

Advanced Cat Herding

By David Poteet

This is a pre-release version of this publication. Please do not modify or distribute it in any form other than by sharing the link nwcity.com/catherdingbook. We'll make it fancy later, but right now it's still a Google Doc so you can add comments and suggestions. Just highlight any section of text and click the comment icon to the right. Thank you!

[Download Advanced Cat Herding as a PDF.](#)

Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[1: What do I know about cats?](#)

[Cats are awesome.](#)

[Cats do what they want.](#)

[2: Cat Herding Over the Life of a Project or Team](#)

[Build trust and communication skills before moving to the harder stuff.](#)

[Involve people in creation.](#)

[Learn to handle conflict constructively.](#)

[Use a process that supports ongoing communication and sustains energy.](#)

[How to do it wrong](#)

[Is there a right way?](#)

[Herding Cats with Workshops](#)

[3: Workshop Dynamics and Flow](#)

[Designing the flow of a successful workshop.](#)

[Diverging and converging](#)

[Brainstorming productively](#)

[No bad ideas?](#)

[A Person \$\neq\$ Their Ideas](#)

[Brainstorm individually first.](#)

[Create distance.](#)

[Mixing individual and group work.](#)

[4: Planning a Workshop](#)

[Preparing for a workshop.](#)

[Workshop Stages in Detail](#)

[1. Set the stage.](#)

[2. Warm up; build trust.](#)

[3. Scope the challenge for the day](#)

[4. Explore the problem](#)

[5. Break](#)

[6. Generate solutions](#)

[7. Run possible solutions through some sort of critical filter.](#)

[8. Take individual responsibility for next steps.](#)

[Planning for Group Size](#)

[Breaking up into Smaller Teams](#)

[Large Groups](#)

[Planning for Multi-Day Workshops or Retreats](#)

[Advantages](#)

[Disadvantages](#)

[Virtual Workshops](#)

[5. Your Role as Facilitator](#)

[Know your job description.](#)

[Participating and Facilitating?](#)

[6. After the Workshop](#)

[Thank everyone.](#)

[Put artifacts where you can see and share them.](#)

[Keep using them.](#)

[Keep it loose.](#)

[Use it to connect stakeholder input to outcomes from your project.](#)

[7. Tips for Different Types of Cats](#)

[8. Conclusion](#)

[Bring Advanced Cat Herding to your organization or conference.](#)

[9. Toolbox](#)

[Commonalities](#)

[Group Juggling](#)

[You \(or your organization\) at your best](#)

[If this changed I'd start working on my resume](#)

[KJ Session](#)

[Ad Hoc Personas](#)

[Elevator Pitch](#)

[Experience Mapping](#)

[Messaging Card Sort](#)

[Visual Card Sort](#)

[Draw How to Make Toast](#)

[Design Studio](#)

[Design Consequences](#)

[Paper Prototyping](#)

Introduction

You've heard it before—"like herding cats" is a favorite simile for getting any group of independent-minded people to move in sync toward a goal.

This eBook distills some of the lessons I've learned over my career as a cat herder. I'll take an in-depth look at the facilitation of effective workshops as one of the primary catalysts of cat collaboration, but I'll also touch on the sorts of things that help over the life of a project or team.

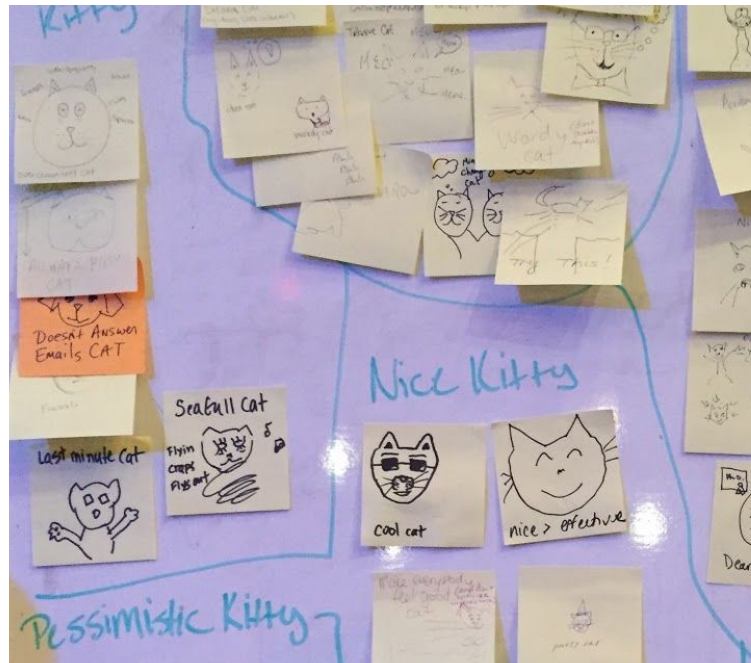
What do I know about herding cats? Many days I'd answer

"nothing at all." But in the years since I started an interactive agency in 1995, I've had to grow teams within our company as well as lead complex client projects with blended teams and demanding stakeholders. For several decades I've spent a week out of my summer teaching teenagers at a youth leadership camp called YXL (Youth eXcelling in Leadership), where I've learned how games and challenges can break down barriers and get a team working smoothly.

I'm an eager student as well—I'm always learning new methods and improvements from colleagues, workshops and other master facilitators.

The cats you herd may be co-workers, people who report to you, people above you, members of your organization, or constituents. This eBook is written for people who will find themselves facilitating, coordinating or leading a group. It assumes you have some say in framing the way your group will tackle a challenge.

So join me on this little journey, and hopefully you'll pick up a tip that makes your next cat roundup something to smile about.



1: What do I know about cats?

Cats are awesome.

Cat herding shouldn't be taken as implying anything negative about cats—you're not learning how to get annoying people to do what you want. This is about motivating and empowering bright, capable people to do work together toward a meaningful goal. Each cat is awesome in its own way. Sometimes we all just need a little encouragement to unlock our awesome.

To do that, we need to understand cats a little better.

Cats do what they want.

Cats are independent. They're capable of thinking for themselves, and they value autonomy in their work. If they work for you, you can try telling them what to do, but people are much more motivated when they have a say in their goals and how they pursue them. Most of the time I'm facilitating groups of people that I can only influence. I know as soon as they walk out of a meeting or a workshop they're going to go right back to doing what they want, no matter what they say in a meeting.

So if I understand what they really want, I can channel that energy toward a common goal.

At the beginning of any project or in preparation for a workshop, we take time to learn as much as we can about the stakeholders, team members and participants. Getting a sense of individual motivations can make a huge difference in your success. I share some advice on this in the section [Preparing for a Workshop](#).

But there are some things everybody wants. These are particularly helpful to factor into your plans.

Everybody wants...

- **to feel smart.** Nobody likes to be caught unprepared, or to have their idea shot down in front of others. You want to feel like you're contributing something valuable, that you are creative and your ideas have merit. Many of the workshop exercises we use are designed specifically to draw out ideas from people without the embarrassment of having them criticized prematurely, or wasting a lot of time as a group discussing ideas that aren't as strong as others.
- **to be heard.** To know that others hear you, understand what you've said, have thought about it, value it and are ready to build on it – is fundamental to building trust and encouraging good communication on a team. We use exercises that

model listening and reflection among the group, but as a facilitator you should consider yourself “listener-in-chief.”

- **to do meaningful work.** . Nobody wants to think their work is pointless, and yet people often question whether a project they’re working on will succeed. When people participate in defining the problem, shaping the goal and creating the solution, they stay motivated and engaged from beginning to end.

2: Cat Herding Over the Life of a Project or Team

Build trust and communication skills before moving to the harder stuff.

One of the tricks we've learned with the YXL summer camp I mentioned earlier is to spend the first half of the week building community within a team, and the second half pushing them into more uncomfortable leadership situations where they are likely to experience failure and conflict. Students come to YXL from all over the US. We organize them into leadership teams of 8-10, most of whom have only just met each other. Teams do nearly everything together during the week. Part of each day is spent playing games or tackling leadership challenges. If you've ever done a low ropes course you'll be familiar with the sorts of activities we use. We're constantly picking up or inventing new ones.

