

# Actor Mapping

A Field Guide

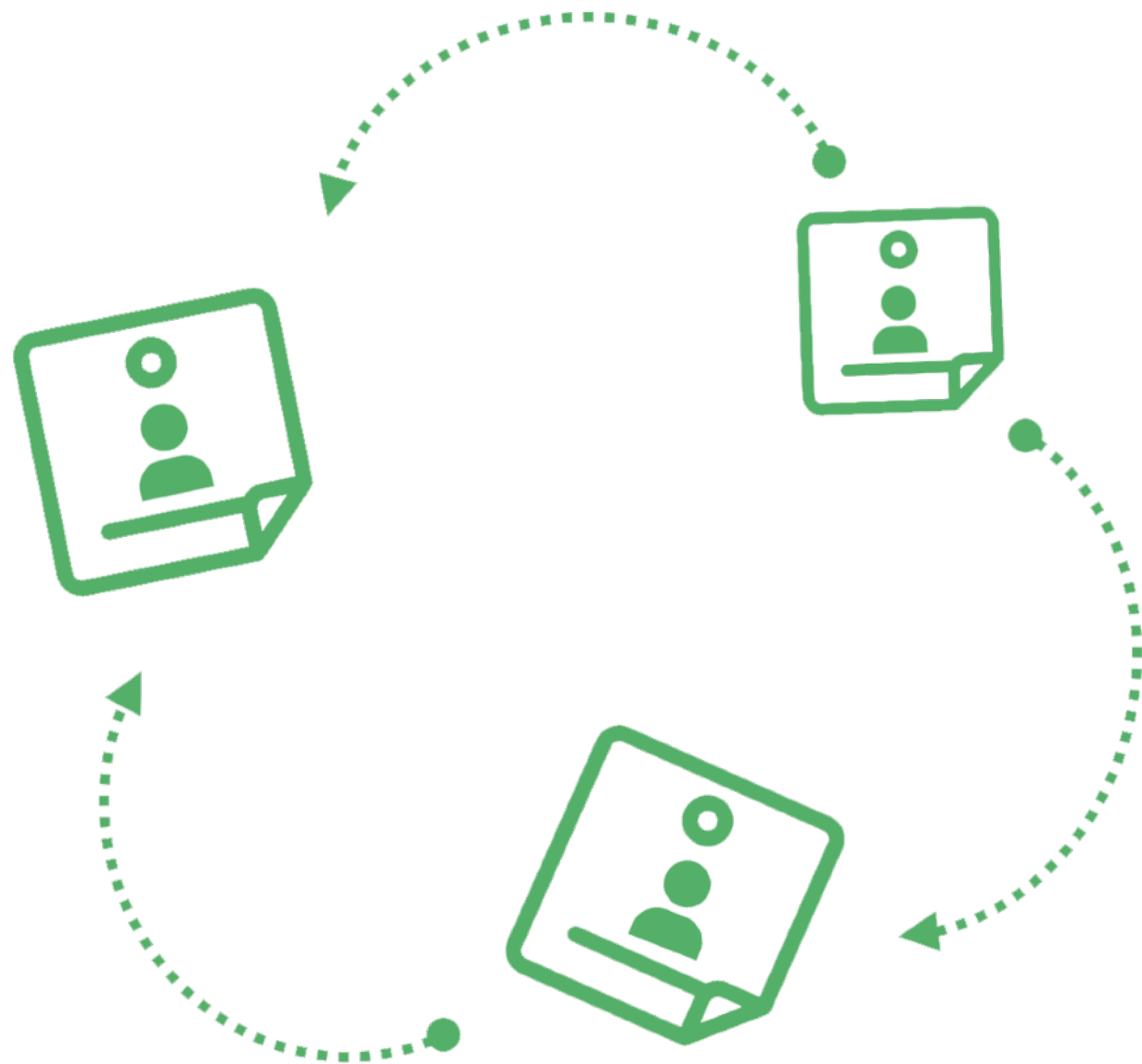




## Overview

Actor maps are a type of system map designed to reveal the network of people and organizations within a given system and how they are interrelated. The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the stakeholder's values, models, incentives and the power dynamics in the system. This is done by creating maps consisting of the various individuals and organizations that have a role in the system we wish to change.

With actor mapping, we are asking who are the individuals or organizations that have an influence in determining the pattern and outcomes of the system and who are influenced by it. These "stakeholders" have a stake in the outcomes to the organization and thus an interest in shaping events according to their stake. To be responsible in our systems change initiatives, we must be first aware of these actors, their perspectives and interests.



# Why Actor Maps?

## Involvement

Start to recognize who will be affected by a change process and thus who needs to be involved

## Opportunities

Find opportunities for alliances, collaboration and recognize potential points of conflict

## Identify Gaps

Identify where gaps to the flow of information or resources are as potential intervention points



## Communications

To understand the mental models and values of actors so that we can better speak their language

## Explore Perspectives

Build up a better understanding of the system by looking at it from the different perspectives of the actors

## Adoption

Understand how an adoption process may take place; who would be likely to resist or promote change

# Involvement

If we map out any complex organization, we will see that for almost every element on the map there will be a stakeholder; a person or group of people that have an interest in that aspect of the system. For example, if we are considering a food system we may have nodes representing the farmers, regulators, consumers, machinery manufactures, the water system, environment, etc. each one of these elements on the map will have an associated stakeholder that has an interest in the system being a certain way and the capacity to affect some aspects of its outcomes.

At the end of the day, stakeholders are the ones who control the state of the system and we need to understand them so that we can work with them and not against them - remember stakeholders can become "stick holders" if we get things wrong. As such, if we want to change a system we need to get both a comprehensive and detailed understanding of these stakeholders, their interests and potential actions and this is the aim of actor mapping.

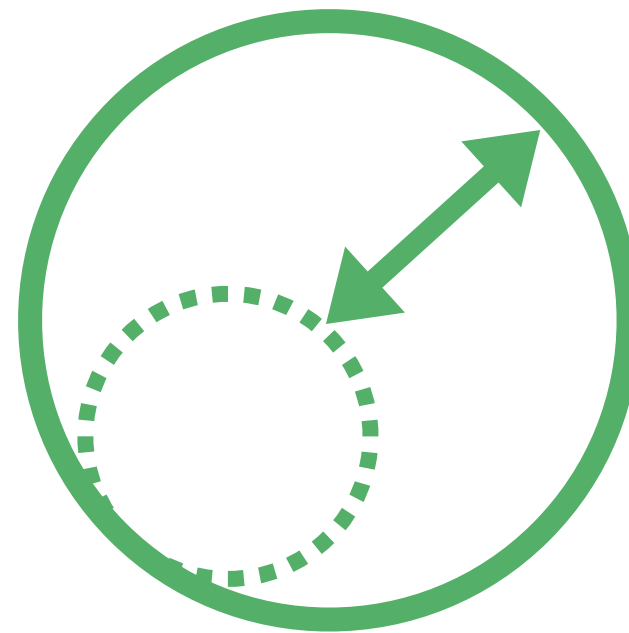


# Key Considerations



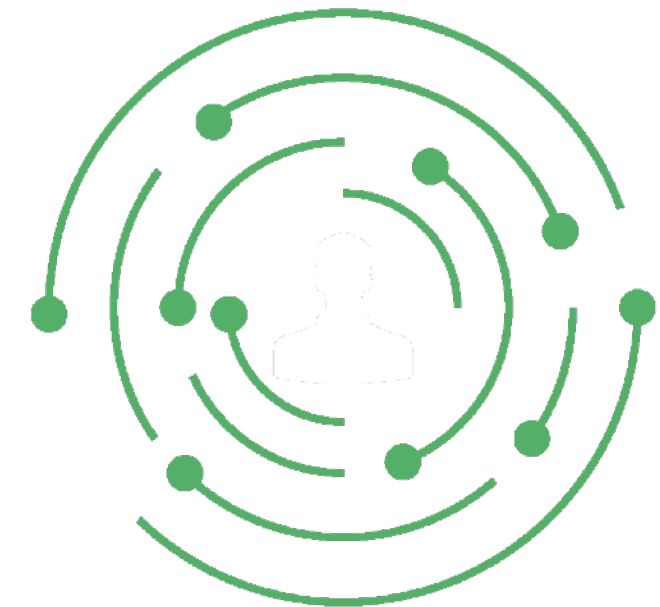
## Multi-Dimensional

People are multidimensional, they have values, a view of the world, incentives, power, etc. and we have to factor in these different aspects.



## Multi-Scale

To understand potential externalities, we need to consider actor groups on different levels, from the individual to organizational but also whole ecosystems.



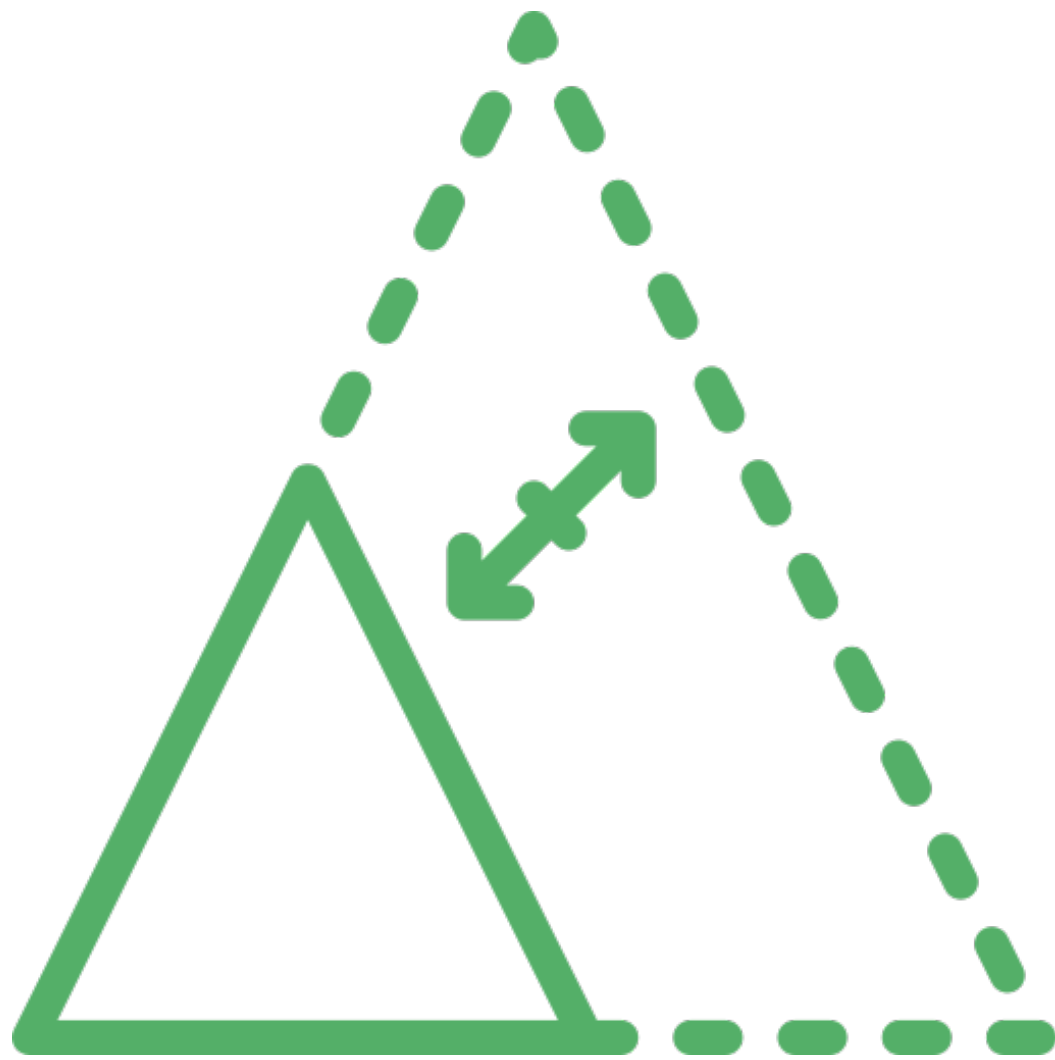
## Multi-Perspective

To build up a more comprehensive picture of the whole we need to try and view the system from the many different dimensions of the actors within it.

