

The !F Lab Field Guide
to interactive storytelling ideation



!F Lab & the WHAT !F IT process

The WHAT !F IT process is a unique concept development methodology for the ideation of digital interactive narratives. It is the result of four years of experimentation at !F Lab (Interactive Factual Lab), an EU funded training workshop led by Sandra Gaudenzi and produced by social innovation agency !DROPS. Between 2015 and 2018 we guided 72 participants from 25 countries and invited top digital creative experts from all over the world to share their knowledge with us. We then formalised the five main phases that any interactive narrative project should go through, in a methodology that any of you can use as it does not need any technical knowledge.

How to use this guide

This guide is a taster of the WHAT !F IT process. Here you will find easy-to-use canvases that will help you focus on the most important points of your project. Treat them as check lists that keeps you on track. You can go through the whole process with your team (this will take several days) or use a single canvas to help you focus on a specific issue. The most important thing is that you play with it. No methodology is set in stone-it is conceived to help you, not to limit you. We are ourselves constantly working on new canvases and ideas... so please do experiment!

What's next

If you want to have access to the full methodology, including the financial and pitch canvases, or want us to help you with your project, contact us at iflab@idrops.be.

If you are using our process in class, workshops or with clients, please do reference us (the methodology is licensed under CC).

An inclusive process

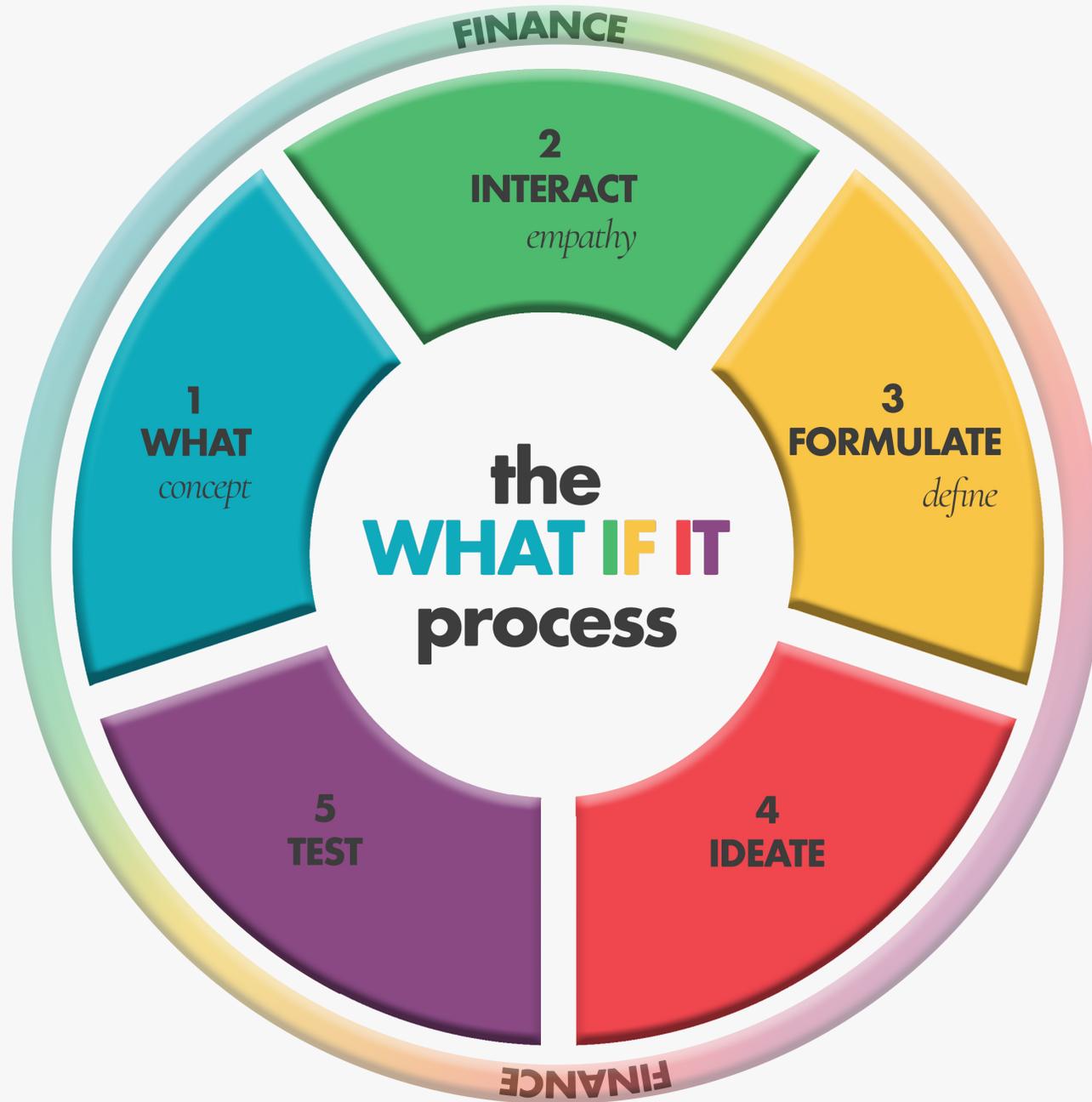
Since your team will be composed of a minimum of one content creator, one designer and one creative coder, the WHAT !F IT process mixes design, coding and storytelling practices. At !F Lab, we believe in co-creation and interdisciplinary ways of working. We also believe there is a 4th inspirational force to be included in the ideation process of your stories: the user (or interactor). An interactive project needs to be designed with its audience, and not for it. This is why our process is heavily inspired by Design Thinking and User Centred Design (UCD). You will recognise the five distinctive phases of UCD. We gave them a twist and adjusted them to the needs of storytelling practice.