Early in the week we design activities to get them to

- open up and trust each other,
- communicate and listen well, and to
- build confidence in their abilities as a team.

They'll certainly experience some bumps, but we're not deliberately setting them up for failure.

In the middle of the week we turn up the heat. The puzzles are harder. They may be competing with other teams or working under a time limit that doesn't guarantee enough "do overs" to succeed. This is when some of the greatest learning moments happen, but they wouldn't be possible without the camaraderie built early in the week. By the end of the week our students have built friendships they keep up for years.

Obviously you're probably not facilitating a summer camp, but this principle of building communication and trust before getting to the hard stuff can still be helpful. What can you do in a 3 hour workshop or a 2 day retreat? I've adapted some of the things I've learned with YXL in my facilitation of workshops and teams.

If I'm planning a single workshop I will incorporate an activity at the beginning that helps people warm up and open up. I'm no fan of cheesy icebreakers, so I try to come up with something fun that's relevant to the workshop and doesn't really involve success or failure. Some of my favorites are [Commonalities](#) or "[You at your best](#)," described in the [Toolbox](#) section. The [Visual Card Sort](#) is a good exercise for building communication and trust as well, as it helps people open up and express some powerful personal stories in a safe way.

If I'm managing a team over a long period of time, I invest some of our time at the beginning in activities designed to build trust and communication skills. We periodically host off-site retreats for our company or teams within the company, incorporating these activities as building blocks. Any time we form a new blended team with a client group we try to do this as well. Exercises like ["You at your best"](#) or [Group Juggling](#), described in the [Toolbox](#) section, are some of my favorite activities at this stage. You can find dozens more that work well in a retreat setting at Project Adventure (<http://www.project-adventure.org>).

We've also used tools like the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (<http://www.myersbriggs.org/>) or Strengthsfinder (<http://strengthsfinder.com>) to help coworkers understand each other better and learn how they can work more effectively together. I like this because it emphasizes the importance of the individual to the success of the whole. By reflecting first on your own values, goals and strengths, you're often in a better mindset to consider those of the organization.

This is an example of how we incorporated Strengthsfinder into a recent off-site retreat:

1. Everyone took the Strengthsfinder assessment, and reviewed the material from the results.
2. We watched a presentation on the whole idea of building on your strengths, and how you can be more successful when you team up with people who have complementary strengths.
3. People paired up with others who had different strengths and talked about what they had learned, sharing examples of how they had seen their own strengths in action.
4. Everyone took individual time later in the day to reflect on 2-3 things they wanted to do in the next year to build on their strengths (Strengthsfinder includes a number of suggestions for each of their strength areas).
5. Teams (people who work together regularly in our organization) met and shared the things they identified as steps for growth.

Involve people in creation.

People will always be more invested in a plan or solution they helped to shape. But not everyone has the skillset or experience to plan, design, or architect whatever it is you're trying to get done. That doesn't mean they can't



contribute in important ways, with the right facilitation and process.

If you're an architect of some sort yourself, you may think this is not the best use of people's time. It would only slow you down and create unnecessary meetings. Or you already have a clear picture in your head and you just need to convey it clearly so people can do it right.

In my experience doing exactly that, I've found that the time saved early is lost later. Both efficiency and quality are less. When people participate in creation, they

- understand the real problem you're trying to solve;
- help you see dimensions of the problem you would have missed;
- identify alternative solutions you wouldn't have considered;
- take ownership.

They also become more comfortable asking important questions and making suggestions throughout the process. This is huge. I can't tell you how many times I've had someone follow my instructions *exactly* and create the wrong thing because my instructions were stupid.

These are some of the exercises and tools we use to involve people in creation, described in detail in the Toolbox section.

- [Design Studio](#)
- [Design Consequences](#)
- [Paper Prototyping](#)

Learn to handle conflict constructively.

Conflict avoidance is one of the biggest barriers to an effective team.

One of my favorite examples of this comes from YXL again. Joel Smedshammer, our devious plotter of tricky problems, designed a leadership challenge where an adult facilitator taught the first member of a team of teens how to tie a bowline knot, using a story about a rabbit coming up out of a hole, running around a tree, and going back into a hole. The student then had to paddle a kayak across a pond and back. On returning to shore, they had to teach the next



member of their team how to tie a bowline, and the process repeated. If they forgot how to tie the knot, they couldn't go back to the facilitator—they had to go back to the person who taught them. Oh, and they were racing against other teams with a time limit.

I watched one guy learn the knot, paddle across and back, then try to teach it to his friend who was next in line. Only he dropped the rabbit story, and just showed him the knot. Well, he showed him *a* knot, it wasn't a bowline. When his friend couldn't tie a knot that looked like a bowline, he grew increasingly frustrated and started yelling at him for screwing it up. Up until this point their team had competed well, and now they were falling behind. There was a lot at stake. It was very uncomfortable, but the facilitator let it play out.

There are several lessons I've taken from this example, like the importance of stories for conveying a vision or solution. One key lesson is that conflicts *will happen* on any team, whether someone's acting boneheaded or there are strong opposing viewpoints. The worst thing in this case would have been to just avoid similar situations in the future.

But somebody in the group created a safe space (later in the day) for them to look objectively at what happened, reflect on their own actions, and resolve the conflict in a non-judgmental manner. That night during their debrief the "teacher" student admitted his mistake and apologized to his friend. They had a chance to talk through what had led to the breakdown and conflict, and decide how they'd handle it differently next time.

It takes courage to create the opportunity for resolution, and courage to admit when you're wrong. Every team needs brave people like that who help the group learn to handle conflict constructively.

In a workshop setting, if an obvious conflict starts to arise it's risky to just let it play out like we did in the knot story. This can get awkward fast, and I'd only suggest it if you know the people involved are used to arguing and sorting things out.

These are some of the things I've learned about handling conflict as a facilitator:

- Try to keep the idea or issue separate from the person. Focus on the idea and don't let it become a personal attack.
- Ask questions and reflect back what you're hearing from each person. Often they're talking past each other or using loaded terms that mean different things to different people. By modeling good listening behavior, you may be able to help them hear and understand each other better.
- Dig in and try to understand the "why" behind each person's argument. What's motivating this? What are they really trying to accomplish? Why do they think someone else's idea is likely to fail?
- Encourage the group to think of some research that might be conducted, a test that could be done, or a prototype that could be created to inform the debate and guide your plans. Often arguments are grounded in opinions, not good data. If

you involve these same people in the research/prototype/test, they can all take ownership of reaching a better solution and no one loses face.

- If the conflict is over tactics, it might help to go back to first principles - your organization's mission, core values, or strategic plan. Use that to weigh both sides of the debate.
- Summarize both sides of the debate and suggest that you tackle it in a separate meeting. Having a "Parking Lot" sheet on the wall can be helpful, where you can write ideas or issues that deserve attention but not in the current setting.

Use a process that supports ongoing communication and sustains energy.

If your team is going to move successfully toward a goal, you need some sort of process or methodology. This eBook is not about process, but I will say that not all processes are equally good for herding cats. The best processes:

1. Support regular (daily or weekly) formal and informal communication.
2. Ensure everyone has the same understanding of the goal or solution, and quickly surface misunderstanding.
3. Sustain the energy of team members from beginning to end.

How to do it wrong

Sometimes it's easier to learn from a negative example. These are ingredients of a cat herding disaster, all of which we've done at some point:

1. Build a solution before you know the real problem.
2. Do all of the thinking and planning at the beginning, and then tell everyone to just execute on the plan. Or ask someone to unquestioningly follow the work done by someone else before them.
3. Embody the plan in a detailed strategy document or specification that everyone is expected to read, understand and follow. The only person who will understand it properly is the one who wrote it, and he or she will have missed something important.
4. Go dark for several weeks while you (individually or as a team) do clever stuff.
5. Deliver important recommendations, prototypes or other outcomes by just emailing someone a document.
6. Ask a bunch of people to email you their feedback.

7. Ask for feedback without describing or demonstrating the sort of feedback you need.
8. Present your work to stakeholders without giving them some sense of the journey, the thinking or steps that led to this solution.

Is there a right way?