## Multi-Scale

One reason systems change is complex is because typically many parties are involved with each having their own interests, goals, and strategies. Large scale change will involve many alterations across the system with many actors being affected in many different ways. In this process of considering who will be affected by our interventions and how they will be affected, we need to think across different levels and scales.

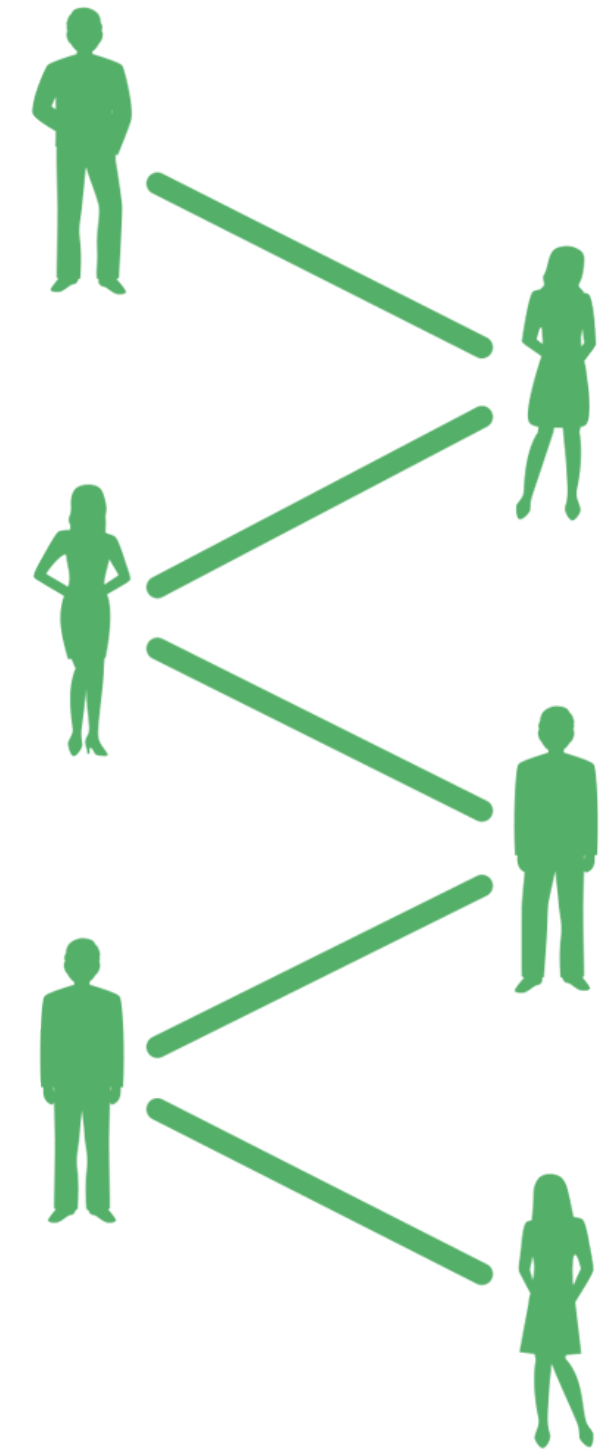
The aim should be to consider actor groups on different levels to better understand potential externalities. Taking a holistic approach means considering not just the immediate individuals and organizations that will be affected but to step back to think of whole communities and ecosystems. This implies considering not just the immediate effects of an action but also the ramifications across different systems - to factor in the externalities, both positive and negative, so that they do not become our stumbling blocks but can provide us with added opportunities.



# Multi-Perspective

Complex systems involve a vast array of actors with many different perspectives, simply having one global view of the system is not sufficed. We need to build up our view of the whole from the specific vantage points of the different individuals within it. Think of the global financial system, it affects almost every person on this planet, but in very different ways. Each of us experiences this system from our own historical, social, economic and geographical context with our own set of interests shaping our perspective.

Reality is about context, everything happens in the context of space and time and involves people interacting with the system based upon their own unique set of conditions. Gaining a grasp of a system through an abstract model is valuable but this model does not exist in reality. Our model and understanding of a system have to be enriched and brought to life through seeing it from the perspective of the lived experiences of the people who form part of it and use it daily. From this, we can start to understand better why the system is the way it is; why the individuals perpetuate the system patterns and the opportunities for changing those patterns.





# Multi-Dimensional



We all have values, a view of the world, we form part of social structures with incentives and based upon that we make decisions and take actions that affect outcomes. However, we are not simply rational agents trying to maximize against a mono-dimensional conception of value, as humans, we value different things and make trade-offs between them in our decisions.

We have values, a way of looking at the world and an identity, we form part of social structures of incentives and power, and thus, in reality, the choices we make and the way things play out are a product of these many different dimensions to ourselves. As such for a solution to be viable it has to create value for all along different dimensions. Looking at a system we wish to change in terms of the different kinds of value to the different actors is an important consideration. If we don't understand and factor in those different dimensions then we are unlikely to create a solution that is sustainable and viable in the long run.



## Identity

We want to first identify the relevant parties



## Analyst

Analyze the actors and relations



## Prioritize

Prioritize the actors in relation to our change initiative

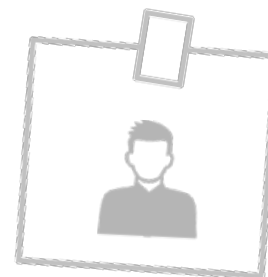
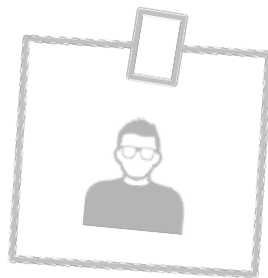


# Actors



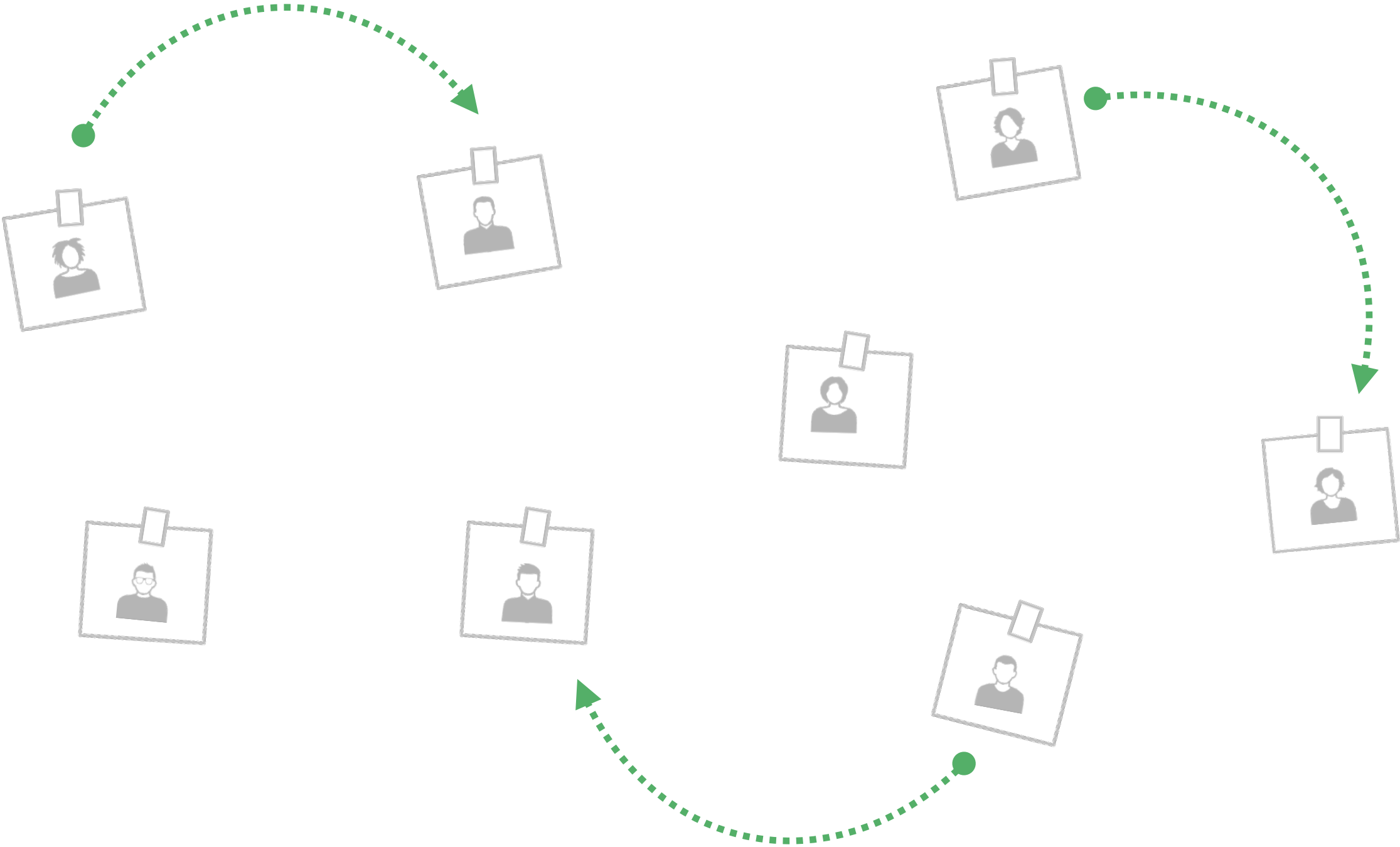
# List of stakeholders

To get started, determine who needs to be involved and from this create a list of stakeholders who form part of the system



# Actor Relations

What are the connections between them?