An iterative process

Go through the WHAT !F IT process wheel from 1 to 5. Then start again. And then again. You should ideate and prototype at all stages of your project, and keep transforming it until it feels strong enough to fly. Do not think of steps 1 to 5 in a linear way. You need an initial concept (step 1) in order to start interacting with your audience (step 2). Once you have engaged with your users you will not only be able to formulate your project goals (step 3), but this will also have changed your initial concept (back to step 1)! So think of this process as a creative dance that keeps iterating itself until it feels ready to be produced.

Why such a name

There are five main phases in the process: WHAT is your concept, Interact with your user, Formulate your idea, Ideate and prototype and Test it. If you take the first letter of each word of the wheel, you get "WHAT IF IT" - hence the name of the process! We also liked the fact that it sounds like an invitation to stay open and to explore... "what if" is always a darn good starting point!



Cards & Canvases

Since !F Lab is an intensive two week lab, we mix presentations, hands-on work on projects and one-to-one mentoring. For this reason we have created two types of learning tools: cards and canvases. The “cards” are mini-lectures on a specific part of the WHAT !F IT process. These keep changing every year as they depend on the personal professional experience of the coaches we invite. We have therefore decided not to publish them. The “canvases” are conceived as practical exercises to make each team make decisions on their own projects. You can see in the “Cards and canvases overview” all content that has been created at !F Lab. We have decided to share with you most of the canvases, as they are the backbone of the WHAT !F IT process.

What about finance

You will have noticed that in our WHAT !F IT process wheel, finance is present all around. Thinking about partnerships, in-kind resources and potential financiers is important from day one, as it anchors your project in real circumstances. We have also developed a series of “financial canvases” to help teams pin down the value and business proposition of their project, and the art of convincing others to help (the art of pitching). None of these canvases are in this book as we believe that you will need a coach to go through them, but feel free to contact us if you need help.

CARDS & CANVASES OVERVIEW



FINANCE	WHAT CONCEPT	INTERACT	FORMULATE	IDEATE	TEST
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0.1 Financing for interactive projects 0.1 Business Model 0.2 Partnership 0.3 Value Propostion 0.4 Pitch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 What: Story & Purpose 1.2 Why: Impact 1.3 Who: Target Audience 1.1 Concept 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 User Research 2.2 User Modeling 2.1 Personas 2.2 Semi-leading Interview 2.3 Empathy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1 Project Challenge 3.1 Users Impact 3.2 Impact Levels 3.3 Project Challenge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1 User Journey 4.2 Wireframe 4.3 Brainstorming 4.4 Interactive Storytelling 4.5 Genres in interactive 4.1 User Journey 4.2 Wireframe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5.1 Paper Prototype 5.2 Screen Prototyping 5.3 UX Evaluation 5.1 Paper Prototype 5.2 Testing Observation

THE CONCEPT CANVAS

WHAT

What are the pillars of your project? Do you know what your story is and why you are telling it? Are you clear about the audience you are addressing and the impact you want to have? This canvas asks you to simplify what is in your head so that it can be understood by others. It also forces you to be coherent and link platform-story-audience in a clear and explainable way.