There isn't one right way, but there has been a lot of innovation in the last decade around processes that support ongoing communication and energy. Participatory Design, Design Thinking, Iterative Prototyping, Lean Startup, Kanban and Agile Software Development are examples. Any approach where you allow the team to quickly prototype and test an idea, adapt the problem or the solution, then test again, is likely to work well for cats.

A prototype supports shared understanding because unlike a planning document, the team has to figure out how it's actually going to work. Prototyping isn't just for products or software. You can prototype services, processes, events, marketing tactics – the list goes on. Prototypes encourage conversation, testing and iteration, building a sense of understanding, ownership and autonomy.

The “lean startup” philosophy embodies this in the “minimum viable product.” You figure out the simplest/cheapest thing you can do to test your product or service concept in the marketplace. Test, figure out what works and what doesn't, and iterate.

Agile relies on daily standup meetings where team members quickly summarize what they worked on today, what they plan to do tomorrow, and what is or might be blocking them. Rather than bogging people down with meetings or cumbersome status reports, these informal but structured sessions help the team quickly identify problems and solutions to keep moving forward.

Herding Cats with Workshops

We use workshops as a catalyst for all of our projects. We use them to make sense of research, define target audiences, explore brand, plan campaigns, organize, design, prototype and test all sorts of things.

Workshops are especially important if you have participants who have day jobs that are unrelated to your project. In this case you want to avoid homework as much as you can, so the workshop becomes the place where their work gets done.

The rest of this eBook focuses on planning and facilitating successful workshops.

3: Workshop Dynamics and Flow

Designing the flow of a successful workshop.

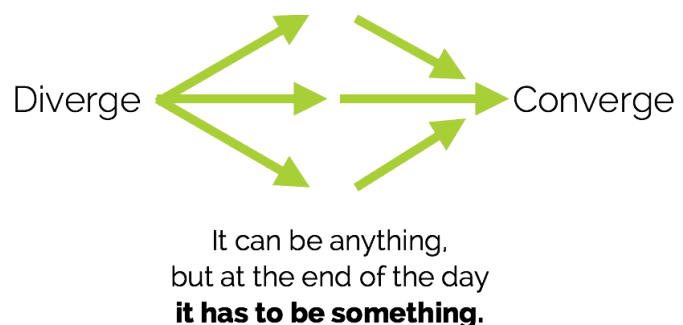
A good workshop follows a similar arc to a good story. You set the stage, introduce the characters, introduce a problem or conflict, work to bring the problem to resolution, then wind up (or set the stage for a sequel). I deliberately spend part of the time diverging to explore the problem and possible solutions, and part of the time converging on a solution.

1. **Set the stage.**
2. **Warm up, build trust.**
3. **Scope the challenge for the day.**
4. **Explore the problem.**
5. **Break** (either here or after Generate Solutions).
6. **Generate solutions.**
7. **Run possible solutions through some sort of critical filter.**
8. **Take individual responsibility for next steps.**

I explore each of these steps in more depth, with examples, in the [Planning a Workshop](#) section.

Diverging and converging

Diverging and converging happens both within individual steps, and as part of the overall workshop. For instance, when you're exploring the problem (step 4), you'll probably generate a lot of thoughts about the problem (diverging) but then you will need to decide which aspects of the problem are most important (converging).



When you generate solutions (step 6) you don't want to just stop at the first good idea; you want to generate many possible solutions (diverging). But then you need some way

to zero in on the most strategic or viable solutions (converging). Select exercises that support this flow from divergence to convergence; (see the [Toolbox](#) for ideas.)

Brainstorming productively

Brainstorming sounds fun but it can often be frustrating and unproductive. How many times have watched someone in front of a flipchart recording ideas that people threw out? There's a better way.

No bad ideas?

You've probably heard a facilitator begin a brainstorming session with the encouragement, "There are no bad ideas." I'm sorry, but there *are* bad ideas. I have them all the time. So better brainstorming needs to provide a way to generate lots of good and bad ideas, then graciously select the ideas worthy of the group's time.

You have to get through the less good ideas to get to the better ideas.

A Person ≠ Their Ideas

But bad ideas are embarrassing. In a workshop setting, depending on the size of the group and everyone's comfort level with each other, people may be intimidated to share their ideas freely. It feels too much like you are putting yourself out there instead of your idea, and the way people respond can affect your self esteem. Everyone wants to feel smart, remember?

How do you avoid that? One of the most important principles we've learned in facilitating is that *a person does not equal their ideas*. So we work on ways to create comfortable distance between a person and their ideas. Many of our exercises use some variation of individual brainstorming followed by a step that creates safe distance.

Brainstorm individually first.

For example:

- Write answers on sticky notes (from [KJ Session](#) and many others).
- Sketch or storyboard (from [Design Studio](#) or [Design Consequences](#)).
- Tell everyone to generate several ideas in a short timeframe (from [KJ Session](#) or [Design Studio](#)).

Create distance.

For example:

- Put ideas on the wall instead of speaking them out loud (from [KJ Session](#), [Experience Mapping](#))

- Explain idea/story to a partner; have partner describe to the group (from "[You at your best](#)").
- Partner builds on what you sketched, creating next step (from [Design Consequences](#)).

Mixing individual and group work.

People will come up with different things on their own than they will in a group. Group activities naturally favor extroverts too. You can ensure these individual ideas aren't lost by giving people a chance to think about a problem and work on their own before moving to a group activity. I go back and forth between individual and group work during the course of a workshop. Many of the exercises in the [Toolbox](#) section have both individual and group phases.

4: Planning a Workshop

Preparing for a workshop.

The level of preparation required for a workshop will vary based on the purpose, participants and length. These are the steps we follow for any workshop.

1. **Learn about participants.** If you're working with people you don't already know well, you'll want to find out as much about them as you can. I like to know something about their background and skillsets, what their current priorities are, and what particular pain points they may be experiencing in their work. Some specific tips:

- Interview stakeholders one-on-one beforehand, whether or not they are participating in the workshop. We always start projects by talking with stakeholders who own the project or will have significant influence on the outcome. Sometimes this person will only be peripherally involved in the project, but has an important perspective that needs to be considered during the planning process.



Dan Willis, co-author of *Designing the Conversation*, explained his approach to stakeholders this way: "My favorite thing is pain. I try to get my stakeholders to selfish as quickly as possible. I'm going to try to ease stakeholders' pain with design solutions. I'm going to try to overlap my solution with easing their pain as much as I can."

You may find during this step that not everyone agrees yet on the real problem you're trying to solve. Or there may be an elephant in the room that's obvious to you but not to everyone else. If that's the case, tread carefully. You may want to consider using a workshop with key stakeholders just to focus on problem definition. Or you may need to nudge a senior leader to clarify the problem for everyone.

- These are examples of stakeholder interview questions we use:

- Describe your role, and how it relates to this project.
- Why does this project matter?
- Who are our audiences, and what does successful engagement look like for each of them?
- How does this project fit into your overall mission?
- What's the one thing we must get right to make this project worthwhile?
- What puts this project at risk of failure?
- How will your life be different if it's a success?
- How will the organization know if it's a success?
- Need more? Kim Goodwin has compiled a comprehensive list of stakeholder interview questions in her book *Designing for the Digital Age*; that checklist, along with helpful tips & tricks, is also available online at [Boxes and Arrows](#).

- Work with a dominant leader beforehand. If you know a particular person in the group is likely to dominate the conversation, consider how you can structure the workshop to avoid this. Sometimes I will enlist their help by saying something like, "I'm trying to make sure we get the best ideas out of your team—there may be things they're aware of, or ideas they have, that you haven't heard. You can help me..."

2. **Know how it should end, and choose the tools most likely to get you there.**

You need a clear idea in your own head of what you need to walk out with at the end of the workshop. Share this with the group beforehand or at the beginning of the session. One of the hardest parts of your job as a facilitator is keeping your eye on this goal. It's deflating when you get to the end of your time and you haven't accomplished what you set out to do at the start. Doing this well takes practice.

- Choose the right workshop tools based on what you need to get out of it. Many of our favorite tools are included in the [Toolbox](#) section at the end of this eBook.
- Have more than one tool or exercise that you switch to if the planned activity isn't working or isn't a good fit with the group.
- Skip steps or abbreviate if you have to in order to reach the goal.