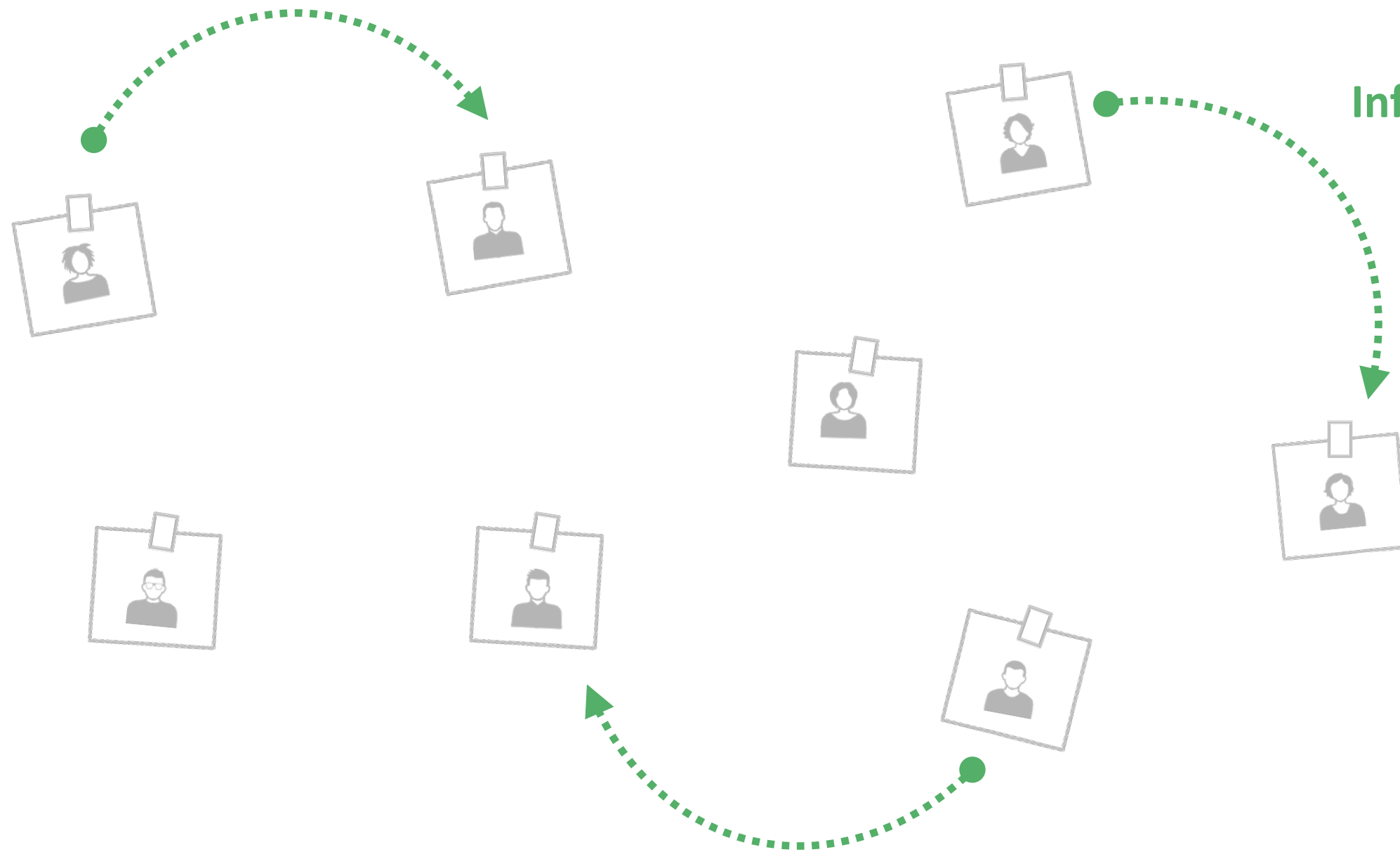
Finance



Information

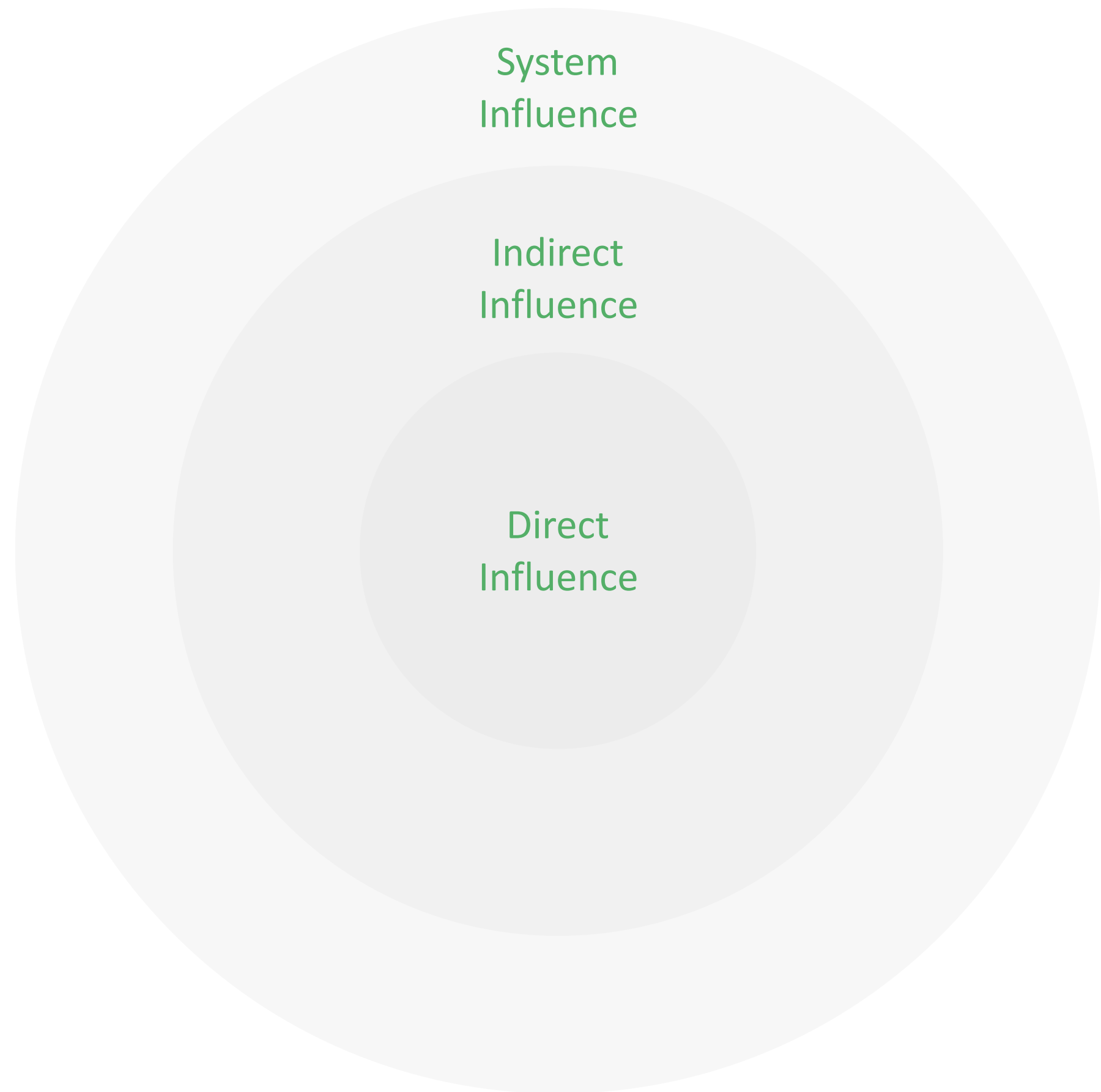


Products



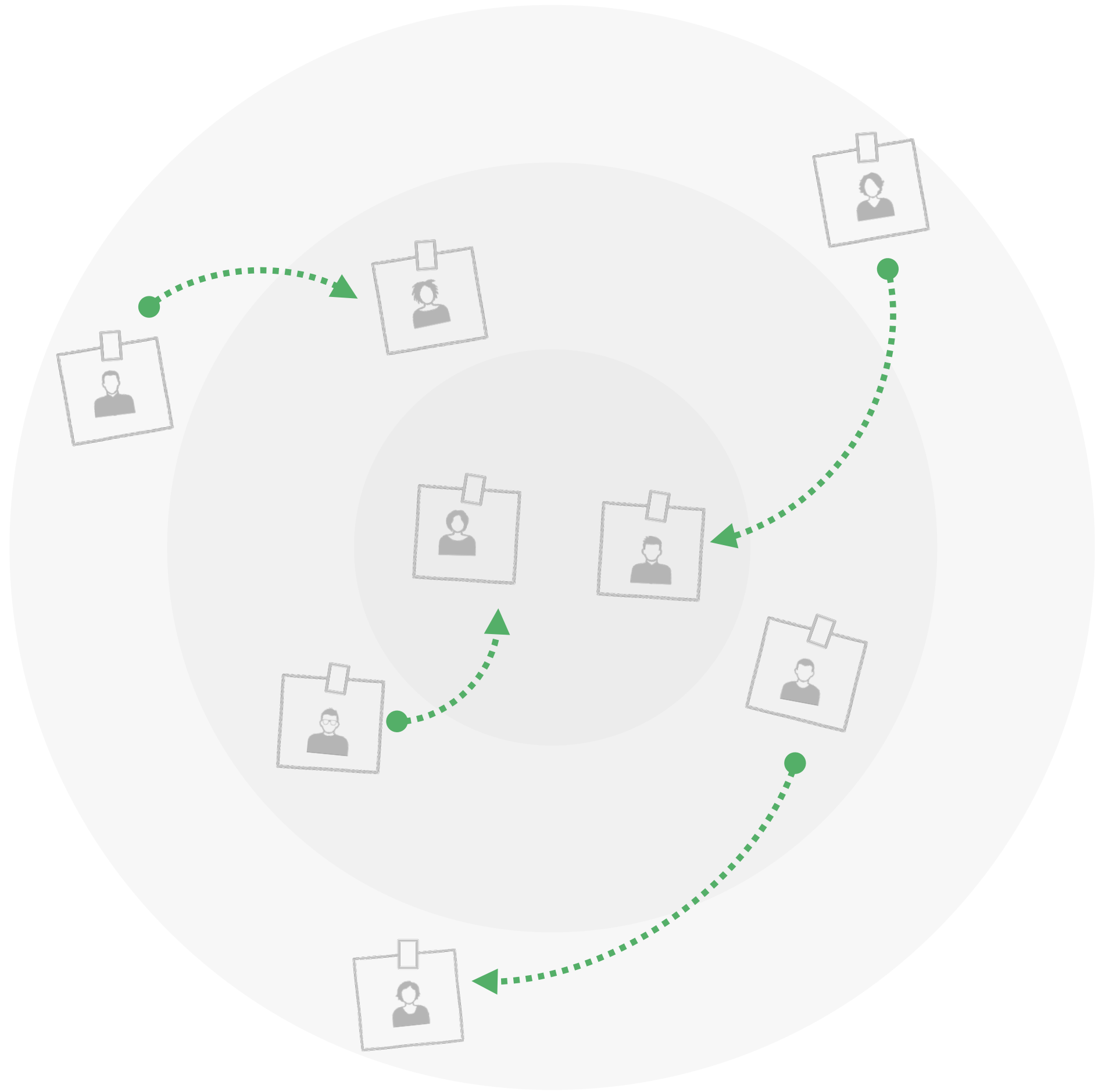
## Determine Relevance

Different actors will have different levels of engagement with the issue of interest









