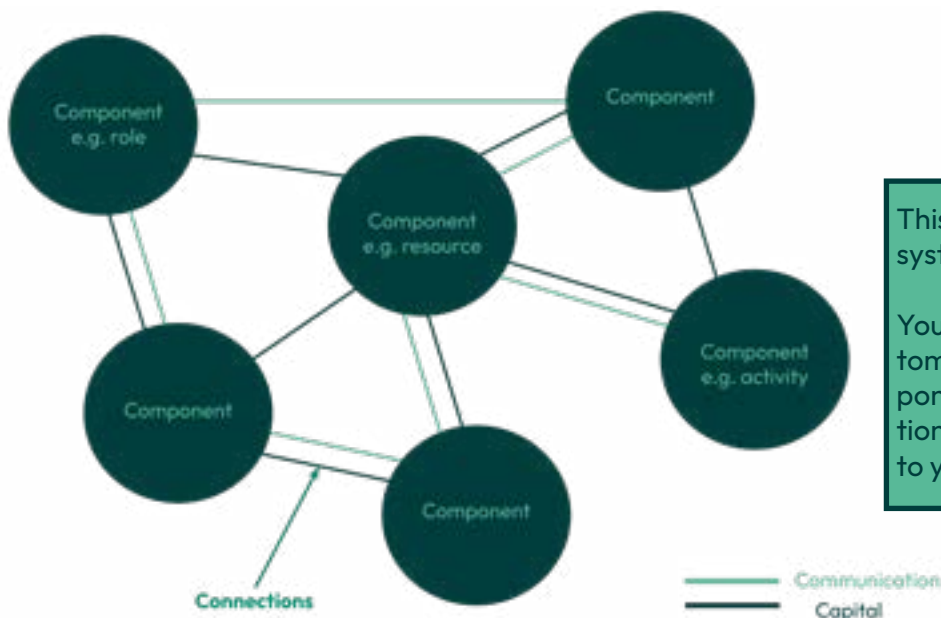# Systems Map

A systems map is a tool to help **identify the component parts** that make up a complex system and show how the components **connect and interact** with each other.

This is an exploratory research activity that can be delivered as a workshop. It will help you **visualise the patterns** of the system in which your 'problem' occurs. System maps can depict the flow of relationships and feedback loops in the system and help identify gaps and **areas for growth** and change, to potentially **create change** within the system.

You will have your own understanding of how the system that you are exploring works. However, it is important to gather people together with **diverse perspectives** in order to gain a full representation of the system, including the people for whom you are designing.



This is an **example** of a systems map.

You will need to customise both the components and connections to make it distinct to your system.

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**Face to face** workshop?

What you will need:
- Large sheets of paper / flipchart to freehand create your map
- Coloured sticky notes
- Pens/markers - multi-coloured

**Online** workshop?

Collaborative platforms such as Miro and Mural offer different mapping templates that can be adapted to use as a systems map.

Miro System Mapping Toolkit has a free and in-depth Systems Mapping Toolkit with step-by-step instructions on how to frame, map and reflect on the system you are identifying.

**PRE-WORKSHOP**

### Invitations and expectations

Consider **who** you are inviting and **how many** people will need to be there.

Decide how you are **setting out expectations** of what the workshop is and how the **outcomes** from the workshop will be used.

Create a space that is **comfortable**.

**WORKSHOP DELIVERY**

### What is the system or part of the system you are mapping?

Set the **context** by defining and writing the framing of the system, or part of the system you are mapping. You may want to also consider writing down questions about the challenges and problems you see in the system you are trying to frame.

### Complete the map together

As a group, **map and connect the components** in the system.

Start by writing a **component** within the system on the paper/flipchart. This could be a role, a resource, an activity within the system. Then **add one component at a time** until you think you have captured all the components in the system you are wanting to frame. If using paper, write your components using one colour marker e.g. blue or black, and draw a circle around each of your components.

Next draw lines and include text to show the **connections and relationships between** each component, and how they interact with each other. You can create a key and use different colour pens to define the different ways in which they are connected such as communication, capital or human resources etc.

This starts the process of teasing out the complexity of the system you are exploring.

### Reflection and Summary

Reflect on what specific areas you want to examine more closely.

- What new **insights** have you gained from working on a systems map?
- What are the **dynamics** within the system?
- Is there potential for intervention and **change**?
- What are the **gaps** in the system?
- What other questions come up for you?

Give your workshop participants **space to reflect** on the process.

You will need to submit the completed empathy map/s and a **short reflection** on the key learnings. For example you might want to think about questions like:

- Is there anything that **surprised you** or that was particularly powerful during the workshop?
- Were there areas of **disagreement or synergy**?
- Have you shown the map to others? What were their reflections?
- Does the map highlight particular **opportunities** or pressing **problems**?

**Further reading and resources**

https://www.ideou.com/blogs/inspiration/what-is-a-systems-map

https://servicedesigntools.org/tools/system-map

https://medium.com/disruptive-design/tools-for-systems-thinkers-systems-mapping-2db5cf30ab3a