- Create a “Parking Lot” board in the room where you can write things you may want to return to later or tackle at another time. If participants start off on a tangent, you have to decide whether it’s important to deal with now in order to reach your goal for the workshop. If not, park it.
- 3. **Plan the time you need for each stage of the workshop but build in some flexibility.** Be realistic and allow for breaks, conversation and the occasional tangent. If you’re trying a new exercise or tool with an important group, you’ll want to test it first to get an idea of the time required. Group size can have a big impact on the time required. I address this in the section [Planning for Large Groups](#).
- 4. **Help participants prepare for the workshop.**
 - Explain the purpose, and include why that individual stakeholder’s input is critical to the success of the workshop and how you will use the input from the workshop
 - Give an agenda if your participants will expect it, but keep it high level. You don’t want to be held to it too closely.
 - Be clear if you need people to attend the whole workshop or not to bother coming at all. Some people will assume it’s OK if they have to come late or leave early. You could say something like “This workshop is designed in a series of steps that build on each other. Your insight is very important to the success of this project, but if you don’t think you can make it for the whole time let us know and we’ll try to find another way for you to contribute.” If you’re having trouble getting commitment from key stakeholders, try planning shorter or staged activities that will fit into their schedule.
 - Let them know anything you need them to read or review beforehand.
 - Give them one or two questions to be thinking about before they come.

Workshop Stages in Detail

In the [Workshop Dynamics & Flow](#) section I listed the eight stages I consider when designing a workshop. Let’s explore these in more depth.

1. Set the stage.

Describe briefly what you want to leave with today. Sketch out what you’re going to do, roughly how long you’ll spend on each part, and when you’ll take a break for bathrooms and email.

Give any ground rules. Sometimes these are helpful, particularly if you want to keep people off their devices or discourage interruptions.

2. Warm up; build trust.

Choose an activity that gets the creative juices flowing, maybe generates a few laughs, and gives people an opportunity to learn a little something about their fellow participants. I always try to do something for this step, but it's more important when you have participants who don't work together every day, or when you're dealing with a very hierarchical organization.

If I'm going to break the group up into smaller teams for the later exercises, I'll usually go ahead and form the teams at this point, and have them do the warmup activity as a team.

Example warm up exercises (See [Toolbox](#) for descriptions):

- [Commonalities](#)
- [Group Juggling](#)

You can find many other ideas for icebreakers on the internet. I also like the books from Project Adventure (<http://www.project-adventure.org/>) for more game ideas.

3. Scope the challenge for the day

Put some initial boundaries or context around the challenge for the day. Explain how it connects to the organization's major strategic goals, or to a stage in your overall process. I keep this brief, it just sets up the next step.

4. Explore the problem

Choose an exercise that helps everyone slow down a little bit and think about the problem you're trying to solve. Most worthy challenges are more complex than people realize. If you think you already understand a problem, you're likely to jump to a solution that misses a vital aspect. Exploration can include understanding audiences, goals, internal or external forces, research, analytics - anything that helps you get your arms around the big picture.



Examples of exploration exercises (See [Toolbox](#) for descriptions):

- [You \(or your organization\) at your best](#)
- [If this changed I'd start working on my resume](#)
- [Elevator pitch](#)
- [KJ Session](#)
- Watching recorded usability tests
- [Ad Hoc Personas](#)
- [Experience Mapping](#)
- [Messaging Card Sort](#)
- [Visual Card Sort](#)

5. Break

Take some kind of break where you can actually think about what's been generated so far. Sometimes this needs to be a whole day!

Depending on the type of problem and time spent exploring it, you may want to put the break after Generate Solutions.

6. Generate solutions

Choose an exercise for generating several possible solutions to the problem you've defined. Ideally this should give each person a chance to generate more than one idea working individually or in small teams. Remember the idea of [Diverging and Converging](#).

Examples of solution exercises (See [Toolbox](#) for descriptions)

- [Experience Mapping](#)
- [Design Studio](#)
- [Design Consequences](#)
- [Paper Prototyping](#)

7. Run possible solutions through some sort of critical filter.

We usually come up with some way for small teams or the whole group to choose, vote or in some way refine the solutions that should be taken to a next stage after the workshop.

It's usually better if you filter first, before spending a lot of time discussing solutions. In this way you invest your time in the solutions that the group thinks are most important or viable.

8. Take individual responsibility for next steps.

You don't have to map out ALL the steps, but you should have some idea by the end of your workshop of what the next 1-2 steps are for anything you've agreed to pursue. Take individual responsibility for these steps. Remember, committees don't get things done. Individuals can enlist help or build a team, but one person should be responsible.

Planning for Group Size

Breaking up into Smaller Teams

It's important to consider group size when planning any workshop. There are some things you will want to discuss or do with the entire group, but if you're leading a workshop with more than 5-6 people we recommend breaking it down into smaller teams for your various exercises.

If you have a team of more than 4 people, one of them will usually start to check out, content to listen and not contribute. So we usually form teams of 3-4 people.

Does each team need a leader?

Usually with teams of 3-4 I find that leadership is not an issue. Someone will naturally step forward, or the group just works together without need for prompting. It's good if at least one person is clear on the instructions for the activity, so with a very large group you may want to have these printed and pass them out to one person from each team.

Most activities end with the teams presenting their ideas to each other, so teams will need to decide on a spokesperson at the end, but again I find this happens pretty naturally.

When leadership is one of the key things you intend to develop through the exercise, you may want to assign a leader or rotate leadership through different exercises.

Large Groups

Large groups require a little more planning. First, never facilitate a workshop when you have no idea how many people may attend. There's nothing worse than thinking you're going to have a group of 6-7 and ending up with 20.

Tips for large groups:

- Break the group into smaller teams as mentioned before.
- Assign tasks or exercises to groups. Either:

- A) break up the problem into smaller subsets and have each team tackle part, OR
- B) have each team tackle the problem and present solutions to the other teams. What and how they present will depend on overall group size and your time constraints.
- You may need an assistant facilitator. With practice, you'll probably be able to facilitate a group of 20–24 on your own, if you're not also participating. Any larger than that and you may not be able to give enough individual attention to each team. If the exercises you're doing require a lot of individual attention from a facilitator for each team, you'll need an assistant with more than 8 people.

Planning for Multi-Day Workshops or Retreats

When we work on-site with a client during a project we plan multiple workshops over a span of days. If you are planning multi-day workshops or a retreat, you have several advantages, but some possible disadvantages.

Advantages

- You can take more time to build communication and trust at the beginning. This comfort pays dividends when you get to the hard parts later.
- You have time for social interaction over meals or drinks, building camaraderie and trust.
- You can break the stages of a workshop described earlier into individual sessions.
- You can add in some other games or activities that are designed to prime the creative juices before tackling strategic problems.
- You don't have the pressure of reaching action steps at the end of each session.
- You have time between sessions to process what you've learned and adapt the plan for future sessions.

Disadvantages

- It can be more challenging to sustain energy over the whole event.
- People get cranky and tired.
- Sometimes the extra time makes people wax poetic rather than focus on the task at hand.

To counter some of these disadvantages you can do things like:

- Plan the workshops in the morning when people are fresh, and let them do other work in the afternoon.
- Feed people well.
- Break up the day with some fun games or activities.
- Watch an inspirational video.
- Keep people active, doing or making things and not sitting for long at all.

Each session within a multi-day workshop or retreat still needs to flow well, so the ideas about setting the stage and knowing how to end still apply.