# Stakeholder Persona

Now to get to know the actors



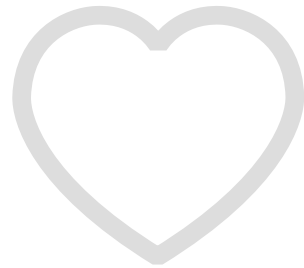
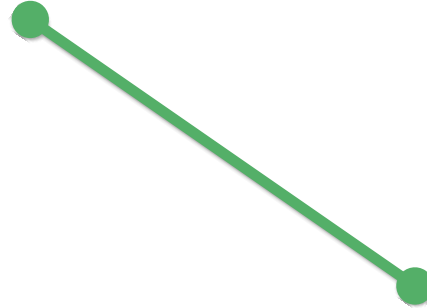
# Ethnography

Get to know the actors in the system through ethnographic studies. Ethnographic studies involve completely immersing oneself in the lives, culture, or situation of the people or organizations we are interested in over some time. We enter and spend a significant amount of time in the real environment needed to be observed to gain insight into actors, the context they find themselves within and how they behave in that environment.

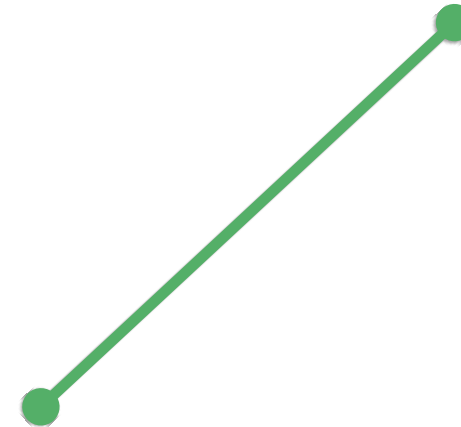
In the process, we try as best we can to not alter the context or project our meaning on to it. In order to understand not just what people say but also what they do the researcher must observe people as they go about their daily activities without disrupting them. Over time the insights drawn can be built up into a persona that captures key information while ensuring that it matches the underlying experience of the actors.

# Factors to Consider

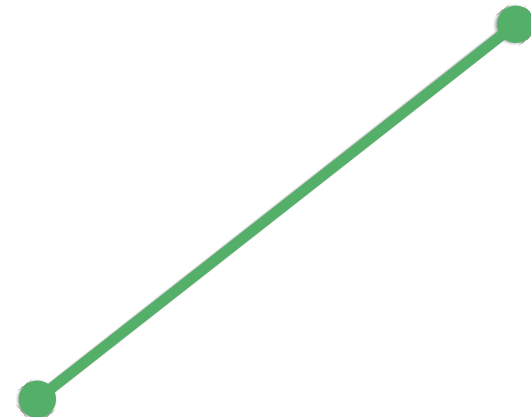
Values



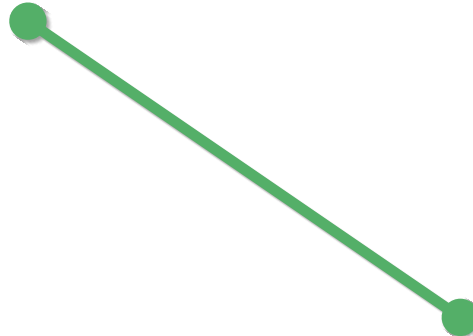
Models



Power



Incentives



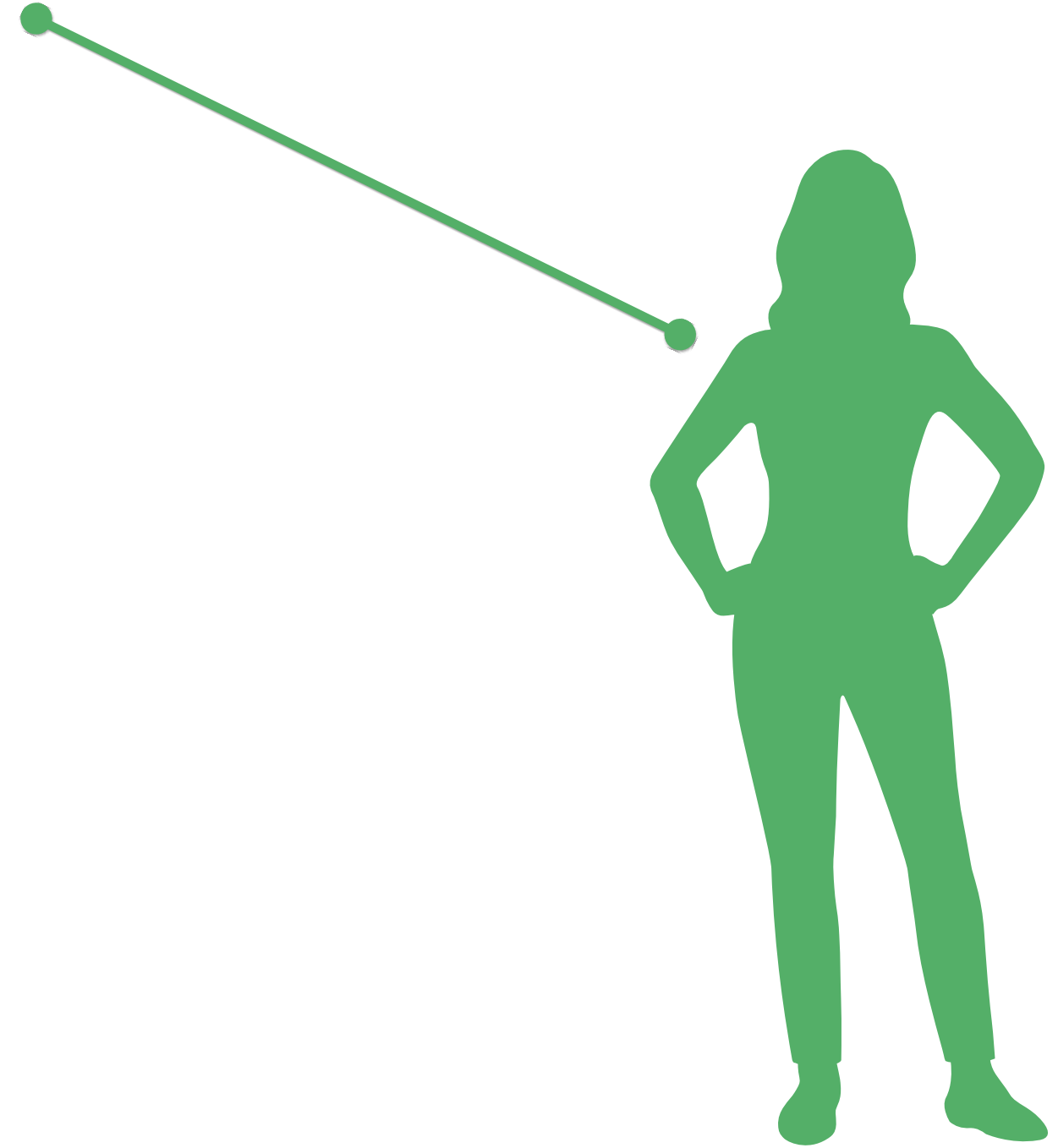
# Values

What are the values?

What are the stories those values create?

How do those values create the assumptions?

What is the accepted paradigm?





## Models

What are the models people use to understand the system, who they are and what they are doing?  
What are the concepts and the language used?  
What are the perspectives created by the models?  
What are the knowledge gaps created?

# Incentive

What are the assets and resources in the system?  
How do resources flow through the system?  
How do those flows create the incentives?  
How do those incentives motivate actors?  
Where are the potential points of cooperation  
or conflict created by those motives?







## Power

What are the sources of power?  
What are the sources of legitimacy?  
What are the rules?  
Who gets to alter the rules?  
For whom do the rules favor?