WHY

The WHAT, WHY, HOW and for WHOM of your project need to be crystal clear to you and to your team members. If not, you will be unable to convince others to join/help you, and you risk to diverge within your own team. This is a good tool to create team coherence and alliance.

HOW

Fill in this canvas with a pen, and make sure you keep a clean copy for the future! Ideally you will fill it in regularly enough to keep track of how your ideas have evolved over time.

You can either fill one copy out with your team, or give a canvas to each team member and discuss the different outcomes as a group. Either way, it will clarify the key points of your project.

Duration: 15 - 45 mins

CONCEPT CANVAS



Project Title:

Date:

WHAT is your story?
 (max 5 sentences)

(now in 2 sentences):

WHY is it relevant to:

You:

Your user:

Others:

WHO is your audience:

Primary audience:

Secondary audience:

WHAT do you want it to "do"/"change"/"allow":

WHY should it be interactive?

Competitive analysis:

WHAT do you want your audience to:

Know:

Feel:

Do:

After experiencing your project?

THE PERSONAS CANVAS

WHAT

Personas are fictional archetypal representations of your user. They are a summary of what you have learned by engaging with, and interviewing your audience about the theme that is central to your project.

WHY

In order to make decisions and design an interface for your project you need to visualise your audience. Would my “persona” be interested in this? Would s/he click here? Would this style speak to her/him? Personas help you to be consistent in how you address your audience in terms of style, platform, tone and interaction.

HOW

First you need to decide who your target audience is. Who do you want to reach? It is also common to have more than one target audience, in which case you will speak of primary and secondary audiences. Now for each target audience you want to build a persona, as the aggregation of real findings you had while interviewing, or researching, your audience (see next canvas). You particularly want to find “needs and frustrations” around your topic, because these will give you new ideas for your project.

Duration: 20 mins



PERSONAS CANVAS

Project Title:

Date:

1. Name:	Background:
Age:	Attitude:
Gender:	

2. In the context of your story’s topic, what do they:

Know:

Feel:

Do:

3. Goals, needs, frustrations of relevance to your topic:

4. Technology skills, media consumption habits favourite sites, etc... :

THE SEMI-LEADING INTERVIEWS CANVAS

WHAT

Semi-leading interviews are face-to-face conversations with your future audience. They are focused on understanding their interest in your topic, their digital habits, what makes them tick, and what really frustrates them - or what they wished existed. They are a possible tool to build your persona with.

WHY

In order to be heard by your audience, you need to fine-tune your story, your platform and your design to what they can hear. You need to know where to find them, how to attract them and gain a deep understanding of their needs and curiosities. This is not about “bending your idea” but about “making it accessible” to your audience. Other surveys and ethnographic research techniques do exist, but semi-leading interviews are a must-do.

HOW

Make sure people have the time to speak to you, and that they represent your target audiences. Never interview friends - they will try to please you. You want to ask questions about “why” and “how” and leave them to fill the silences. This is not the space to explain your ideas, but rather to listen to their needs and current habits or knowledge about your topic. The more interviews you do, the better. Aim for a minimum of 6-10 interviews per target group, for you to see some patterns and build your persona with the data you collected.

Duration: 15 - 30 mins per interview



SEMI-LEADING INTERVIEW CANVAS

Tips: Don't explain too much about your idea- you want to know what they know. Let them fill in the blanks. This is where you will find important information (e.g.: So in that situation, you... [long pause?]). Ask "why" a lot and let them speak. Never ask directly if your project idea is good, as they will want to please you.

1. Who do you want to talk to? Write a list of different users you might want to reach (or people who know your project field very well)

2. General intro questions and techno/demographics specifications

Participant's age & gender & occupation

What devices do you use on a regular basis? What are your favorite websites and apps? How much time do you spend online every day?

