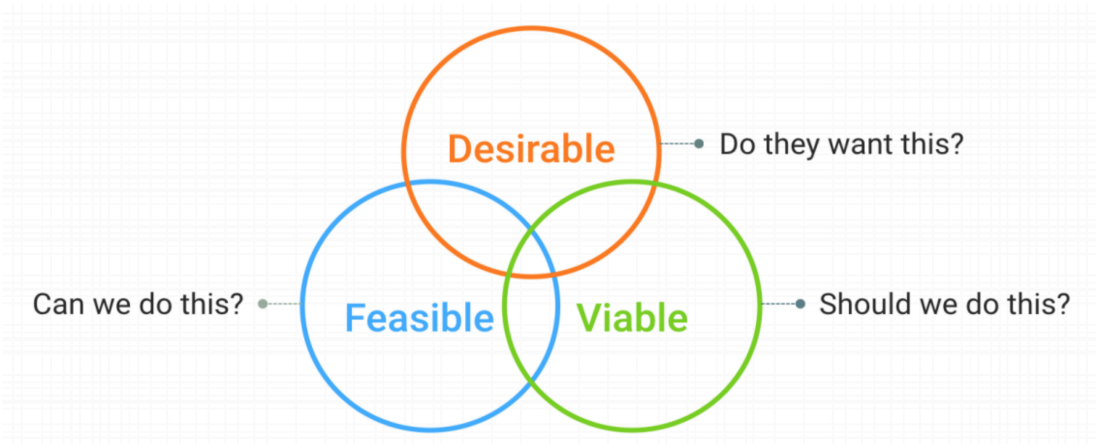
Assumption Mapping

Identifying flaws in your strategy before it's too late

This tool was created by David Bland and is part of the Design Sprint Tool Kit from Google.

Behind every new product or service hides leap of faith assumptions. If proven false, these important and yet unknown assumptions can make or break your initiative. This method is designed to deconstruct these assumptions as a team down into specific areas to help focus your experimentation. Assumptions Mapping exercise helps your team identify those assumptions, explore what is behind them and discuss what really matters.
Typically the assumptions on a project will fall into those categories:



Sometimes it's hard to identify the assumptions we make. Here are some questions to help:

Desirability: do they want this?

- Do customers care about the problem we want to solve today?
- Are our customers looking for solutions to the problem?
- Do customers already have a solution to this problem today?
- Does the existing solution fully satisfy the customer?
- Does our customer understand our offer?
- Can we reach our customers?

Viability: should we do this?

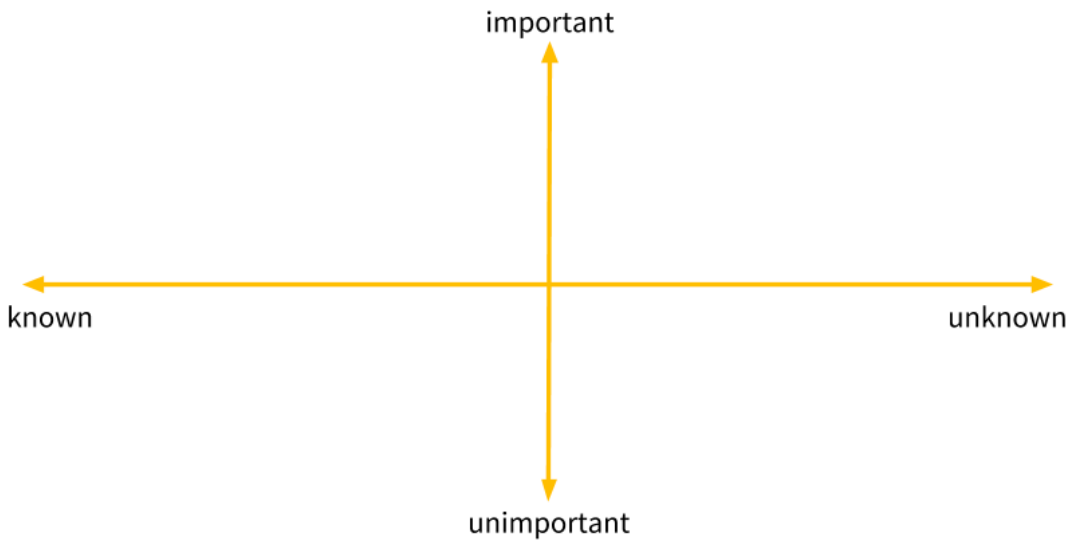
- Will your solution solve the customer problem?
- Will customers pay for our solution?
- Will we be able to make enough money from this business model?
- Will the customer recognize the value we provide?

Feasibility: can we do this?

- Do we have the capability to build our solution?
- Can we scale such a solution?
- Are they any legal, regulatory (or internal) risk to our solution?

Think of what additional assumptions you or your team is making that, if proven false, will cause your product or service to fail.

Once you've answered these questions, draw the 2x2 and with your team discuss where to place them. On the vertical axis, decide what is more important and is less important to the project. This is based on the impact that this assumption can have on the project, if false. At the top, the most important and the bottom the least important. On the horizontal axis, place the assumptions based on how much evidence or knowledge you have. On the left, when you know already if this is true or false, on the right if you need further evidence to know.



Assess the map you have created. The shared understanding through the mapping conversation is much more valuable than the map itself.
The matrix should be balanced. It's all about relative choices between assumptions and not about absolute truth.

- Focus on the top right quadrant for near term experimentation. Create evaluative experiments from these important and unknown assumptions.
- Check the top left quadrant against your existing plan. Are these important and known assumptions already accounted for in your plan?
- Defer commitment on the bottom left quadrant. These known and unimportant assumptions can be explored after you've validated the top right quadrant.

Create a list of exploratory experiments for future validation. These experiments should come from the bottom right quadrant. These unknown and unimportant assumptions can be probed later for future growth opportunities.

Allow the map to continue to grow past the confines of this exercise. This map is a living document and is an iterative process. Take a snapshot every week to document how things have changed and what you've learned over time.

Reference: http://precoil.com/precoil-resources-page.html - by David Bland
https://designsprintkit.withgoogle.com/methodology/phase2-define/assumptions-mapping