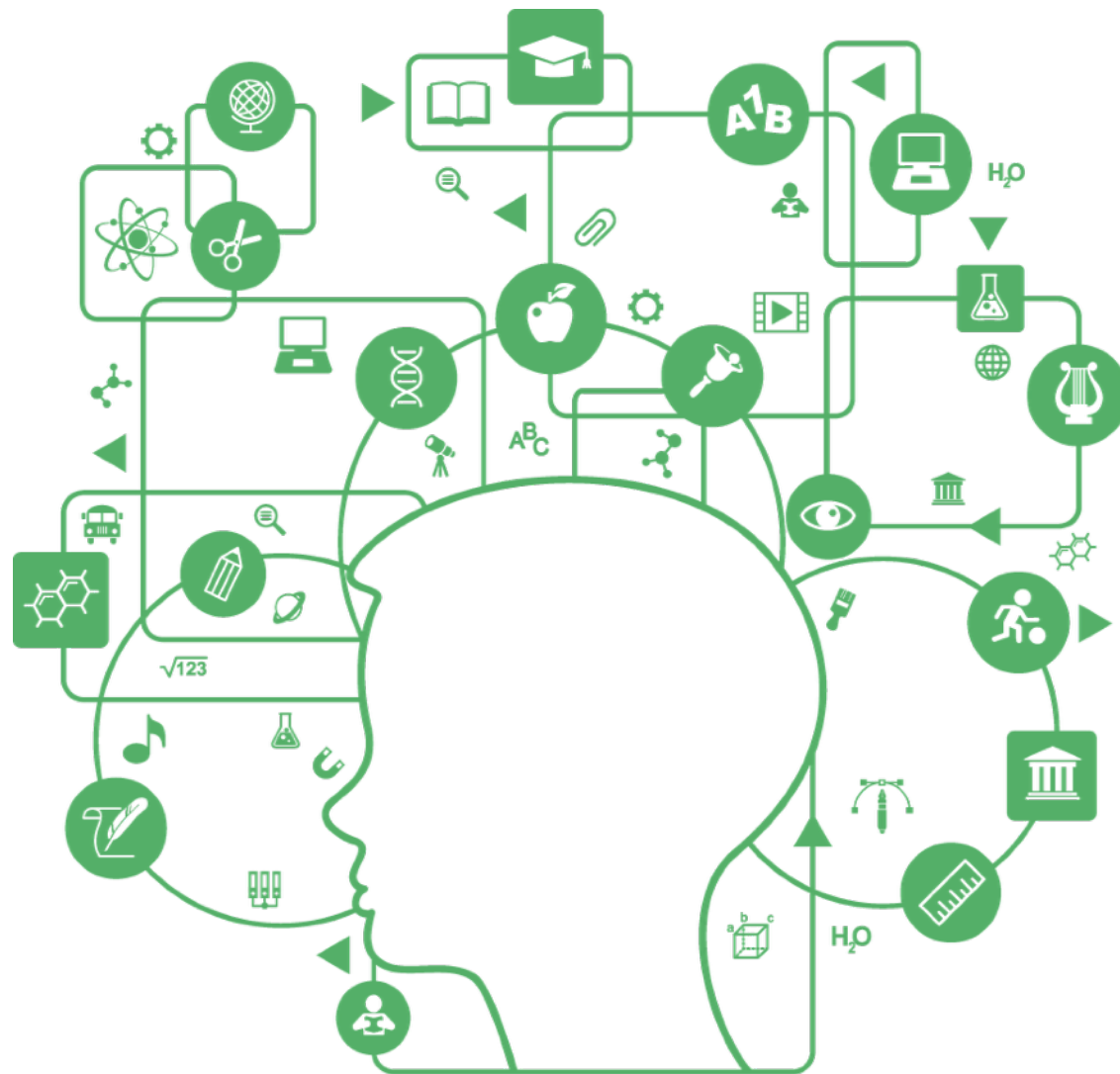


# Values & Models

# Value Mapping

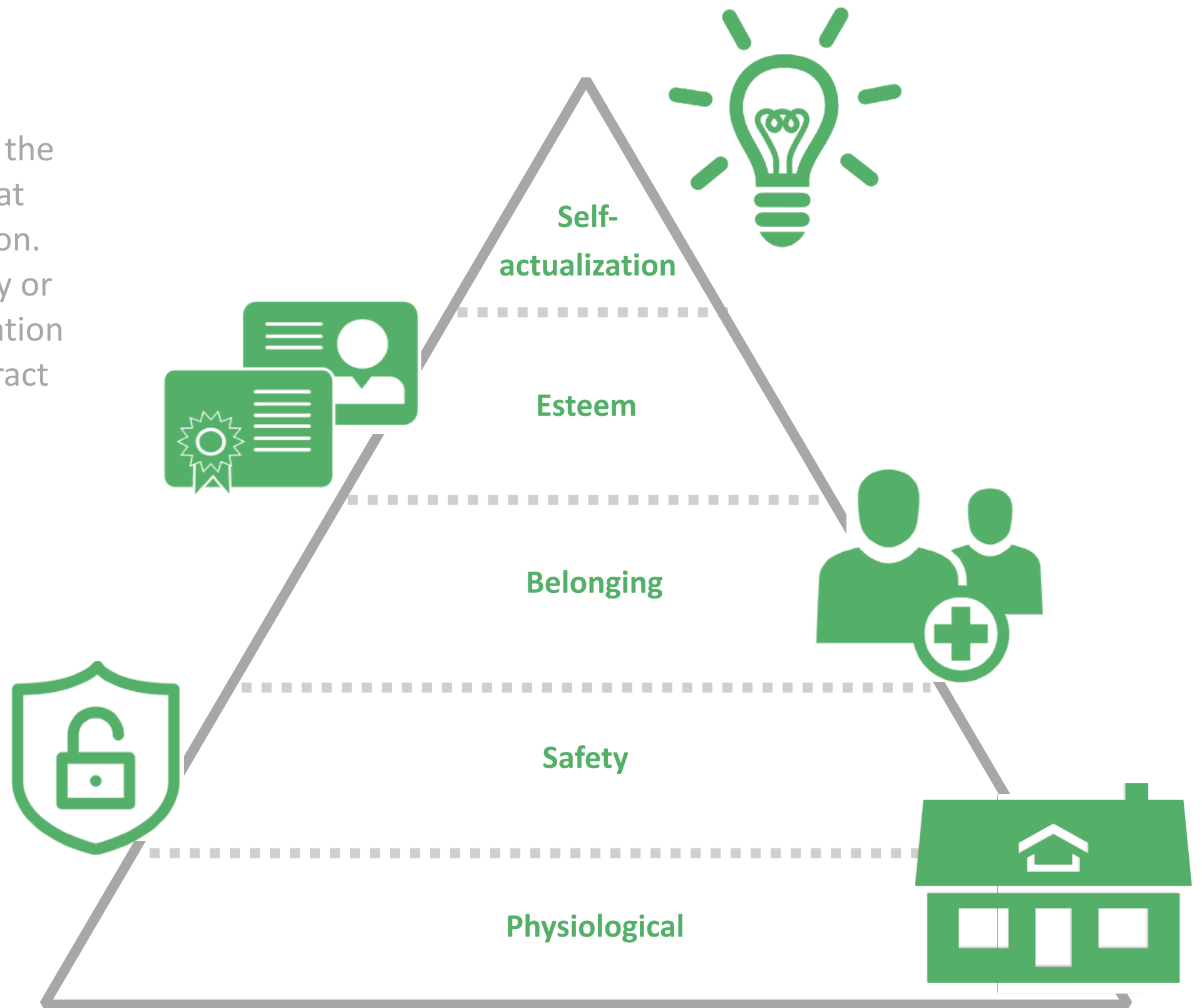
Mental models and the values that shape them are at the foundations of how we see the world and act upon it to create the environments we inhabit. Values are like a compass that directs our lives. They guide what we move towards or away from by defining what is of higher or lower value to us. Values rank what is good or bad, better or worse, and in so doing they give structure to our world. These rankings then work to motivate or demotivate us. To get a deep insight into the workings of the system we wish to change we are going to have to map these out; visualize the values and beliefs of the different actors in the system.

Values define our broad preferences concerning appropriate courses of actions and outcomes. As such, values reflect a person's sense of right and wrong. Values are, and probably always will be, a major source of conflict in the world, however, by learning how to elicit and work with values we can begin to understand what is important to the actors and why they do what they do.



# Hierarchy of Needs

Values can be mapped in many ways, one of the most common is the hierarchy of needs that structures values in terms of their abstraction. People pursuing basic needs of food, security or economic welfare, will differ hugely in motivation and worldview to those pursuing more abstract motivation such as self-realization.



# Motivation

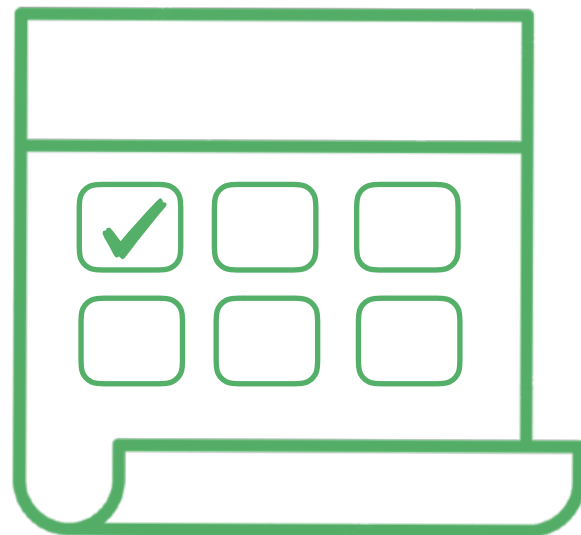


The hierarchy of needs model helps to illustrate how values are what motivates us. Values are the "why" of what people do and can differ hugely - for one person going backpacking in Thailand makes no sense, for another it is a path to self-discovery. These values are probably more important than anything else in shaping what we do.

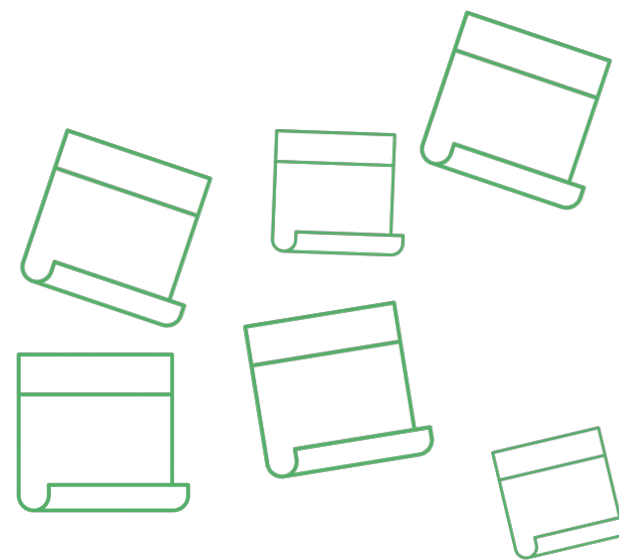
Our values might be something that we take for granted that we think is obvious, or that we've never actually articulated or written down. Revealing these values, however, can be very useful when trying to explain why things work the way they do. Once the values are mapped, they can be shared and act as a common reference point that simplifies and speeds up decision making.

# How it Works

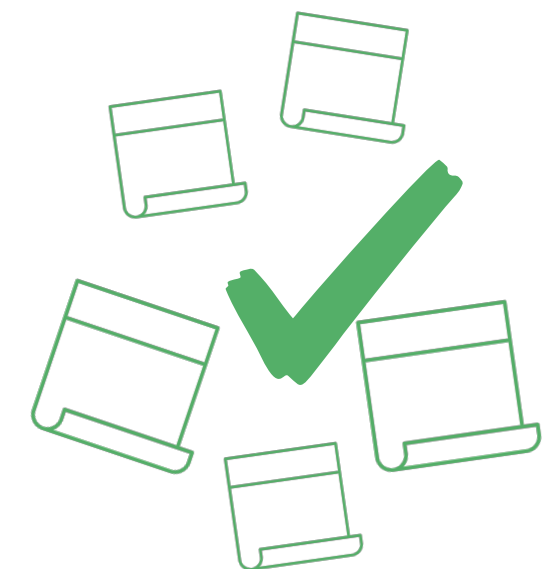
We can elicit and map values by using a value mapping work sheet. Create a sheet with different sections where individuals can write down what is of importance to them or not so important.



Have individuals fill out their values



Now compile these together and cluster them



See where the overlaps exist

# Conceptual Models

Robert Pirsig in his famous book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* illuminated the importance of models when he wrote: "If a factory is torn down but the rationality which produced it is left standing, then that rationality will simply produce another factory. If a revolution destroys a government, but the systematic patterns of thought that produced that government are left intact, then those patterns will repeat themselves."

Mental models and the values that shape them are at the foundations of how we see the world and act upon it to create the environments we inhabit. To get a deep insight into the workings of the system we wish to change we are going to have to also add these to our map to represent the values and beliefs of the different actors in the system.





