

Mapping Workshops That Don't Waste a Day

Process-mapping workshops have a reputation, and it is mostly deserved. This is the format we use: three hours, the right eight people, data on the wall before anyone starts drawing, and decisions made in the room.

Before the room: bring data, not a blank wall

The single biggest change you can make is to arrive with the discovered map already on the wall. Starting from a blank canvas turns the session into collective recall, which is slow and, more importantly, wrong — people describe the process as it is supposed to work.

Pull the event log, discover the map, print the top variants with their volumes, and bring the ten slowest hand-offs. Participants then spend their time reacting to reality rather than reconstructing it.

The right eight people

Eight is the working maximum. Above that, someone is a spectator and everyone slows down.

- Two or three people who do the work daily — not their managers.
- The process owner, with authority to decide.
- One person from the upstream team and one from downstream.
- One from risk, audit, or compliance.
- A facilitator who does not have a stake in the outcome.

Three hours, four blocks

A tight structure protects the energy in the room.

- 0:00–0:20 — What the data says. Present the discovered map, variants, and hand-off times. No discussion yet.
- 0:20–1:10 — Where it hurts. Mark the map with pain, rework loops, and waiting. Everyone writes before anyone talks.
- 1:10–2:00 — Why. Take the top three pain points to cause, not blame. Ask 'what makes this the rational thing to do?'
- 2:00–2:50 — What changes. Each pain point gets an action, an owner and a date, or is explicitly parked with a reason.
- 2:50–3:00 — Read back the decisions out loud before anyone leaves.

Facilitation rules that do the heavy lifting

Write before you speak, so the loudest voice does not set the agenda. Time-box every cause discussion to eight minutes. Ban solutions in the first two blocks. And when the room disagrees with the data, mark it and check the log afterwards — sometimes the log is wrong, and that is a finding too.

After the room

Publish the annotated map and the decision list within twenty-four hours, while people can still recognise it. Turn each agreed pain point into a measurable rule so that improvement becomes visible in the same data you started from. Then schedule the re-check, because a workshop with no follow-up is what gave these sessions their reputation in the first place.

Video walkthrough — key points

1. Mapping workshops

- Three hours
- Eight people
- Decisions in the room

Process mapping workshops have a reputation, and it is mostly deserved. Here is the format we use instead: three hours, the right eight people, data on the wall before anyone starts drawing, and decisions made in the room.

2. Bring data, not a blank wall

- Discovered map printed
- Top variants with volumes
- Ten slowest hand-offs

The single biggest change is to arrive with the discovered map already on the wall. A blank canvas turns the session into collective recall, which is slow and usually wrong, because people describe the process as it is supposed to work. Bring the map, the top variants with volumes, and the ten slowest hand-offs.

3. The right eight people

- Two or three who do the work
- The owner, with authority
- Upstream, downstream, risk
- A neutral facilitator

Eight is the working maximum. Above that, someone is a spectator. You want two or three people who do the work daily, not their managers. The process owner, with authority to decide. One person from upstream and one from downstream. Someone from risk or audit. And a facilitator with no stake in the outcome.

4. Four blocks

- What the data says
- Where it hurts
- Why — cause, not blame
- What changes, owned and dated

Four blocks. Twenty minutes on what the data says, with no discussion. Fifty minutes marking where it hurts, writing before talking. Fifty minutes on why, taking the top three pain points to cause rather than blame. Then fifty minutes on what changes, where every pain point gets an action, an owner and a date, or is explicitly parked with a reason.

5. After the room

- Publish within 24 hours
- Turn pain points into rules
- Schedule the re-check

Afterwards, publish the annotated map and the decision list within twenty four hours, while people still recognise it. Turn each agreed pain point into a measurable rule, so improvement shows up in the same data you started from. And schedule the re-check. A workshop with no follow up is exactly what gave these sessions their reputation.

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