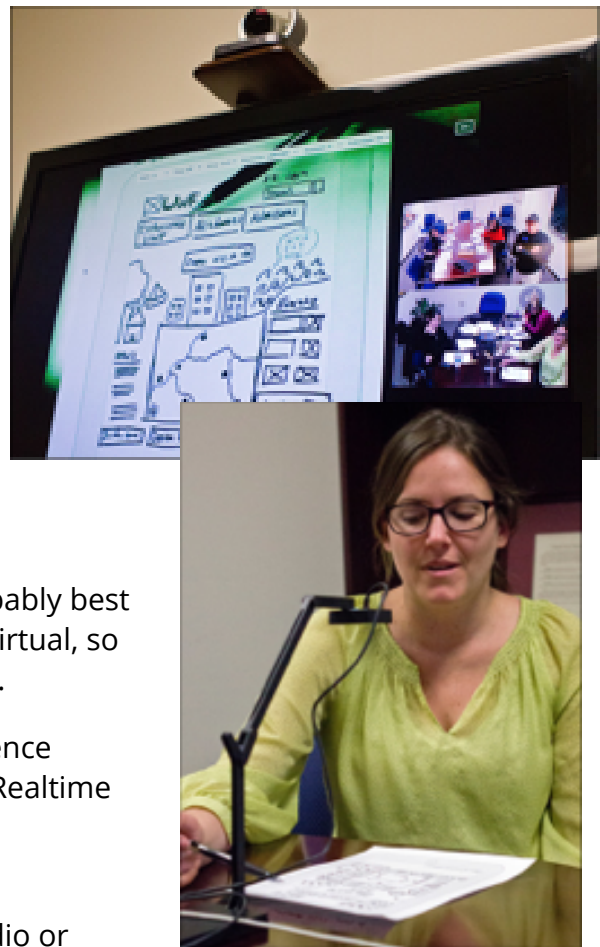
Virtual Workshops

It is possible, but harder, to run a workshop like this with participants who are remote. We've tried mixing live and virtual participants, and I will just say that while remote participants can contribute constructively, they will not have remotely as good an experience as those who are on-site. In a workshop it is very hard to avoid cross-talk, which confuses most audio systems. So invest in the best audio tech you can find – don't just use your computer's built-in mic and speaker.

If you have some remote participants it is probably best to design the whole workshop as though it is virtual, so that each participant has the same experience.

For remote sessions like KJ Sessions or Experience Mapping, try virtual whiteboard tools such as Realtime Board (<https://realtimeboard.com>) or Mural (<https://mural.co>).

For remote sketching sessions like Design Studio or Design Consequences, use a document camera such as Ipevo's Ziggi HD (http://www.ipevo.com/prods/Ziggi-HD_Plus_USB_Document_Camera). This works like a webcam, but it's more effective because it holds focus at a specific point,



instead of constantly refocusing as a regular webcam will. You can place your sketch under the camera and show it to everyone, and take snapshots as you go.

Remember, a small investment in good technology to support your virtual workshops is still much less than a plane ticket. Sometimes we just buy the gear for our clients.

5. Your Role as Facilitator

Know your job description.

What's the facilitator's job? Chances are if you've facilitated a workshop before there are some areas where you excel and others less so. I've found it helpful to keep the following job description in mind so I don't neglect a key aspect of my responsibilities.

- **Master of Ceremonies** — Set the stage for the day, introduce each section, give context and summarize the outcomes of each section.
- **Keep your eye on the goal** — As described earlier, keep in mind the place you need to reach by the end of the session. Be ready to switch, modify or skip exercises if necessary to ensure you reach the goal of the workshop.
- **Manage the clock** — This goes hand in hand with keeping your eye on the goal. But it's never fun to have a rigid timekeeper in a workshop. I like to keep it loose, but having a rough schedule helps me know when to move things along in order to stay on track and reach my end goal. I recommend you always have someone else helping you keep an eye on the time.
- **Manage the energy of the room** — The energy won't be the same from start to finish, but you want to be mindful if you see participants losing interest or getting tired. The best way to counter this is to get your participants actively engaged in some sort of work, particularly if it involves moving around. So be ready to change plan so long as you're moving toward the desired goal. This is another reason why team sizes should be kept small. Strategic placement of breaks helps too.
- **Make sure listening is happening** — Good listening takes practice. You can model it by reflecting back what you've heard people say during group discussions.
 - One of my favorite warmup techniques is to have people pair up and share a story related to the workshop's purpose (See "[You at your best](#)" in the [Toolbox](#) section). Each partner then tells the larger group some aspect of the other person's story. This helps everyone get into a better listening mode.



- As facilitator during a discussion I often think of myself as keeping the ball in play. I don't want to do all the talking, but I will reflect back something I've heard, and connect it to something someone else has said earlier. "So what you just said about X seems like it would help with the problem Jackie was describing. What's your take, Jackie?"
- To do this well I have to be truly listening myself, and thinking about what I'm hearing. That's hard when you're also trying to manage the clock or think about what comes next in your workshop. If you struggle with this part, get a facilitation partner to worry about the other stuff.
- **Be Curious and Learn** — Come expecting to learn from the group—even if you've done this many times before. Look for your own "aha" moments. You're not just there to enlighten everyone else or follow a script. Participants will respond much better if they can see you're learning too.

When you do this well, VIPs will cancel meetings so they can attend your awesome workshops!

Participating and Facilitating?

How you facilitate a workshop will depend on how much you personally need to participate in the work, and how much you're just acting as the facilitator. If you need to both participate and facilitate, you'll want to have at least one other person who can assist you with facilitation. Brief them on the exercises you're going to do beforehand, so that they are able to answer questions and keep the process or exercise moving along. Preferably they will have been through the exercises before.

You may find it manageable to participate and facilitate without extra help. I can manage both pretty well when I'm facilitating a small group of 8 or fewer people. With a larger group, you'll likely need a co-facilitator. It's harder, and I definitely need assistance.

6. After the Workshop

Thank everyone.

You should always find a way to thank people for their participation and let them know how valuable their input was. When you can point to tangible outcomes, do that.

Put artifacts where you can see and share them.

What you do after a workshop depends very much on the purpose of the workshop and how it fits into the overall process. I mentioned earlier that we use workshops throughout our projects, especially when we need input from busy people and we can't realistically expect them to do homework between meetings.

Workshops are effective at developing shared motivation, vision and understanding among your cats. But a few days or weeks of dealing with other priorities can make even the best memories fade.

Thankfully many of the exercises we recommend produce tangible artifacts that you can hang on walls in your work space (with or without refinement). They become focal points for ongoing conversation. You can use them to share outcomes with other people who weren't at the workshop.

Keep using them.

You may have the luxury of being able to dedicate a room to your project, where you can keep these artifacts up for a longer period of time. Then every time your team meets, you can refer back to personas or an experience map, for example. These physical landmarks help people quickly return to the mental space they were in when the ideas were first formed.

Consider also creating a virtual project space where everyone can easily find and use these artifacts. We use various virtual collaboration tools like Basecamp (<https://basecamp.com>), Google Drive (<https://www.google.com/drive/>), Trello (<https://trello.com>), and those described in the [Virtual Workshops](#) section.

Keep it loose.

I mentioned that you may want to refine these artifacts to give them more polish, for presentation to stakeholders or clients. But there are advantages to keeping them in their original rough form (i.e. butcher paper covered with sticky notes). This makes them

feel more malleable. You can keep evolving and refining your thinking as the team comes together to tackle various aspects of the plan further down the road.

Use it to connect stakeholder input to outcomes from your project.

If the purpose of your workshop was to engage stakeholders who won't be involved directly in the project, chances are you will be presenting the outcomes of your project to some of these same stakeholders a few weeks or months later. Use the narrative arc of the workshop to remind them what you created together, and connect the thinking from the workshop to the work you've done since then. If they see their input reflected in the outcome, they're much more likely to support your efforts.

7. Tips for Different Types of Cats

No two cats are just alike. More importantly, not all cats are like *you*. It's easy to design a process or workshop that works well for a group of your clones. But how do you plan for different personalities?

Organizational psychologists have come up with many ways of sorting people into categories by temperament or personality type. One of these, the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) has been in use since the 50s. It has its critics, and no system is perfect, but I've personally found the MBTI dimensions helpful in preparing for workshops.

An explanation of MBTI is beyond the scope of this eBook. If you're familiar with the 4 pairs of preferences, then this chart can be helpful for you to consider how to prepare given the makeup of your group.