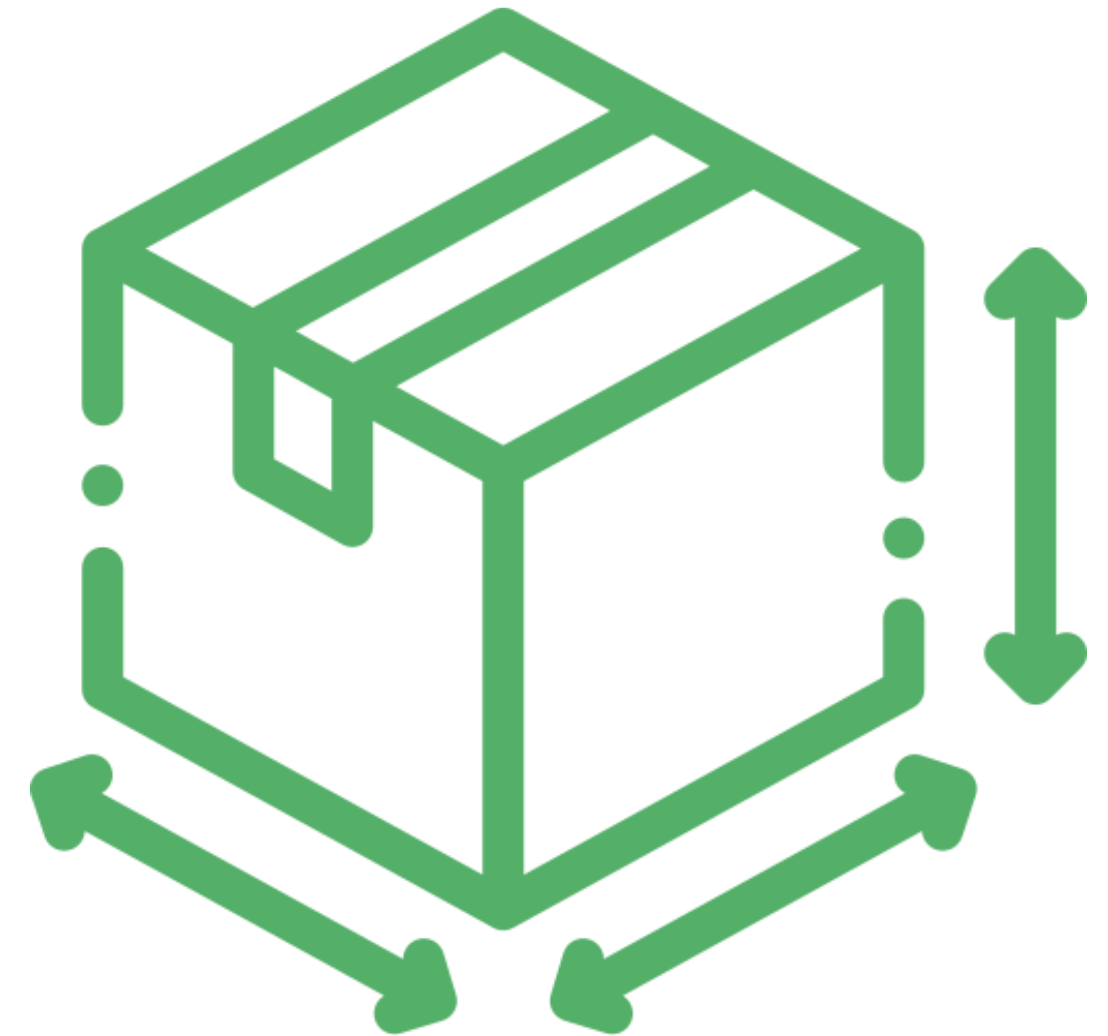


## Thinking

All of these systems that we might be interested in changing are created by us, by the models that the people in the system hold and act upon. Virtually every problem we will encounter in the world can ultimately be traced back to a socio-cultural one. If you dig far enough into the water crisis, environmental degradation, inequality, or cybersecurity you will find that it is not really about lack of water, lack of land, lack of money or computer code, as it may appear, it is more about people and how they see the world; how our models and thinking constrain us to a certain subset of solutions.

## Boxes

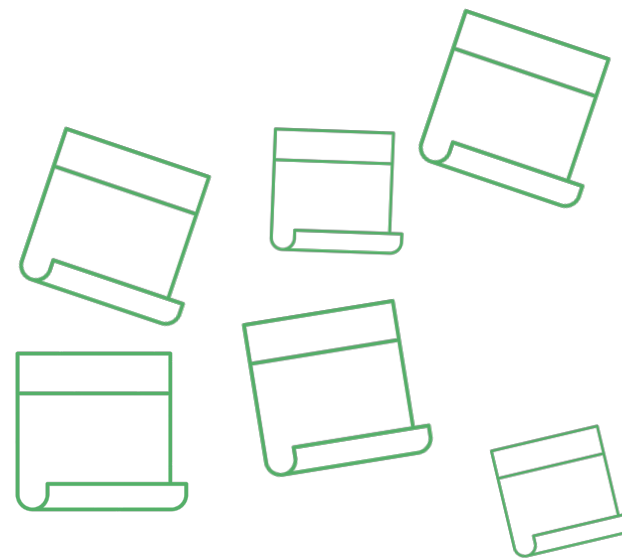
Every community and organization comes to form its own culture, story and shared way of seeing the world. Biologists, doctors, accountants, engineers, each community has its own paradigm, assumptions, stories, and way of seeing the world. This is expressed in the institutional structures that we create and the result is a world of boxes. The problem is the gaps created between them, all those things that don't fit into the boxes. We should be asking, what are the boxes that the paradigm and models lock us into? What are the knowledge gaps between them?



# Eliciting Models



Create questions for people to fill out about how they understand the system



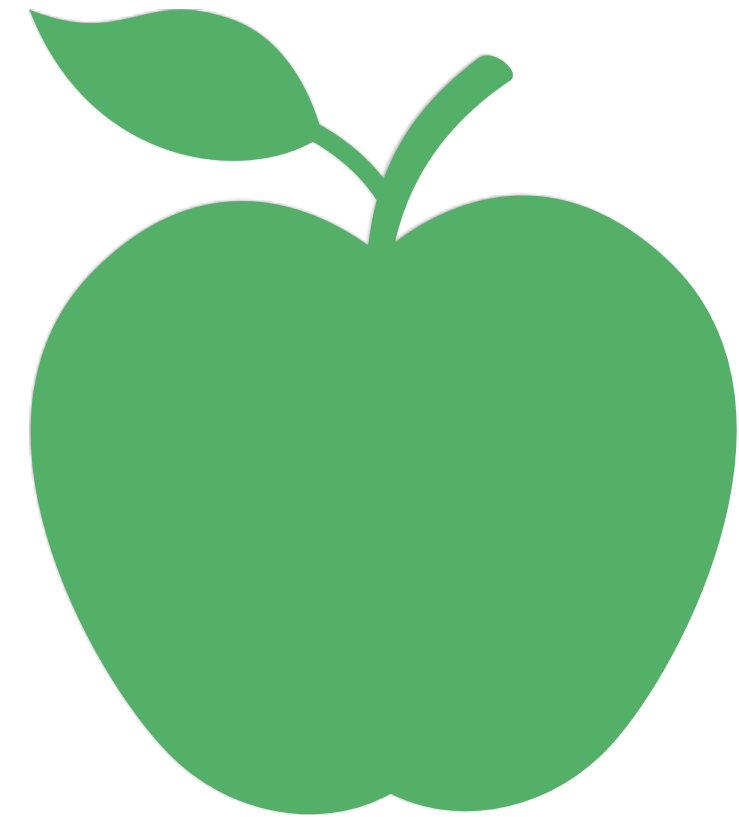
Cluster them to see where actor's mental models align



Identify main concepts and themes



# Incentives & Motivation



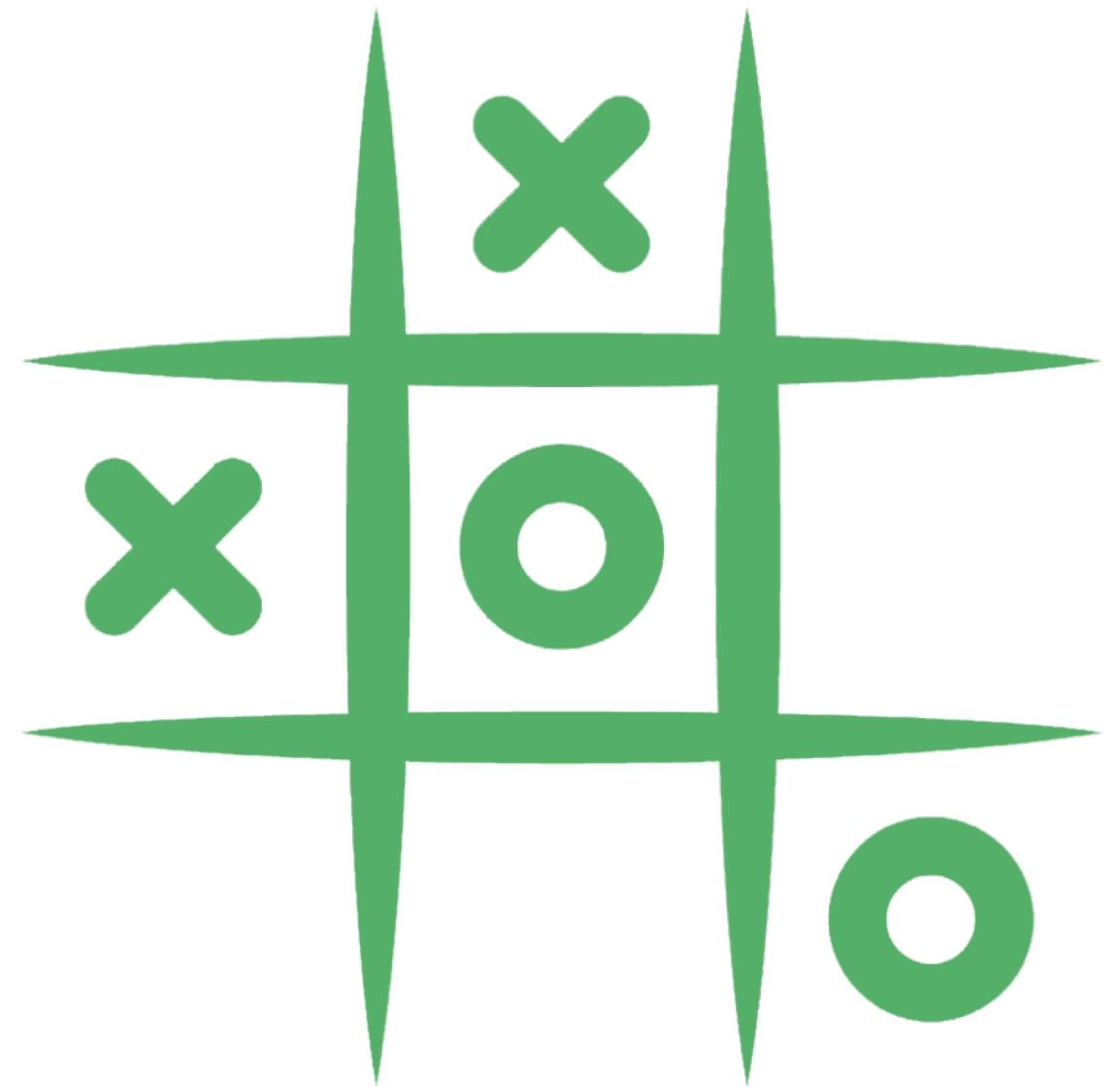
# Overview

Charlie Munger once said, “Show me the incentive and I'll show you the outcome.” Understanding the structure of incentives in the system is key to understanding how and why it operates the way it does and why it continues on the same path - irrespective of what the stakeholders may say.

