool and what influences the time needed?	Time needed to <u>implement</u> the tool and what influences the time needed?
Considerable preparation required – A concept mapping process involves multiple steps (described above and below) that can take place in a single day or can be spread out over weeks or months depending on the situation: scope of topics, number of participants etc.	Considerable set-up and preparation required – time depends on the subject, the number of participants and skills of the facilitator. It is also dependant on whether the process is held online with the use of specific IT programs or with the offline involvement of participants (i.e. physical meetings).
Time needed to <u>summarize</u> using the tool and what influences the time needed?	Price for the user of the tool and what influences the price
Considerable effort to summarize required – It is very important to summarise the outcomes of the process to make them useful. It involves sorting and rating inputs, grouping ideas into clusters and representing them in map form. If the ideas describe the activities of a project, the clusters show how these can be grouped into logical groups of activities. If the ideas/statements are specific outcomes, the clusters may simply be a set of proposed concepts.	The cost depends on who is working as the facilitator and can be quite high if an expert is hired. It depends also on the subject, required tools and time. There are special IT programs that can be used in the process of conceptual mapping but they can cost substantial money.
SWOT on using the tool	
STRENGTHS Concept mapping helps people to think more effectively as a group without losing their individuality. Its graphic product is comprehensible to all of the participants and can be presented to other audiences relatively easily. It increases group cohesiveness and morale. It helps visualize outcomes and can thus also help overcome language barriers.	WEAKNESSES The main weakness can be that the process is time consuming. Can be expensive to use Conceptual Mapping software, requires planning in advance and potentially budgetting. While the map may be meaningful to those who created it, without proper documentation of the process, notes and explanations, the concept map may become meaningless to an outsider. Must keep a continued awareness of “would someone outside of the process understand this?” while creating the conceptual map.
OPPORTUNITIES Concept mapping helps people to think more effectively as a group without losing their individuality. Its graphic product is comprehensible to all of the participants and can be presented to other audiences relatively easily.	THREATS Selected participants may not be relevant to the chosen subject, the facilitator is not able to coordinate the participants or formulate the group outcome properly. Conceptual mapping has an inherent barrier for individuals with visual impairments.

How to use the tool?

How to prepare using the tool?

- Specify the group of participants and get to know them;
- Plan how to invite/recruit participants;
- Select/recruit relevant expert to work as the facilitator;
- Prepare schedule and time frame for the process;
- Book and prepare the location and needed tools and materials.

How to implement the tool?

- Opening: Welcome, short introduction to the conceptual mapping process and the time frame;
- The participants are divided into smaller groups and each group works with the facilitator (either online using special IT programs or directly) over the same topic;
 - Generation step (generating statements, describing specific outcomes of brainstorming, brainwriting, nominal group techniques, focus groups, qualitative text analysis, and so on);
 - Structuring step (sorting the statements into piles and rating the piles);
 - Representation step (where the analysis is done);
 - Interpretation step (the facilitator works with the stakeholder group to help them develop their own labels and interpretations for the various maps)
 - Utilization step (involves using the maps to help address the original focus).
- Formulate the group outcome.

How to follow-up using the tool?

- Summarize and present the outcome.
- Evaluate the process of using the tool and results of the tool.

Tips and hints for using the tool with people in silver age

- **Be aware of visual difficulties silver aged people may have and plan accordingly** – i.e. create exceptionally large conceptual maps with a very large text font and/or read the text aloud.
- **Be prepared to hand out written materials or use digital solutions** – pay attention to the color contrasts of your materials and if everything is easy to read, and in case some participants have poor eyesight, written materials or personal tablets can also be useful.
- **Be flexible** – if necessary, allow the participants to sit as close to the front/conceptual map screen as needed and have the facilitator work around the needs of the participant instead of the usual 'classroom' arrangement.
- **Take into account the needs of your participants** – the techniques used can differ depending on specific participants (age, background), the size of the group, the issues for analysis and the expected outcomes.



Conceptual mapping (Institute of Baltic Studies)