Extraverting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Less likely to read materials beforehand. Build time into workshop for them to come up to speed. ● Responds to prompts and verbalizes ideas quickly. ● Initial ideas may not be fully considered. ● Thrives on workshop atmosphere. ● Has a hard time being quiet during individual exercises. ● Wants to keep moving, less patience for tedious detail. ● May decide quickly and verbally. 	Introverting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wants to read materials and prepare in advance. ● Needs time to reflect before putting ideas forward. ● Does not decide quickly unless they thought about it beforehand. ● Doesn't want to rush. ● May be intimidated by workshop setting, used to letting others do a lot of the talking. ● Appreciates a break in a long workshop, time to recharge.
Sensing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relates to facts and details more easily than big picture. Build up from details to big picture. ● Likes practical examples. ● Grounded in the here-and-now. ● Good at considering implementation, next steps. 	iNtuiting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relates to big picture more easily than details. Connect details to big picture for relevance. ● Makes connections between facts and ideas. ● Good at imagining possible futures, unseen implications.
Thinking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Makes decisions based on rational consideration of options, motivated by logic and research. ● More concerned with soundness of 	Feeling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Makes decisions based on values, priorities, what seems right. ● Concerned with how the group is working together.

<p>the plan than how everyone feels about it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Turned off by generalizations, repetition, incoherence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Draws out input from others.
<p>Judging</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wants to know the agenda, game plan beforehand. Doesn't like surprises. ● May be uncomfortable with the chaotic divergent phase of a workshop. ● Enjoys bringing order out of the chaos as you sort things. ● Likes to be reminded where you are relative to the overall plan. 	<p>Perceiving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● May show up late. ● Not concerned about the agenda, but likes to know the goal. ● Handles change of plans well, can help you adapt the plan to changing circumstances.

With practice you can learn to spot these characteristics in your colleagues, and plan ahead accordingly. Practically, when planning a workshop, you have to be prepared to deal with any of these variations. The workshop flow and the exercises we recommend in this eBook are designed to accommodate the full spectrum of temperamental preferences.

8. Conclusion

Improving your abilities as a cat herder makes you more valuable to any organization. You'll find your facilitation skills coming in handy in all sorts of settings, not just workshops. You'll be able to help your organization move past roadblocks and get people working together who may have avoided it before. Honestly it just makes work more fun.

Some of what I know about herding cats I've learned by watching great facilitators, some I've learned from my co-workers, some I've read in books, some I've learned by trial and error. I've shared what I hope are the most useful and nuanced tips here.

If you're new to cat herding, start small - find a group with whom you can try some of these exercises. Let someone else know you're practicing your facilitation skills, and ask them to give you feedback afterwards.

If you're an old hand at cat herding, hopefully I've given you one or two ideas that can make your experience better. And if you've got a tip that I didn't cover, tell me and I'll include it with credit.

Either way, I'd love to know what you found most helpful!

- Email me at dpoteet@insidenewcity.com
- Message me on Twitter [@davidpoteet](https://twitter.com/davidpoteet).

Bring *Advanced Cat Herding* to your organization or conference.

I teach *Advanced Cat Herding* as a 90 minute or 3 hour workshop. In the workshop I cover many of the principles in this eBook, and we practice some of the workshop exercises from the Toolbox so you can experience them first-hand. The longer workshop includes more practice exercises.

Please contact me if you are interested in bringing *Advanced Cat Herding* to your organization or conference.

9. Toolbox

Commonalities

Take 3 minutes and make a list of things your group has in common that aren't visible or immediately obvious (like the fact that you all work for the same organization). At the end of 3 minutes each group reads their list to the rest of the room.

Group Juggling

This is one of my favorite warmups but it will feel a little like summer camp so you should know your group before you try it. It's a great metaphor for collaborative teamwork.

You'll need:

- Small, softish items that can be thrown and caught over a short distance. One per participant.

Group Juggling Steps:

1. Have the group form a circle.
2. Give them one item, and tell them to toss (not pass) it to everyone in the circle, except that it can't go to the person right next to you, and it can't go to the same person twice until it's gone to everyone else.
3. Once the group is able to successfully toss the item to each person, introduce a second item. They should keep going with the first item as well.
4. See how many items they can juggle at once.

You (or your organization) at your best

This exercise plays to your or your organization's strongest suits, and can even uncover some hidden gems for stories and messaging. This should help participants and facilitators understand what helps the team to work well together, and lay the groundwork for its brand's strengths. This is a form of what is also called "Appreciative Inquiry."

You'll need:

- ☐ Note paper and pens
- ☐ Sticky notes
- ☐ Markers

Steps:

1. Ask participants to think of
 - (if focusing on individual experience) a time when they were at their best at work, when things were clicking and they felt truly satisfied in their work.
 - (if focusing on the organization as a whole) a situation/story or person that represents their organization at its best. These can be stories of customer interactions, solid teamwork skills, solving a very difficult problem internally, etc.
2. Have participants write down a short summary of their story on a piece of note paper.
3. Pair participants with a partner or in small groups of 3-4 and have them share their stories with each other.
4. Ask each group to share their most remarkable stories, but have someone else share it other than the person who originally told the story.

There are a lot of things you can do with this exercise from here.

- You might map stories to existing brand attributes or key messages.
- You could have groups take each story and write the key ideas about your organization that demonstrated by that story on sticky notes. Put those on the wall and sort them, then discuss.
- You could talk about ways to make that story happen more often.

Learn more about Appreciative Inquiry:

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appreciative_inquiry

If this changed I'd start working on my resume

This is a backwards way of finding out what qualities of your organization are most valuable to your employees, members or volunteers. It's sort of a funny way to set it up, and you will often uncover different things than you would in a traditional branding exercise.

You'll need:

- ☐ Sticky notes
- ☐ Markers (not pens or pencils)

Steps:

1. Have participants finish this sentence, writing their answer on a sticky note: *"If this changed about [Organization Name], I'd start working on my resume."*
 - a. Or, if you're a non-profit working with volunteers, you might use: *"If this changed about [Organization Name], I'd start looking for another place to give my time."*
2. Write as many answers as you can think of in a limited amount of time, typically 3-5 minutes.
3. Put sticky notes on the wall.
4. Have participants organize them into themes, similar to the KJ Session approach.
5. Discuss.

KJ Session

The KJ Method — created in the 1960s by Japanese anthropologist Jiro Kawakita — allows groups to quickly reach a consensus on the priorities of subjective, qualitative data and opinions.

It's simple, easy to do, and cost-effective. It focuses a group on a single task, eliminates unnecessary discussion and distractions, and prevents one stronger personality from dominating the conversation.

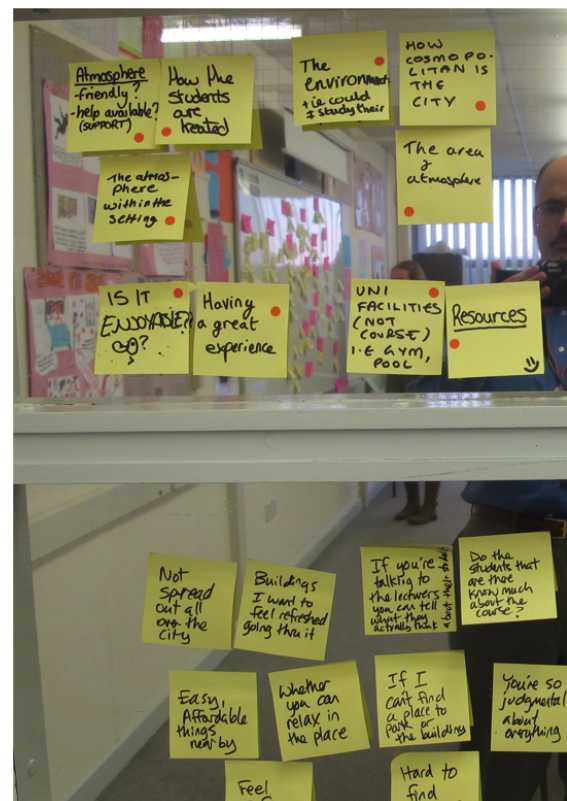
It can be completed with any size group in less than 90 minutes.

You'll need:

- ❑ Sticky notes in 2 sizes. We use the standard small square notes for individual brainstorming and some larger ones for naming groups of sticky notes. You should have one pad of smaller notes per participant, although you can certainly split up a pad. You should also consider whether you want them to be all the same color or not. Sometimes we use colors to differentiate answers to different types of questions.
- ❑ Sharpie markers or similar. Do not use pens or pencils. The writing needs to be readable from at least 2 yards/meters from the wall.
- ❑ Small dot or star stickers that can be used for votes.