For every node on a system map, we will see that the node can have a state that may be deemed better or worse for that actor. The actors who have a stake in a given node are motivated to improve their stake; improve their value as they define it. This creates a set of motives and direction for their decisions and actions. Ethnographic studies, here again, are important to understand what it is people really value and the incentives they experience locally.

# Games

In this context, we can understand the actors in terms of their goal-orientated behavior, i.e. each actor has some model as to what they value and they take actions to affect their environment in order to achieve more of whatever it is they define as valuable. As the actors pursue their valued ends they come in to contact and become interdependent in dynamics of cooperation and competition - we can call this a “game”. In game theory, a game is any context within which agents interact and in so doing become interdependent in attempting to achieve their valued ends. We need to get an understanding for not just the points of possible collaboration but also the points of competition and where they lie is largely a function of the structure of incentives.





## Incentives

Incentive mapping is important because it lets us see the somewhat invisible fields of incentives that are acting on all of us everyday. In our investigation we should be asking: what are the resources in the system? How do they flow through it? How do those flows influence the actors? Take for example the flow of drugs and associated money through Central America that has distorted the social and economic institutions of many of those nations.

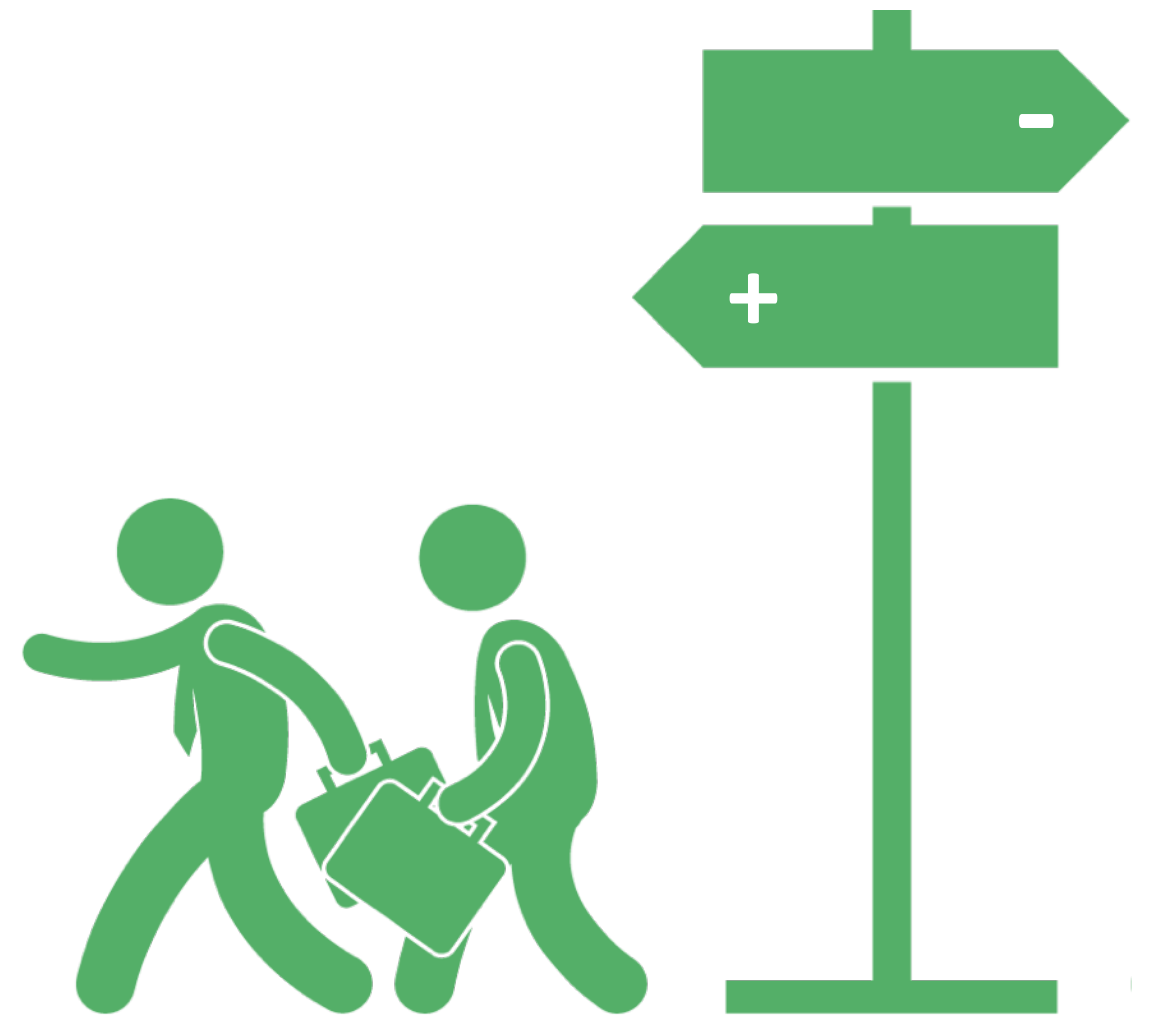
Investigating these incentives will tell us a lot about the underlying structure of why and where conflict, competition, and cooperation arise and why. It also points us in the direction of possible ways to alter those incentives to realize new outcomes.



## Positive & Negative Incentives

If we want to change a system we need to be aware of how the incentives are working to either resist it or as potential sources for enabling it. A subtle combination of positive and negative incentives are used by organizations to direct us in different ways; to enable or inhibit actions.

Incentives can be both positive and negative. Positive incentives are rewarding while negative incentives are punishing. A positive incentive would be like a bonus payment for doing something, while a negative one could be a fine. For example, as part of environmental regulation, the government will use a combination of negative incentives such as banning certain polluting activities, but will also use positive incentives such as subsidies for certain activities that are seen to be beneficial to the environment.

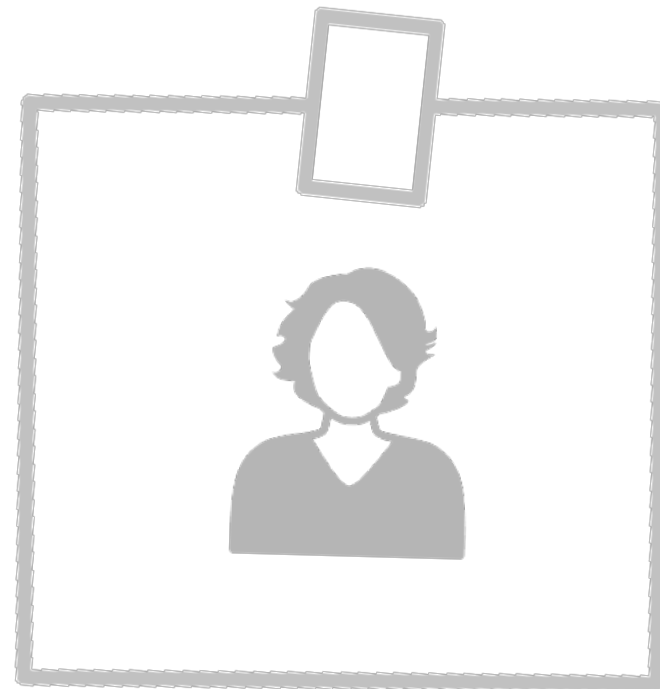


# Actor Incentives

What are the motivations of the actors in the system?

What do they want to achieve or do?

What are the outcomes they want to see realized?







# Power Mapping

# Overview

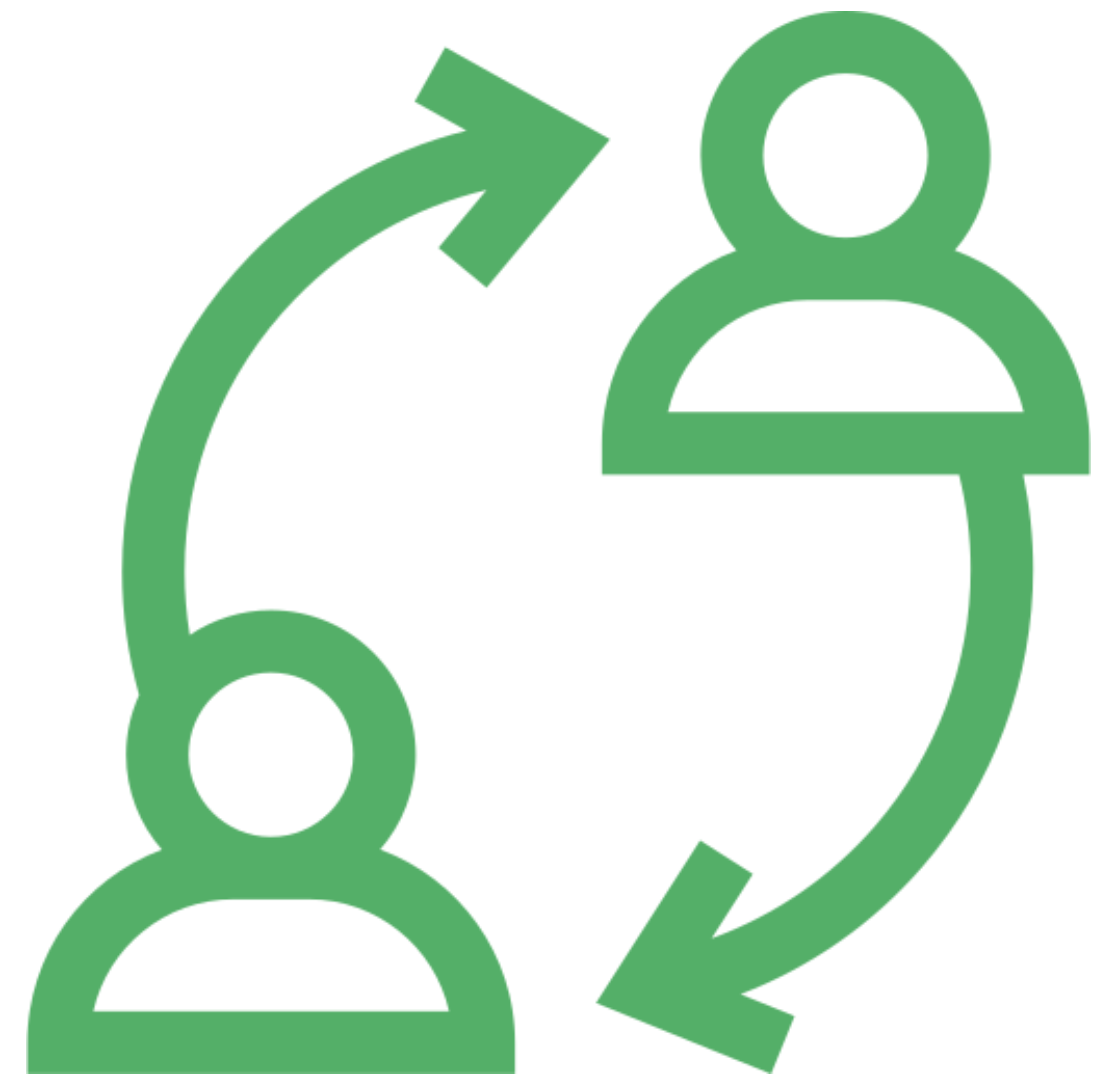
As Alex Nicholls once said: "power is what perpetuates systems." Because of this systemic change almost always involves changes in power dynamics, it reveals new forms of power and challenges the status quo. Thus nurturing an ecosystem requires a deep awareness of power: Who has influence? What kind of influence do they have? Who does not have any influence? Likewise, we need to understand this power distribution not just in the abstract but in practice through ethnographic studies.

