

Mapping As a Meeting Facilitation Tool

Mapping is a format that makes it easy to see quickly where a group is on a given subject. It can also help members of a group make connections and learn new things about each other and themselves as a group. It's an excellent tool for helping groups get unstuck when they've been bogged down in a discussion for too long without seeing any shifts.

The Basic Form: To map something, you establish a question and a set of options (two or more), put labels in different parts of the room, and then ask people to move their bodies into lines or clusters representing where they are "standing" in relationship to the question.¹

- As a way to take a straw poll – Mapping is an excellent tool for getting a literal picture of where everyone is *at this moment*.
 - Put different options/views at opposite ends of the room on signs and ask people to stand in the spot on that continuum that reflects how they feel right now.
 - You can then ask people to speak to where they are standing, encouraging people to move (their bodies, or their sticky notes) if their position changes while listening to others.
 - Sometimes this exercise will create additional options, which can be added to the map, with participants then invited to move as they are inclined.
- As a way to get to know each other/the group – Mapping can be used to let people learn about each other (workstyles, preferences, histories, etc.), or to see things about themselves as a team.
 - **In lines** – You can ask people to identify where they fall on various continuums.

Here are some examples of useful work-related questions:

1. I thrive when I get regular feedback vs. I'm happy to just do my work without feedback unless there is a problem I need to know about.

¹ For ease of reading, I am going to describe the exercises as they work live and in-person. **If you are using an online visual collaboration tool like Mural**, you will post the options spread out on the virtual whiteboard and ask people to represent their bodies with sticky notes with their initials. This works well, and has the advantage of creating a visual record of where you end up. See suggestions on the last page.

2. I do my best thinking in conversation vs. alone.
3. When I need to recharge my batteries/get energized, I want to close my door and work alone vs. go talk to people.
4. I am most comfortable with clear rules and expectations vs. I trust us to sort out how we are going to do things as we go.
5. I like to be clear ahead of time about who the decision-maker is vs. I am comfortable being informal about our decision-making structure, letting it evolve.
6. I tend to do most of my checking-in informally vs. I tend to do most of my checking in via formal meetings/structures.
7. I am impatient with talk/planning; I like to do stuff vs. I like getting clarity about the plan before I start acting.
8. I need clear goals and success measures to feel safe/good vs. I am pretty comfortable trusting that we'll sort it out as we go.
9. I feel like we need a stronger vision/clearer sense of direction to work from vs. I feel like I have what I need and can just get to work.
10. I have a clear understanding of the process/system we're going to start using and feel ready to implement it vs. I need more information or support before I'll feel like I'm ready to implement this process/system.

Some examples of “ice breaker” or “get to know you” questions are:

1. I'm a night owl vs. I'm a morning person.
 2. I vacation in the same place every time vs. I love to go to new places on vacation.
 3. I loved high school vs. I hated high school.
- **In Clusters** – You can create spaces around the room for people to cluster in according to their views or identities. Here are some examples, starting with some “getting to know you” questions and moving into more work related ones:
 1. The place(s) I spent my elementary school years were primarily:
 - a. Urban
 - b. Rural
 - c. Suburban

2. I grew up:
 - a. Poor
 - b. Working class
 - c. Middle class
 - d. Wealthy
3. One of my favorite things to do for fun is: (could do 2-3 rounds and invite people to move or not)
 - a. Read
 - b. Cook
 - c. Dance
 - d. Write
 - e. Make art
 - f. Make music
 - g. Look at art
 - h. Listen to music
 - i. Build or fix things
 - j. Garden or farm
 - k. Walk or hike
 - l. Spend time in or on water
 - m. Other
4. My favorite way to be outside is:
 - a. Walking
 - b. Running
 - c. Cycling
 - d. Hiking
 - e. Sleeping
 - f. Eating
 - g. With my dogs
 - h. In or on water
 - i. Playing physical games/
sports in groups
 - j. Other (invite people to say)
5. I'm a dog person vs. I'm a cat person vs. other
6. Number of languages I speak (1, 2, 3, more than 3)
7. My work in this organization focuses primarily on:
 - a. Working directly with those we serve
 - b. Working with our community partners
 - c. Supporting the employees who do a or b
 - d. Supporting the systems that support the people who do a, b or c.
8. I much prefer to hear about problems:
 - a. Face-to-face
 - b. By phone
 - c. By email
 - d. By Slack, Hangouts or other messaging system
9. I think of myself as:
 - a. A strong and experienced x (meeting facilitator, trainer, etc.)
 - b. A competent x, with room for development

- c. An inexperienced but good x, in need of more training
- d. A complete newbie at x, but interested in learning
- e. Someone who hates doing/being x

10. I do my best thinking:

- a. In the first few hours I'm at work
- b. After lunch
- c. Toward the end of the day or after everyone else goes home.

Again, you can use a migration process: Use lines and invite people to shift if/as their opinion changes, or use clusters and keep throwing out new questions of identity or views and let people move around, pausing each time to see who their "peeps" are in that categorization.

- You can also work with a **"step forward if you..."** exercise format. I've seen this used mostly as a way to help people see each other's complexities and commonalities. Here is an example of how it might look: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jD8tjhVO1Tc>.

For this exercise to be useful, there must be a degree of willingness in the group and some trust in the people facilitating. You can start with less personal or challenging questions, and either stay there or go deeper.

I suggest if you are going to do this on an **online whiteboard** like Mural, you ask people to put small photos of their faces on the whiteboard first, and move those around in response to the prompts. That will be much more powerful than just people's names or initials on sticky notes.

Rhythm and Impacts

I suggest using mapping regularly, for a variety of purposes, because it shifts the meeting energy in useful ways, supports efficient use of time, builds the group sense of where we are, and helps people move out of stuck spots. The last effect is most apparent when people are actually getting up out of their chairs and moving their bodies, but I've also seen it happen in the online format. You can encourage the getting unstuck effect when working online by suggesting people take a 1-3 minute "stretch break" and walk away from their computers right before doing the exercise.