Use Empathy maps to chart feelings, thoughts, and responses

Empathy maps are visual tools used to align teams on a shared understanding of a specific user or persona. By charting qualitative data into distinct categories, they reveal the "why" behind user actions and help identify unmet needs or pain points.

The Four Core Quadrants

Traditional empathy maps are divided into four sections centered around a specific user:
Says: Captures verbatim quotes and explicit statements made by the user during interviews or research (e.g., "I wish this were faster").

Thinks: Represents internal beliefs and mental models that the user might not express out loud, often inferred from their behavior (e.g., "Am I doing this correctly?").

Does: Documents observable actions and behaviors, such as how the user physically interacts with a product or their specific workarounds.

Feels: Identifies the user's emotional state, such as frustration, excitement, or anxiety, often paired with the specific trigger for that emotion.

Steps to Create an Empathy Map

Define Scope and Goals: Identify the specific user persona you are mapping and the goal of the exercise (e.g., improving an on boarding flow).

Gather Research: Collect qualitative data through user interviews, surveys, and direct observations. Avoid relying on assumptions; ground the map in real evidence.

Fill the Quadrants: Collaborative teams use sticky notes to populate the quadrants. Participants should use direct quotes for the "Says" section and infer "Thinks" and "Feels" based on evidence.

Cluster and Synthesize: Group similar notes into themes. Look for contradictions between quadrants (e.g., a user says they love the product but feels frustrated by its speed) to uncover deeper insights.

Identify "Pains" and "Gains": Many modern maps add specific sections for Pains (frustrations and obstacles) and Gains (desires and measures of success) to highlight areas for innovation.

Advanced Variations

Updated Empathy Map Canvas: Created by Dave Gray, this version includes sections for what the user Sees (environment), Hears (external influences), and their specific Goals.

Aggregated Maps: Consolidate data from multiple individual maps to represent an entire user segment or persona group.

Confidence-Based Mapping: Color-codes insights based on the reliability of the research (high, medium, or low confidence) to prioritize further study.

Template