Power mapping refers to a set of tools and processes that enable us to analyze power relationships and start to create strategies for change. Power mapping is a visual method for representing the sphere of a person or group's influence in the system. The power map tool helps to visualize who we may need to influence, to clarify leverage points and where to try and build coalitions that may have systems-level influence.

# What is Power?

Let's start with a basic definition. Power is the ability to make others do what you would have them do. The key question is; what are the means through which actors can realize their ends irrespective of the interests of others? There are many forms of power, force, money, norms, ideas, mass mobilization, etc.

Power is to social relations what physics is to objects, we may not like to talk about power but it is always there. Power is no more inherently good or evil than technology, it just is. Power is dynamic, like water, it flows like a current through everyday life. It determines who gets to make decisions and who decides the rules of the game. Actor mapping should involve an attempt to: identify the different kinds of power, who has it, what is the legitimacy for holding the different kinds of power and how does that affect the potential for change or create resistance to it.





### **Legitimate**

Seen to be legitimate and a valid source of authority



### **Expert**

Perceived high level of competency and knowledge



### **Referent**

Charismatic form of power through attracting others and loyalty

# Types of Power

French and Raven's Six Forms of Power



### **Reward**

Capacity to provide others with incentives



### **Coercive**

Capacity to exert force inducing others to act



### **Information**

Capacity to control the flow of information

# Influence

Determine the influence of the actors - which members are influential, important or have potential.

Identify their importance according to different dimensions of influence





# Alignment of Interests

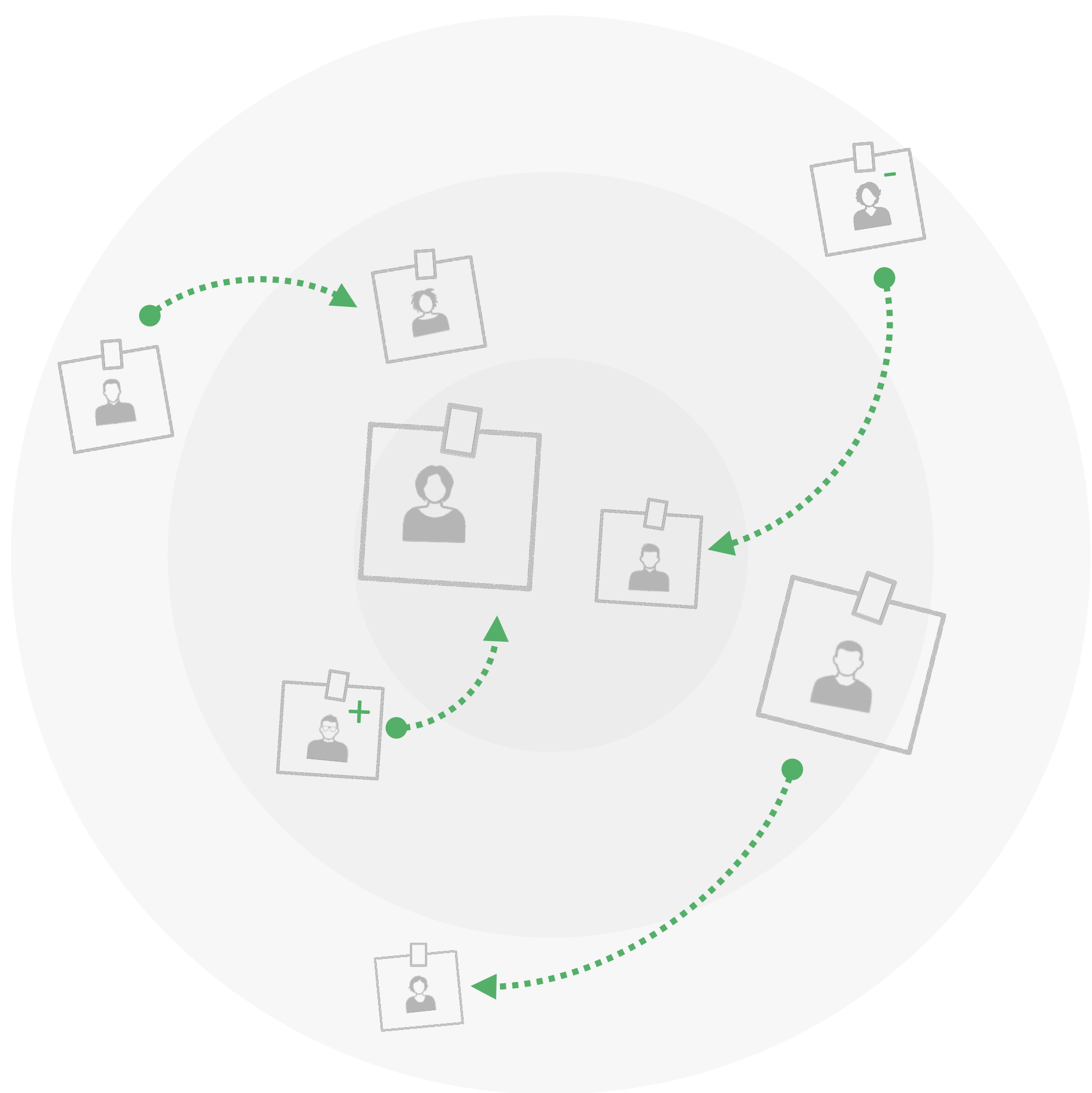
Try and determine the motives, objectives and goals of the relevant actors.  
Are their motives and agenda aligned with the changes you wish to see take place.





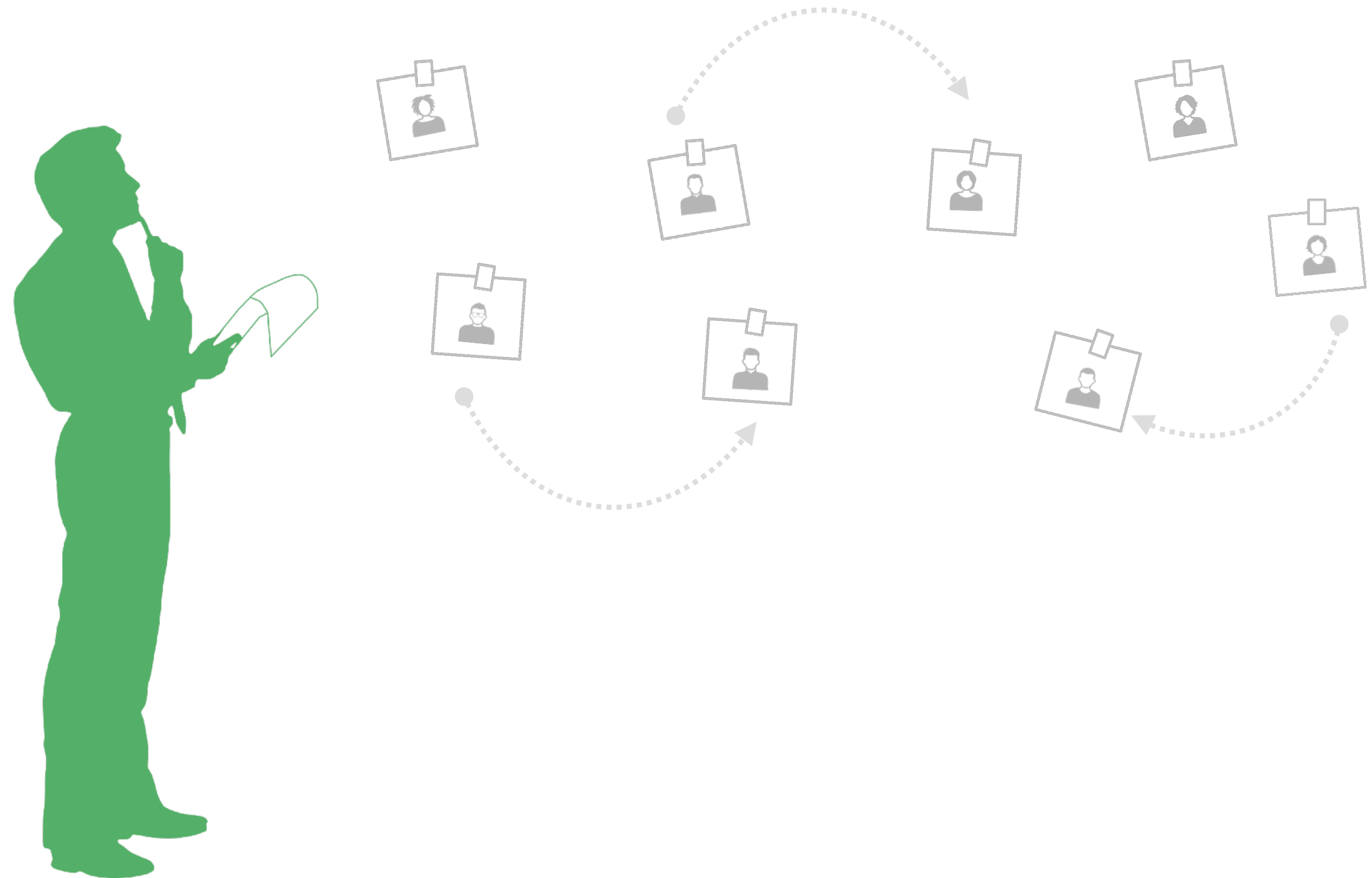
# Map

Place the stakeholders on the map, scaling them according to their level of importance.



# Observe

Now step back and look at the map from the perspective of the different actors involved.





# Conclusion





Version 1.1

A Systems Innovation Publication

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