3. What do you want to learn from your interviews? Write a list of everything you want to know about your target user. Examples: what are users' behaviors, attitudes and expectations of a product/subject/topic? What are their needs and behaviors? What are the pros/cons of different designs (If you are showing them prototypes)? What are pros/cons of competitors' products?

4. Do your own project "interview guide"

Write down 3 to 5 questions that are really essential to you:

THE EMPATHY CANVAS

WHAT

The Empathy canvas is a tool to summarise what you have learned from your semi-leading interviews and audience research, and to start mapping how this might influence your project. It is another way to visualise your persona, that puts the emphasis on the “pains & gains” of your target audiences.

WHY

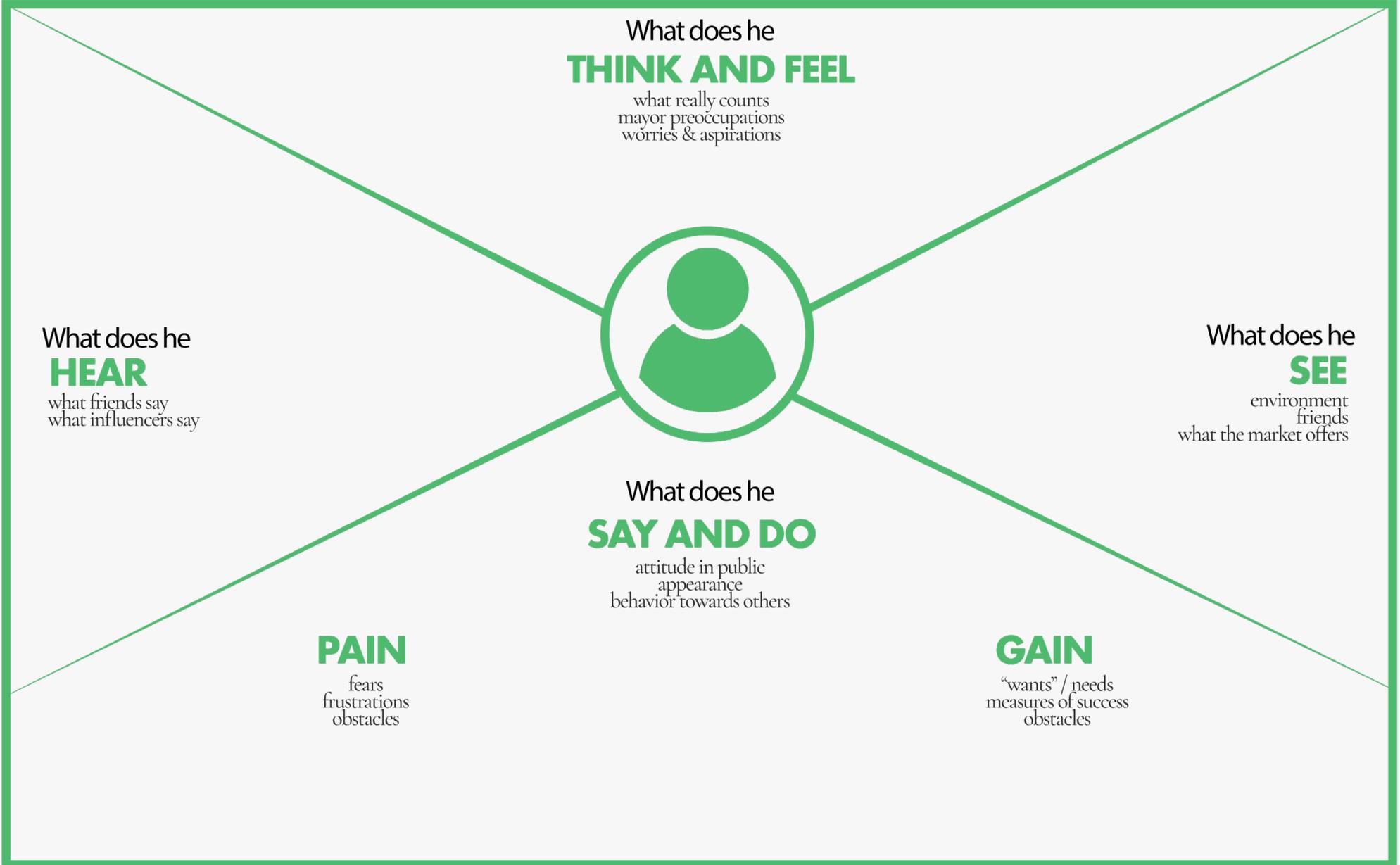
Once you have done your interviews and created your persona, you want to visualise what your audience feels/knows/does about your topic of interest. By empathising with your audience you can make a better design for them. The aim here is to conceive a project that can be heard and understood. Remember: you are NOT the target audience!

