

## Reflection Paper

What is context mapping? How does one context map for empathy? To answer these questions, I did some research. Context mapping is a primary feature of human-centered design. People have local and contextual knowledge that is valuable to designers. To tap into this unique knowledge, context mapping is used as a form of contextual user research. This allows user experience and interface (UX/UI) designers to gain empathy for their users as well as gain inspirations from them. When presented with this knowledge I thought, “how can this be applied to the average individual/everyday life?” I wanted to bring context mapping outside of the world of UX/UI and human-centered design. Context mapping is a tool for observation and reflection. We as individuals should be granted this same access to the experiences, dreams, and needs of others. It was my goal for this project to expand the tool of context mapping for empathy beyond one field, an empower the individual to gain empathy themselves.

In order to scope context mapping for individualized empathy, I had to first *truly* learn about how it is done. While I have learned about the concept in previous classes, I needed to evaluate how to personalize the process. The format of empathy mapping is a rectangle consisting of four-quadrants on top of a platform. The four quadrants are (from left to right, top to bottom) as follows: the 'Says' quadrant contains what the person says out loud; the 'Thinks' quadrant is what the person is thinking throughout the experience; the 'Does' quad is the action the person takes; the 'Feels' quad is the user's emotional state. Underneath these quadrants is the 'Goals' section. The goals section is arguably the most important part – what are your reasons for empathy mapping? Understanding what your designed end result is first will better help you understand how to achieve it. You cannot actualize your goals if you do not know what they are.

Now, the typical way to construct an empathy map involves conducting user interviews, holding focus groups, and things of that nature. For the individual, who likely does not have access to these things (nor is it socially normalized for one to do so), the process starts within. Putting yourself in the empathy map first prompts the mindset of emotional reflection. Reflecting on how you would react in a given situation helps to open one's eyes as to why another individual might react similarly. So, the first step to empathy mapping for the individual is placing yourself in a given scenario and reflecting on what you would say, think, feel, and do. In the 'Goals' section, reflection on how you would like (or would have liked if using a nonfictional scenario) this scenario to play out. After this first step, place somebody else in the exact same scenario. This works best with someone you know well. If you are working with someone new to

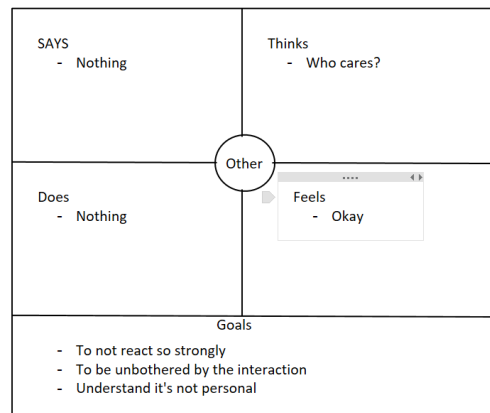
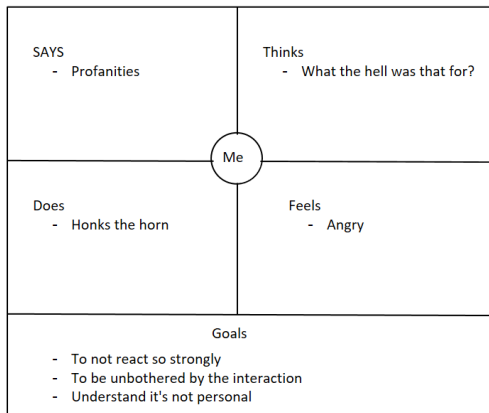
your life, let *your* map's responses guide how you think they would response. Avoid the influence of bias to the best of your ability – using your own empathy map as a basis should make this easier.

In the spirit of “practice what you preach”, I decided to try out context mapping for empathy myself. To do this I, of course, put myself inside the formatted empathy map in the context of a fictional scenario. For my first iteration the scenario was “getting cut off in traffic.” This proved to be kind of a difficult task consider the other party involved is a complete stranger who will likely never return to my life again. Nevertheless, I tried it anyways. For my second iteration I decided to choose a difficult person in my life and place us both in a fictional argument. This person I chose was my oldest sister, who I live with and consider to be not the best house mate. The living room is a shared space, so for this scenario the living room has been left a mess by one of us. This was easier for me to do because it is something that has happened in the past from both perspectives. The ‘Says’ and ‘Does’ quadrants were easier to fill out than the ‘Thinks’ or ‘Feels’ quadrants, however, it was easy to set the goal to “keep the living room clean without having a fight.” Knowing how my sister is, I know she does not usually mind a mess. After putting her in the same scenario in the empathy map, I was inspired to do a third person for this scenario – our mom. She also lives with us and approaches this same situation differently. It was interesting for me trying to merge all of our thoughts all doing this iteration as I was trying to imagine how this scenario might play out now. Examples of both of these iterations are attached.

Reflecting on this project left me with a few major takeaways. The idea is that putting yourself in the context map first makes it easier to assess others when in the context map – which is the goal. Context mapping for empathy (in a casual over design setting) is designed to make empathizing with others easier, but this starts with understanding yourself. And no matter how much you empathize with yourself, understanding how others think and feel is hard. What someone says or does is not always reflective of how they truly think or feel. But to know that about others, I think you have to first recognize it in yourself. If nothing else, context mapping for the individual can be a tool for self-reflection.

*Empathy Map Iterations on the Next Page.*

## Scenario 1: Being cut-off in traffic



## Scenario 2: This person left the living room a mess.