KJ Session Steps:

1. Determine a focus question (Examples: "What would a [specific audience] come to your website to find or do?" or "What one thing could we do that would most improve our visitor experience next year?")
2. Have each participant write answers to the focus question on sticky notes.
 - No talking
 - One answer per note
 - As many as they can come up with
 - Answers can be based on research or brainstorming
 - Use a marker so answers can be read from some distance.



- We usually give a time limit of 5-7 minutes.
- 3. Have everyone put their sticky notes on the wall in a random blob.
- 4. Ask everyone to:
 - read the notes on the wall without talking.
 - If they see two notes that are related/similar, move them into a group together.
 - If two notes say *exactly* the same thing, put them on top of each other.
 - Usually as the facilitator you will need to help a bit with this, asking questions about why certain things were put together or combining smaller groups. 20 groups is probably too many, for example.
- 5. You should see some groups/patterns emerging.
 - It's OK if there are a couple of outliers that are in a group by themselves, but if there are very many outliers ask the participants to try to find a home for the orphans.
- 6. Discuss and come up with a name for each group.
 - We will usually start at one end of the wall and discuss each group, touching on some of the individual items within the group, and asking for ideas for the group name.
- 7. Vote for the most important groups.
 - Give each person 6 dot or star stickers for voting. You may vary this number depending on your goals.
 - They can put vote stickers on a the group label, or on an individual sticky note within the group. A vote for an individual sticky note puts emphasis on that one, but still counts as a vote for the whole group.
 - They can put multiple votes on the same group.
- 8. Review and discuss the top ranked items.

Learn more about KJ Sessions:

- https://articles.uie.com/kj_technique/
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affinity_diagram

Ad Hoc Personas

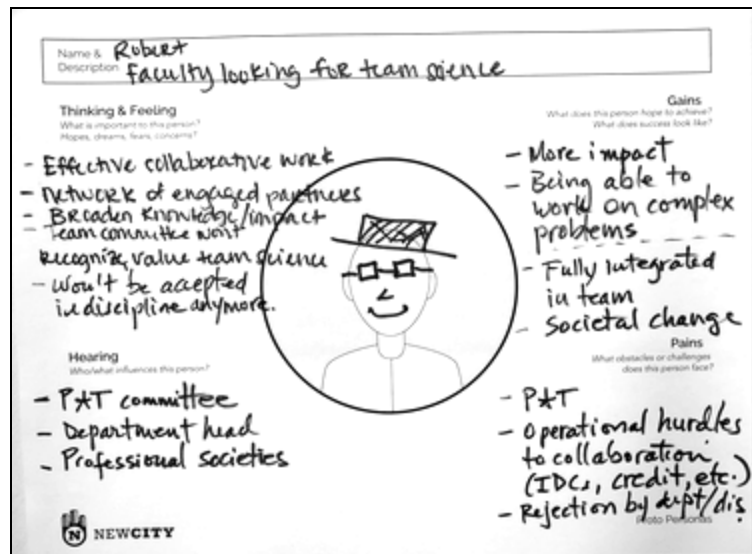
Ideally personas are created from extensive research into your audiences or customers. But sometimes during the planning process it helps to brainstorm some personas just to get things moving and focus your planning work. Ad hoc personas are a way to do that. They should NOT however be considered an equal substitute for audience research.

You'll need:

- ☐ Posters or flip chart paper
- ☐ Markers or pens
- ☐ Sticky notes

Ad Hoc Persona Steps:

1. Brainstorm a list of your key audiences.
2. Choose the top 3-4 (vote on this if needed).
3. Identify any parameters within one of those audiences that might have a significant impact on behavior. For example, if "teachers" is one of your audience, you might need to subdivide by experience level or subject area.
4. Create 3-5 specific but fictional people from those audiences. Break your participants up into small groups to work on each persona.
5. For each persona
 - Name your persona (something you'll remember).
 - Give your persona some personal details.
 - If it's relevant, describe how much experience this person already has with you or with the type of product/service you offer.
 - Describe a particular scenario that would prompt them to look for what you offer or come to your website/store/school etc.
 - How would they typically look for you (or look for your category)?
 - What information/content is most important to them (maybe top 3-5)?



Name & Description: Robert
Faculty looking for team science

Thinking & Feeling: What is important to this person? (Hopes, dreams, fears, concerns?)

- Effective collaborative work
- Network of engaged partners
- Broaden knowledge/impact team committee work
- Recognize, value team science
- Won't be accepted in discipline anymore.

Hearing: What influences this person?

- P&T committee
- Department head
- Professional societies

Gains: What does this person hope to achieve? (What does success look like?)

- More impact
- Being able to work on complex problems
- Fully integrated in team
- Societal change

Pains: What obstacles or challenges does this person face?

- P&T
- Operational hurdles to collaboration (IDC, credit, etc.)
- Rejection by dept/dis

NEWCITY

- What motivates them?
- What drives their decision?
- What fears/concerns might they have?
- Draw a sketch of your persona with some memorable details that relate to their personality or story.

6. Have each group present their persona to the rest of the participants and discuss.

Example Persona Templates:

- Add link

A persona exercise is excellent preparation for Experience Mapping, Design Studio or Design Consequences.

Elevator Pitch

This is a quick, high-level description that could explain the organization to someone in the time it takes to ride an elevator.

You'll need:

- ❑ Sticky notes
- ❑ Markers or pens
- ❑ Flip chart paper or white board

Elevator Pitch Steps:

1. Each participant writes as many answers as they can think of on sticky notes to fill in each of the blanks below:
 - *More than anything else, [Your Organization] provides [a defined offering] to help [a defined audience] that [solves a problem] with [secret sauce/unique differentiator].*
 - Each sticky note should fill in one of the blanks. It should NOT be a complete version of the elevator pitch.
2. Collect all the sticky notes and organize them on a wall with the answers to each blank grouped together. So for example all of the "defined offering" notes would be together.
3. Have each participant read through the whole set without talking.
4. The group then votes on three in each of the four blanks to identify the best answers in each. We usually vote using dot stickers.
5. Discuss.



Experience Mapping

This exercise allows the group to take a deep, multi-faceted look at the journey people have with an organization, product or service. When we use this to develop web strategy, it helps us consider how the website fits into the broader experience.

During this exercise your participants may uncover interesting, novel functionality or content ideas that they might not have considered if they were only focusing on the thing you're trying to make together.



You'll need:

- ☐ Roll of butcher paper and some way to mount it to the wall
- ☐ Sticky notes, blank paper, other office supplies for creating a diagram on the butcher paper
- ☐ Markers or pens
- ☐ Audience research reports OR participants who represent your audiences OR participants who interact with your audiences on a regular basis.

Experience Mapping Steps:

1. Identify the audiences or personas whose journeys you want to map.
2. On the left X-axis, create sections for
 - Doing - What physical, visible actions are they taking at this stage? Or what do we want them to do in the future if we create whatever we're going to create?
 - Thinking - What questions, ideas, thoughts are they having at this stage?
 - Feeling - What motivations, delights, fears, concerns are they experiencing at this stage?
 - How we engage them through
 - Digital (web, email, search, social etc)

■ In-Person

- Opportunities - what else could we do or provide that would better support the journey at this stage?
- 3. On the top Y-axis, create sections for each broad stage of the journey. For example, if you're mapping out a family vacation experience, you might use
 - Dreaming about possible vacations
 - Choosing vacation with family
 - Planning vacation
 - Taking vacation
 - After the vacation (sharing, connecting, etc)
- 4. Have participants brainstorm (or draw from research) what's happening in each X-axis category for each Y-axis stage of the journey. This could be done with sticky notes, sketches or whatever.
- 5. Participants place their items on the butcher paper and then work together to create a diagram that makes some sense.
- 6. Using these journeys, participants then identify opportunities where we can bridge a gap, make the experience better or smoother.