HOW

On post-its, write the main responses to your interviews and the findings of your audience research. Then start moving the post-its to the relevant parts of the canvas (or write it by hand). Do one Canvas per target audience. Then step back and let it simmer: what is it saying to you? Treat it as an ideation tool through which the audience gives you hints about what direction/platform/content you should consider next for your project.

Duration: 20 mins

EMPATHY CANVAS



THE USER'S IMPACT CANVAS

WHAT

Impact is like an onion - it has different layers. At the core you have the individual (your user). What are the changes you want this project to have on such a person? The user's impact canvas allows you to map the core changes your project needs to provoke in order to be successful. They can be small or big changes. They can be geared to create awareness and learning (know), an emotional reaction (feel) or provoke an action (do).

WHY

You have identified the aims of your project in your Project Canvas. You now have to split them in small, clear changes that you can enforce by design. By writing down what learning you want to create, you can start mapping the content you need to produce. By thinking in terms of an emotional shift you can make decisions about style, content, platform and interface. By deciding that you want an action as outcome, you can frame your story towards a call-to-action.

HOW

This canvas formalises your intentions for the project and summarises your decisions. You might want to consider the Empathy Canvas to see if your intentions are realistic in relation to your target audience. If you have more than two target audiences it is advised to include them (but avoid having too many). Try to be specific, "everybody that is interested" is NOT a target audience. Think of impact as a "shift" that you want your user to have. Where is s/he now and where do you want her/him to be after experiencing your project?

Duration: 20 mins



USER'S IMPACT CANVAS

Project Title:

Date:

What does your user (primary target audience)
Know/Feel/Do NOW (before experiencing your project) and AFTER (experiencing your project)

1. Primary Audience:

BEFORE	KNOW	AFTER
	FEEL	
	DO	

2. Secondary Audience:

BEFORE	KNOW	AFTER
	FEEL	
	DO	

THE LEVELS OF IMPACT CANVAS

WHAT

You have defined the shift you want your user to have through experiencing your project, but do you want to go beyond the learning/emotion/action of the individual? If you want your project to have impact at a societal or political level, you need to plan it and build it into your dissemination strategy, but also in your ideation process.

WHY

Different layers of impact require different types of content and dissemination strategies. You want to be able to map the complexity of your project in order to ideate a concept that responds to your ambitions. Remember to be realistic in your goals, otherwise the exercise is meaningless.

HOW

Use this canvas to visualise the levels of impact that you wish to have. Make a distinction between what you want to achieve (hence you have to plan and design it into your project) and what would be nice to provoke, but is not part of your planned impact. You can use two different colours to differentiate between the “must have” and the “nice to have”. Then, in the ideation phase, only design and test for the essential things you want to achieve (some people call this the MVP - Minimum Viable Product).

Duration: 25 mins

LEVELS OF IMPACT CANVAS

Project Title:

Date:

MACRO AND POLICY SHIFTS

Project needs to:

Policy:

Law:

also consider health/poverty/war/environment/...

... :

... :

... :

SOCIAL SHIFTS

Project needs to:

Friends:

Family:

Discussion:

Social Media:

News:

Social Change:

Innovations:

Social action:

INDIVIDUAL SHIFTS

BEFORE

Know

Feel

Do

AFTER

THE PROJECT CHALLENGE CANVAS

WHAT

The project challenge (often referred to as design question) is used to keep the focus on what you need to solve in order to have a successful project. It is specifically useful to keep a multi-disciplinary team aligned during a long process.

WHY

How can you bring your persona from where s/he is to where you want her/him to be after your experience? What is the question you need to ask yourself in order to find a solution? The project challenge will help you to put the core values and challenges of your project into words. Regularly come back to it and check if what you are working on is still in line with it. You can also use it to decide on critical design issues. It can also be useful when pitching to express the fundamental challenge your project tries to solve.

