

ICEBERG



What is it?

The iceberg is a classic model to aid thinking. Our minds tend to pay the most attention to what we can see above the surface - events and activities. But these are significantly shaped by what is happening underneath the water - by behaviours, systems and structures, and mental models.

When is it used?

It's useful to use the iceberg early in an innovation process, but after you've collected sufficient observations, insights, data, stories, and other inputs to populate it. Systems maps can be built and layered over time. Authors of an early systems map will see it in a certain way, and additional information and perspectives can then be added to surface early assumptions and add dimension that otherwise may have been missed.

How is it used?

1. Determine the boundary of your systems map - what will be included, what will be adjacent, and what will not be included. If not bounded well, you'll end up with an unwieldy map that doesn't give you useful information about your problem space.
2. Depending on the stage of your process, iceberg mapping may take a few different forms. The design team may make an early iceberg map together as part of the design brief. A workshop may focus on making shared maps of the problem space, from different perspectives. Individuals may make their own iceberg maps to surface their perspectives and information, and then these can be shared with each other to build a more diverse understanding of the problem space. The design team could use these to then generate themed systems maps that bring together these experiences, and show different dimensions of the question that you are working on.
3. Once you start seeing and working in systems, you can't unsee them and you'll find that they are all around you. So jump in!

More info:

Inspired by the works of Donella Meadows