Learn more about Experience Mapping:

- <http://www.mappingexperiences.com>

Messaging Card Sort

Although in-depth research is great for developing robust messaging architecture, the messaging card sort can quickly uncover common themes expressed by stakeholders when prompted to answer how they think about their organization as it exists today or as they envision it in the future.

You'll need:

- ❑ A set of 100 index cards with descriptive words. These words come from stakeholder interviews, publications, the website, and some common ones used in higher ed. We usually type them up and print them using the perforated Avery cards. If you have more than 4 people you may want to divide them into groups to do this exercise, in which case you'll need sets for each group.

Messaging Card Sort Steps:

1. Lay out the set of 100 descriptive cards on the table.
2. Participants sort the cards into the following groups:
 - Who we are
 - Who we aspire to be
 - Who we are not
3. Participants can change or add new words as they discuss the cards out loud.
4. After finishing the sort, participants focus on the first two categories (who we are, and who we aspire to be), and vote on those they find most representative of the organization.



Visual Card Sort

This exercise was developed by Brian Maddox, Creative Director at NewCity. The visual card sort is similar to the messaging card sort, but it focuses more on visual styles, emotions and stories that represent your organization's mission and brand as it exists today or as you envision it in the future.

You'll need:

- ❑ LOTS of table space
- ❑ A set of 500 or so beer coaster-sized cards with a wide collection of images, illustrations, colors, textures and typography samples. We use the same set over and over. It took us about a day to source all the images from stock photography sites and then we had to print and trim them.

Visual Card Sort Steps:

We've done many variations on this exercise, so you should experiment as well.

1. Lay out the 400-500 image cards on tables around the room.
2. Participants select cards to answer a prompt from you. In recent scenarios we have asked them to use the cards to do one (or all) of the following:
 - Share a story you would tell a close friend or relative that was considering attending the institution.
 - Recount a personal story that endears you to the school or your department that keeps you engaged or committed to the brand (Why do you show up to work every morning?).
 - Convey a story that you know of in which someone was personally impacted by their attendance here.
3. The set they choose will show a variety of images, textures, and design styles that do not necessarily influence the design direction you take (if you're working on design), but help you speak the same language and get to the heart of what makes their brand tick.



4. Participants work isolated or together (depending on the size of the group) to choose up to 4-6 visual cards that help to convey this personal story.
5. Ask participants to share specific stories about the organization that embody the characteristics represented by the cards chosen. These stories can then either be mapped to descriptive words from the Messaging Card Sort exercise or be used to generate them.

Draw How to Make Toast

This is a workshop approach developed by Tom Wujec. It can be used for exploring a problem or generating solutions, but focuses on processes or systems, not user interfaces (like many of our other exercises).

You'll need:

- ☐ Butcher paper to cover one or more walls
- ☐ Markers and pens
- ☐ Sketch paper
- ☐ Sticky notes

Here's the description from the DrawToast website:

"DrawToast workshops are a great way to get groups to think freshly about mental models. In just 3 minutes, each person sketches a diagram of how to make toast. When comparing diagrams, people are shocked at how diverse the diagrams are, revealing a wide range of models of what's important in making toast. It's a great launch pad for drawing out what's really important to the group."

Read the full description and find helpful workshop templates: <http://drawtoast.com>

Design Studio

Design Studio is a quick and efficient way of generating multiple ideas from various stakeholders. It does require sketching which can intimidate some people, but we've found that a short introduction to simple sketch techniques can help people get past their artistic inhibitions. Todd Zaki Warfel has a great video on the technique, <https://vimeo.com/37861987>. Or this sketching how-to video from Napkin Academy (paid) <http://www.napkinacademy.com/>.

You'll need:

- ☐ Sketch templates
- ☐ Markers or pens for sketching
- ☐ Larger flip chart paper or posterboard for creating a larger mockup of the final screens

Design Studio Steps:

1. Break participants up into small teams. There should be an even division between those with some design or architecture experience and those with little to none.
2. Define the problem(s). What are we trying to accomplish with the website or application? What problems are we having with the current iteration?
3. Everyone sketches 4-6 ideas individually first. We use a 6-up thumbnail page template for this step. These could be 4-6 versions of the same screen, or sets of screens that work in a user flow.
4. Each person shares their thumbnail ideas with their team.
5. Each person sketches one more version of their screen(s) individually.
6. Teams review each member's ideas and decide which ideas they like best.
7. The team then makes a sketch together on a large sheet of flipchart paper or posterboard.



8. Present ideas to the full group and discuss.
9. Have participants vote on which designs are the best. Have them explain why they chose — or why they didn't choose — specific designs and/or elements.

Learn more about Design Studio:

- https://articles.uie.com/design_studio_methodology/
- https://articles.uie.com/design_studio_workshop/

Design Consequences

Design consequences can help medium to large groups of stakeholders feel more involved with the new direction of a website or application. The concept could probably be adapted to other purposes but we haven't tried it.

This exercise demonstrates a couple of things to your participants:

- Everyone has their own interpretation of what the redesigned website should look like. Even if they're all agreeing on words like "dynamic," "elegant" or "innovative," their mental pictures can be quite different.
- While no two participants will share the exact same ideas, each can use their perspective to their advantage and learn to incorporate others' ideas into their own.

As the facilitator, you'll gain a better understanding of how people imagine the end product. It's up to you how to incorporate these ideas.

You'll need:

- ☐ Blank paper
- ☐ Markers or pens for sketching

Design Consequences Steps:

1. Identify a problem or scenario with the website or app. What is a user trying to accomplish? What are you trying to accomplish as an organization?
2. Have participants take about 7 minutes to individually sketch an idea for the first screen. Use Sharpie markers or thick pens, since it's hard to show sketches done in pencil or lighter weight pens.
3. After 7 minutes, each person passes their sketch to the person on the left.
4. With a new screen in front of them, participants pick something on that screen that interests them the most and pretends to click or tap it. Then they take another 7 minutes sketching the screen they think would come next.
5. After the second round, have participants share and discuss their sketches.
 - Ask them why they made the choices they did.
 - Do they see anything from other designs from which they could have benefitted?
 - What would they keep?

- What would they do differently?

Learn more about Design Consequences:

- <http://www.disambiguity.com/design-consequences-a-fun-workshop-technique-for-brainstorming-consensus-building/>

Paper Prototyping

This exercise is a variation on traditional website usability testing. Before creating a digital mock-up wireframe or design, designers will often start building a site with a paper version of the interface. You can also adapt this to product or service prototyping.

Stakeholders with a lack of design or technological skills can benefit from the exercise's simplicity, while designers can feel free to test rough sketches without designing numerous variations in graphic design tools like Photoshop.

Paper prototyping is a good add-on to Design Studio or Design Consequences. You can take the ideas generated during one of those exercises and test them right away.

You'll need:

- ☐ Sketches or printouts of the interfaces you want to test
- ☐ Sticky notes to create changeable parts of an interface that can be added or removed based on user behavior
- ☐ Transparency film to simulate any fillable forms
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Removable tape

Paper Prototyping Steps:

1. Build your prototype interface using printouts or sketches and the office supplies mentioned above. Simulate any interactive elements (i.e. slideshows, light-boxes, fade-in graphics, etc.) on separate pieces of paper as well.
2. Recruit people who represent your target audience to test your prototype. In a workshop setting you can have groups test each other's designs.
3. Assign them with specific task that they'll need to accomplish by navigating through your paper prototype.
4. Introduce the test just as you would a regular usability test. Be clear that you are testing the effectiveness of the website or application, and not their ability to use it.
5. During the test, have one person act as the facilitator and another to act as the "computer" (maneuvering the paper prototype to respond to the user's actions). You can also have an observer to record what happens.
6. If the user tries to do something with the prototype that you haven't simulated yet, take the opportunity to ask what they expect would have happened next.

Learn more about Paper Prototyping:

- <http://alistapart.com/article/paperprototyping>
- Watch a paper prototype in action:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrV2SZuRPv0>
- *Prototyping* book by Todd Zaki Warfel
<http://rosenfeldmedia.com/books/prototyping/>
- Paper Prototyping Training Video from Nielsen Norman Group (paid)
<https://www.nngroup.com/reports/paper-prototyping-training-video/>