HOW

If you have more than one target audience, or different levels of impact, it is best to have one project challenge for each. Then try to see if it is possible to unify them in a single sentence.

Duration: 20 mins

THE USER JOURNEY CANVAS

WHAT

The user journey maps the end-to-end process that your users experience. It is often visualised as a map, or diagram, but it can also look like a script or a series of drawings if that is easier for you. It shows in chronological order, how your target audience gets in contact with your project, the first entrance point and platform, what the main decision points are and what happens when s/he finishes it. It is not made to show the interface and media assets, but rather the main emotional and decisional nodes of the whole experience.

WHY

The user journey moves you from the research part to the persona, to what you want her/his experience of your project to be. It is a first step in the direction of the design of your interactive narrative because it helps you to define the most efficient, engaging, and intuitive paths for your user to move through your story. Use it as a tool to list the touchpoints and moments where/when the interactions should take place. It will help you to prioritise your content delivery.

HOW

Define which persona the journey is for. Specify what the journey's ultimate goal, or end-point, is. Specify the different touchpoints and decisions for the user. Make a numbered list of the steps in the journey. Think of what you would like your persona to feel, know and do at each step. Keep asking yourself "What will excite my users to go further? What could make them quit?" Then move from the Canvas list to a more graphical representation of it. This can be done in so many different ways and styles that the easiest is to look at examples by googling "user journey mapping". Then choose the one that speaks to you and add your own content.

Duration: 45 mins

USER JOURNEY CANVAS



YOUR PERSONA:

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Needs (in relation to your topic):

Frustrations (in relation to your topic):

How does your persona encounter your project?

Where is s/he? Alone or in public?

On which platform/s?

What is the first thing s/he should see?

Make a list of the steps you want s/he to go through (What would make her/him go to the next step?)

Is there one or multiple ends? Explain...

What happens to your persona after the experience?

THE WIREFRAME CANVAS

WHAT

A wireframe is a skeletal framework that helps you arrange the main elements of your website, mobile app, or web-doc. It helps you to plan the site's structure and functionality in a hierarchical way. It is mostly used for screen-based interactive narratives and less relevant for spatial experiences (VR&AR&locative). Think of it as a 2D-visualisation of each screen the user will interact with. It is a storyboard that visualises the interaction possibilities.

WHY

You have used the user journey to define the main steps you want your audience to go through, now you need to arrange them within an architecture of choices and possibilities. This will also help you to design the layout of the interface - although you are still at the level of functionality and you should not be thinking about the "look and feel" yet.

HOW

Choose the most appropriate tool (it is best to start with paper and then move to digital tools). Start very simple: each rectangle is a screen. What is the first screen that the users see? What is on it? Use easy icons to represent a title, a paragraph of text, a video, a photo etc. Check your user journey to populate your wireframe with the decision and content points you have set for your story. What are the decision points? What is the next screen once they click on an option? Is there a single or a multiple end? Once you have completed it you can go back and make it look better, but that is not the point of the exercise really. At this stage you just want to map and distribute your content and action points.

Duration: 45 mins

WIREFRAME CANVAS

Start by drawing the shape of your main screen platform (here a phone, but it could be a tablet or a computer) and then populate it with its content components. Draw buttons, icons, navigation arrows to explain movement and options. Put them in sequential order and see if the user flow works.

The diagram illustrates a three-step wireframe process for a mobile application screen. Each step is represented by a mobile phone outline containing specific design questions and a corresponding notes section below it.

- Step 1:** The first phone screen contains the questions: "Is there a title?", "Or a video playing?", "Or an arrow to scroll?", and "Where is the catch?". Below it is a notes section with the instruction: "Use this space to explain things you do not know how to draw, or other options..." followed by four horizontal lines.
- Step 2:** The second phone screen contains the questions: "And then what happens?", "What are the choices of the user?", and "Is there a call to action?". Below it is a notes section with the label "Notes:" followed by seven horizontal lines.
- Step 3:** The third phone screen is currently blank. Below it is a notes section with the label "Notes:" followed by seven horizontal lines.

Large grey arrows point from the first phone to the second, and from the second to the third, indicating a sequential flow.

