Social Presencing Theatre

4D Stakeholder Mapping for Systems Change

BEING | Presence

What you will need:

- 8 - 24
- Group
- 2 hrs preparation
- 1.5 - 2 hrs execution
- Name tags or labels for roles, seats positioned in a circle

Related Tools:

- Body Awareness
- Inside-Outside Presence

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"4D Mapping lets students experience the interconnections within complex systems through embodied roleplay. By engaging the body, not just the mind, this method reveals hidden dynamics and opens space for deeper insight and transformation."

—Jaro Pichel

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I. Overview

Social Presencing Theatre (SPT) is an arts-based change methodology that encompasses various embodied learning practices that can be useful when working with complex societal and environmental issues in the classroom (Hayashi, 2021).

Using our physical and social body, this practice can help to unravel complex questions by exploring underlying dynamics that keep systems stuck and identifying key leverage points for transformation.

As such, it can complement more cognitive-based approaches to systems thinking by not only understanding but also sensing the system and its interconnected relationships (Scharmer, 2018).

Learning outcome

- The student is able to cultivate open-ended presence, using bodily senses to deepen their understanding of complex systems while embodying their role within the social and ecological whole

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II. Learning Activity

Using embodied practices to explore and reveal hidden dynamics in complex systems, students foster presence and a sense of connectedness while uncovering pathways for transformative change.

1. Introducing the Method 10 mins

Introduce students to Social Presencing Theatre (SPT) and 4D Mapping methods, using the handout with background information for teachers.

You can choose to bring a predefined case yourself or ask students to prepare and propose cases in advance. Alternatively, you might devote one session to defining cases together with the group and use a second session for the actual 4D Mapping process. For inspiration, see the case examples provided.

Conclude the introduction with a brief somatic warm-up to help students become present in their bodies. For example, a short moment of silence, slow movement or noticing posture and breath.

Tip: refer to Step 1 of Inside-Outside Presence for a warm–up exercise.

2. Co-Initiating 10 mins

Present the case that will be explored through 4D Mapping. If students have prepared the case themselves, invite them to give a short introduction. If you've brought the case, provide sufficient context and clearly describe the roles that will be used.

Remind students that when stepping into the space, they do not represent what a role

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should be or *should become*. Instead, they enter with an open mind and open body, embodying the role as it is — as they intuitively sense it. They express the quality of the role through a physical shape, not a performance.

Tip: before moving to Step 3, do a brief body-awareness exercise to help anchor attention and support presence. For instance, instruct students to sense the back of their body and the ground beneath their feet. Optionally, use the guiding questions of Step 1 of Body Awareness here.

3. Co-Sensing 20 mins

Call out the name of each role and hold up the matching card. Invite students to volunteer one by one, asking them not to pick a role that reflects their own daily position. Once chosen, each student attaches the card visibly to their shirt.

The players step into the space and choose a position based on their felt sense of the role, in relation to the centre, the edge and the other roles. Emphasise that this is not a performance, but an embodied exploration through posture, position and presence.

Encourage students to reflect on questions such as:

- "Am I bigger, smaller, in the centre or on the side?"
- "Do I feel powerful, weak or vulnerable?"

Once the player has found a shape, they speak one sentence from that shape, using the first person. For example:

- "I am the CEO, and I feel pressure from the board."
- "I am an employee, and I feel invisible."

Repeat this for all roles.

After everyone has entered, invite anyone who wishes to adjust their shape, level or position to better represent the current reality of the system. This becomes Sculpture 1.

Signal clearly that the group is now viewing Sculpture 1.

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Optionally, allow a final sentence or movement before moving on.

Remind those seated around the space that their role as space-holders is vital: they offer focused, non-judgmental attention.

Tip: some students may hesitate to take on a role. Reassure them it's a playful, open-ended exercise with no right or wrong way to do it. Participation is voluntary; if a particular role isn't chosen, simply place its card in the field so it remains part of the system.

4. Presencing & Crystallising

20 mins

Close Sculpture 1 with a short pause. Then, invite the players to transition into movement. Encourage students to begin by simply standing still, letting go of any fixed idea about what should happen next.

From there, they slowly begin to move. This movement unfolds gradually and intuitively, until the group arrives in a new, collective shape: Sculpture 2.

This phase usually takes 5–10 minutes. Allow the process to unfold without rushing.

Once the sculpture has come to a natural stop:

- Each player says the name of their role and one sentence that reflects their experience of this new configuration;
- The note-taker records what is said;
- You may also invite space-holders in the circle to offer one sentence, if they feel moved to speak.

