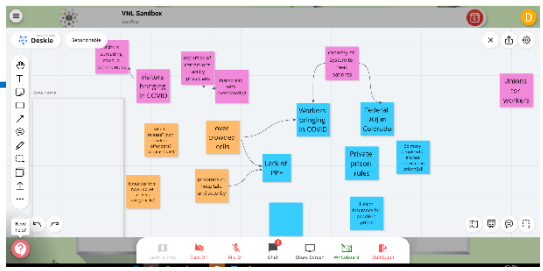
Network Innovation Summit |May 18, 2020

Systems Mapping Exercise [Overview and Directions]

Overview. A design sprint has three parts – Understanding, Problem Definition, and Solutions. At this point in the day, we are deep into the problem zone, with a theme of Networks in Times of Crisis. We hope that the COVID-19 and Problem Zone Panel sparked lots of systems thinking about the future of networks and how all the parts of those systems are interacting now, and in the future.

Now it's your turn! In this Systems Mapping exercise, we will tap into the collective wisdom at your table to think about and map a systemic problem in an area that you care about. Systems thinking is an approach for examining complex challenges or problems in a way that enables us that broaden our thinking, ask questions before jumping to conclusions, articulate issues in new and different ways, and expand the range of possibilities for solving a problem.

The goal at the end of this session is to complete a systems map that includes: **1) a topic identified; 2) a visual of the systems components that impact that problem, and 3) the relationships between them**. Your table will then use the systems map to help develop a systems solutions pitch later in this afternoon.



Directions: Time: 40 minutes.
With your table members:

1. Discuss a systems problem related to the COVID-19 pandemic that you want to work on (i.e. how K-12 schools reopen; mitigating covid-19 outbreaks in overcrowded prisons; food insecurities; public transportation; business re-openings; health equity).
2. Map the system on the whiteboard using sticky notes to identify all the relevant elements of that system. Include elements that are both directly and indirectly related to the original topic (e.g. school closing -> kids at home -> people cannot go to work)
3. Debrief with each table member to hear why they put each item there and how they connect to each other. Use the arrows to show their connections (i.e. what are all the relevant elements and how do they link together?)
4. Take a screenshot of your whiteboard when you are done and email it to learning@visiblenetworklabs.com. These will be posted here for viewing after the event.

QUESTIONS TO SURFACE ASSUMPTIONS, PRIORITIES OR LESS VISIBLE ELEMENTS IN THE SYSTEM

1. What are the people, policies, organizations, funding, beliefs, and outcomes that shape and/or affect this problem?
2. How would the ultimate beneficiaries see the issue(s)? What is important to them? How do they think about it?
3. How would this issue look from the viewpoint of X? …policy makers? …senior decision makers? …funders? …other stakeholders? What factors or components would that level see? How do they think about the issue?
4. Why has X been happening despite our best efforts to achieve a different goal? (This framing doesn't assume a solution).
5. What are causes affecting this system? What other effects does the system produce?

WHY DO SYSTEMS MAPPING?

Systems mapping a simple yet powerful tool for making sense of complexity. In order to think multidimensionally, we need to discover the dynamics and interconnectedness of the systems at play. This is where systems mapping tools come in- they provide an exploration of the system, communicate understanding, and allow for the identification of knowledge gaps, intervention points, and insights. A systems map allows us to:

- Identify the pieces that form the systems puzzle of your environment.
- Define how those pieces connect with each other to form the interdependent system.
- Find ways to change parts and/or connections to create sustainable systemic change

It would be impossible to develop a complete model of a system or map every component of your system. Systems maps are meant to encourage thinking holistically about a topic.

SYSTEMS MAPPING CAN HELP US:

- Visualize how networks play a role and how different parts of the system are aligned.
- Shift our perception of the problem or challenge.
- Understand the dynamics and interconnectedness of the systems at play, and thus also better understand the ripple effects of actions.
- Better communicate our understanding or possible actions.
- Allow for identification of knowledge gaps, intervention points, and insights.
- Identify intended and unintended consequences.
- Symbolically depict the relationships between elements (people, organizations, service models, supply chains or resources flow, power structures, etc.) within some space.
- Support decision making and action taking in complexity.