THE PAPER PROTOTYPE CANVAS

WHAT

The paper prototype is the extension of your detailed wireframe, but it can be experienced screen by screen by your user - so that they can test each screen without seeing what is coming next. It is a collection of cut-out screens and interactive paper stickers, buttons or pop-ups that illustrate your concept without you having to code a single line.

WHY

Before even thinking of spending money on coding your interface and project, you should test it, and a paper prototype is the cheapest and easiest way to do so. You will need to use your imagination (or watch a few tutorials online) to make paper seem “clickable” or “scrollable” but it can be done, and it is actually a lot of fun! The beauty of it is that it is easy to change, so you can keep re-iterating your idea at no cost!

HOW

Go back to your wireframes and make sure you draw each screen with enough information so that a user would know what to do without you explaining too much. Keep in mind that testing is about investigating possible issues. Make sure you produce all the relevant screens for the user experience to test a particular point (it could be the concept, the interface, the story beginning, an entire user journey or the navigation).

Duration: 60 - 120 mins

PAPER PROTOTYPE CANVAS

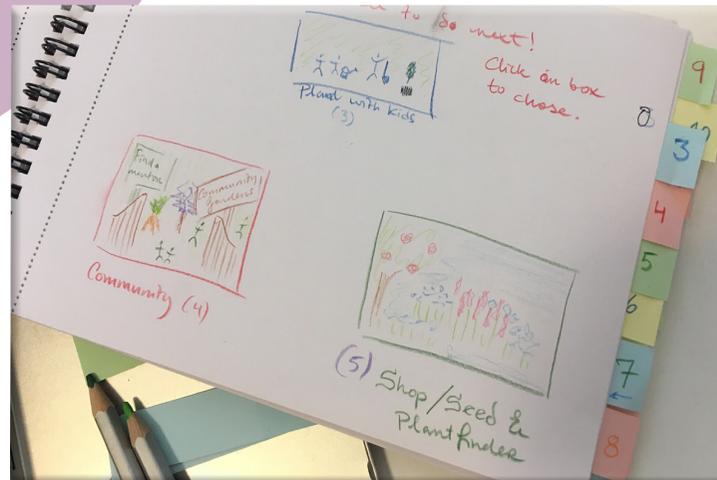
See here a few ideas of what your paper prototype could look like. There is no 'standard way' to do one and you can be as creative as you want, just keep in mind it needs to be practical to test. All the below examples were created by !F Lab participants.



Draw a sphere and populate it with a collage of images to simulate a 360 VR experience.



Cut out each screen as a separate paper and use post-its to illustrate buttons and navigation options.



Use a sketch book to fit all the screen of your website in different pages (using tabs to go to the relevant "next screen").

THE TESTING CANVAS

WHAT

Once you have done your paper prototypes you want to test them with real people. By doing so, you study the reactions of your future users (with regard to your ideas, your design or your navigation) and you can make sure your project speaks to your audience. You want to use testing as a source of creative inspiration, by listing all the things you need to improve before moving into production. Be open enough to be surprised and never patronise your tester...

WHY

Testing your paper prototypes is a way to evaluate the user experience and spot potential issues before you start spending time and money on building it. You could be testing the very initial idea, the storytelling flow, the usability or navigation, the levels of gamification or anything that is crucial for the success of your project. Remember to focus on a few aspects if you want the results to be useful.

HOW

First of all, you want to test with your target user. Do not ask friends - they will try to please you. Make sure you know what you want to find out (you cannot solve it all in one go, test different issues regularly). You now need 4 people for each round: 1 user, 1 person that simulates the computer (that finds the right "paper, next screen" when the user makes a choice), 1 facilitator (who explains the purpose of the test and asks the participant to think aloud) and 1 observer (who writes down all the doubts, hesitations and remarks of the tester). The more people you test with, the better! Aim for a minimum of 6 - 10.

Duration: 15 - 20 mins each

THANK YOU!

The WHAT IF IT Process would not have been possible without the generous collaboration of all the !F Lab coaches and all the !F Lab participants that tested it and helped us develop it. We thank you for your generosity and creativity. It has been a pleasure working with you. Mike Robbins: we all know how important you have been for every single project that came to !F Lab! We salute you.

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This book was written and conceived by Sandra Gaudenzi, !F Lab's Head of Studies.

The !F Lab team,
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