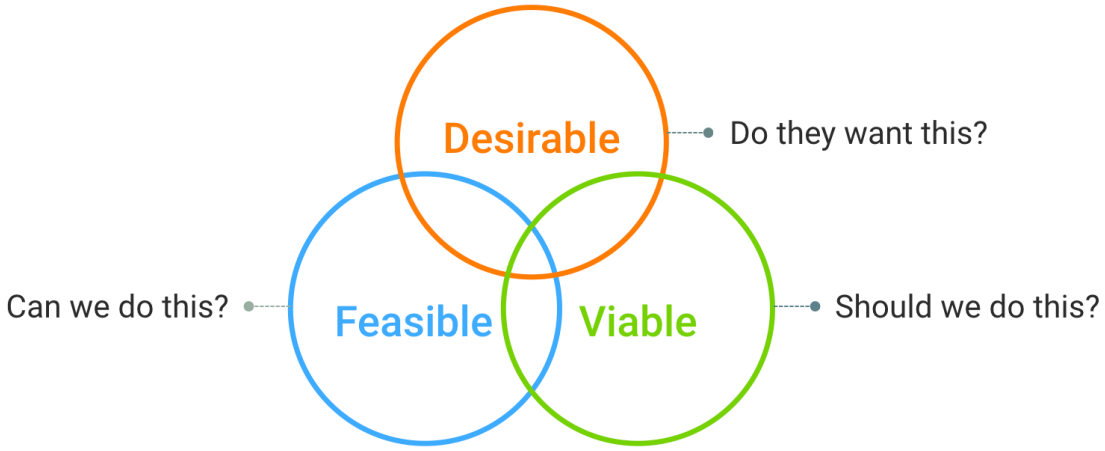
Assumptions Mapping Worksheet

by David J Bland

Behind every new product or service hides leap of faith assumptions. If proven false, these important and yet unknown assumptions can make or break your initiative. This worksheet is designed to deconstruct these assumptions as a team down into specific areas to help focus your experimentation.



Desirable - Do they want this?

Before scaling to a million customers, do you have evidence that even a hundred customers have this problem? The proof is outside of the building.
(Roles: Designers and User Researchers)

Viable - Should we do this?

In addition to uncovering the problem, you have to ask yourselves if this is viable and if so, provide evidence. How can you reach customers? What is your business model?
(Roles: Product Managers, Product Owners and Business Stakeholders)

Feasible - Can we do this?

Here is where we typically spend all of our time, proving that it is possible. In addition to experimenting in code and hardware, do you have any legal or regulatory hurdles?
(Roles: Engineering, Development and Legal)

Your answers below should be as specific as possible to the best of your knowledge, based on what you know today and be written on orange, green and blue sticky notes.

Do they want this?

(Write your answers to these desirability assumptions on orange sticky notes.)

1. Who are the target customers for our solution?

---

2. What problem do our customers want to solve?

---

3. How do our customers solve this problem today?

---

4. Why can’t our customers solve this problem today?

---

5. What is the outcome our customers want to achieve?

---

6. Why will our customers stop using their current solution?

Should we do this?

(Write your answers to these viability assumptions on green sticky notes.)

1. What are our main acquisition channels for obtaining new customers?

---

2. How will our customers repeatedly use our solution?

---

3. Why will our customers refer us to new customers?

---

4. How does this solution support our company vision?

---

5. Who are the primary competitors to our solution?

---

6. How will our solution generate revenue?

Can we do this?

(Write your answers to these feasibility assumptions on blue sticky notes.)

1. What are our biggest technical or engineering challenges?

---

2. What are our biggest legal or regulatory risks?

---

3. What are our internal governance or policy hurdles?

---

4. Why does our leadership team supports this solution?

---

5. Where does our funding for this solution come from?

---

6. Why is our team uniquely positioned to win?

Other Assumptions

(Optional: What other assumptions are you making that, if proven false, will cause your solution to fail? Write these other assumptions on yellow sticky notes.)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

Mapping Your Assumptions

Next, map out the assumptions together as a team in a structured conversation. Why do you think this is known when I think it is unknown? Why do you believe this is important when I believe it is unimportant? The shared understanding through the mapping conversation is much more valuable than the map itself.

Below are some tips to get you started:

1. Draw the horizontal axis first and map known vs unknown. Then draw the vertical axis and map important vs unimportant. This will help prevent cognitive murder.

2. Focus on the top right quadrant for near term experimentation. Create evaluative experiments from these important and unknown assumptions.

3. Check the top left quadrant against your existing plan. Are these important and known assumptions already accounted for in your plan?

4. Defer commitment on the bottom left quadrant. These known and unimportant assumptions can be explored after you've validated the top right quadrant.

5. Create exploratory experiments from the bottom right quadrant. These unknown and unimportant assumptions can be probed later for future growth opportunities.

6. This map is a living document and is an iterative process. Take a snapshot every week to document how things have changed and what you've learned over time.