Let students know that Sculpture 2 is not about figuring out the next shape, but about sensing into it. The movement should come from the inside, not from a mental plan. Encourage them to follow a felt impulse rather than asking themselves, "Where should I go?" or "What would make the most sense?"

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5. Generative Dialogue 20 mins

Guide a group reflection on the experience of moving from Sculpture 1 to Sculpture 2 using reflective questions. If the group is large, consider splitting it into smaller sub-groups for this dialogue.

Clarify that this is not a discussion or evaluation, but a space for collective reflection, focused on sensing, noticing and naming what happened.

Before closing the session, invite everyone to step out of their role consciously. You can do this by asking students to hand in their name tag or by physically "shaking off" the role with a light movement. This helps release the embodied role and restore a neutral sense of self.

Either choose to join the conversations yourself or ask students to report key outcomes. You can also take a moment to share your observations:

- Did the players engage with their role using their bodies, or did it feel more like a performance?
- What worked well in the exercise? What felt difficult or uncomfortable?
- How did students experience stepping into a role?
- How was it for others to observe the process from the outside?

These questions invite a meta-level reflection on the learning experience and can deepen students' understanding of embodiment, presence and systems sensing.

Please note, after the group reflection, as part of assessment *as* learning, students write a short individual reflection.

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III. Assessment

Following the group reflection, students reflect individually on their 4D Mapping experience, focusing on how they related to the system through embodied presence and/or awareness of complex dynamics, depending on their role.

Purpose

Assessment *as* learning aims to strengthen the learning process and the development of metacognitive skills. It empowers students to direct their own learning and to become independent, critical self-assessors.

Roles

Self-assessment and peer assessment

Characteristics

Self-regulated learning

Materials

Group reflection and individual reflective assignment

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Assessment

Reflective questions (Step 5)

You can use the questions below to guide the group reflection. You don't have to answer all of them; choose the ones that feel most relevant to your experience.

- Where did the change begin in the shift from Sculpture 1 to Sculpture 2? What set it in motion?
- Did your attention evolve during the process? If so, how?
- Did your sense of space, time, self or other shift? If so, how?
- If this were a film, what would its title be?
- What was your experience as a player or as a space-holder? What surprised you?
- What changed between Sculpture 1 and Sculpture 2? What are the three most striking differences?
- What insights or next steps emerged for you from this experience?

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Assessment

Individual reflective assignment

This individual reflection invites you to deepen your understanding of the 4D Mapping experience by exploring how you related to the system, through the body and your awareness of complex dynamics. Reflect on how open-ended presence helped you sense patterns, tensions or leverage points. Depending on your role (stakeholder or observer), you can focus more on presence or complexity awareness.

Assignment

Write a 500–750 word reflection that explores the two dimensions below:

1. **Presence**: Your inner experience, physical sensations, attention and openness during the activity.
2. **Complexity Awareness**: Your observations of systemic relationships, shifts or causalities that became visible through the mapping.

You can use the guiding questions below to support your reflection. You don't have to answer all of them; choose the ones that feel most relevant to your experience.

Presence

- What was it like to embody a role using through body and attention?
- Did your sense of space, time, self or other shift during the activity? If so, how?
- What helped you stay present and open? What made that difficult?

Complexity Awareness

- What relationships, patterns or dynamics in the system became visible through the mapping?
- Where did the change begin in the shift from Sculpture 1 to Sculpture 2? What set it in motion?
- What causalities or tensions did you sense or discover during the activity?
- What surprised you about the systemic configuration as a whole?

Integration

- How did being present help you understand something about the system that might otherwise have stayed hidden?
- What insight or question are you taking away from this experience?

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Your reflection will be assessed based on the following criteria:

Criteria	**Description**
Presence and engagement	The reflection shows attentiveness to bodily sensations, inner experience and presence in the process.
Complexity awareness	The student describes key dynamics, tensions or relationships that reveal complexity in the system.
Integration of dimensions	The reflection meaningfully connects embodied presence to insight into the system.
Clarity and depth	The writing is clear, coherent and reflective — not superficial or overly descriptive.

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IV. Key Advice

The **background information** and **case examples** (Step 1) can be downloaded below.

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Key Advice

Background on Social Presencing Theatre and 4D Mapping

As a teacher, it is important to familiarise yourself with the method in advance. Ideally, you have the chance to join a 4D mapping yourself, before applying it to your classroom. If this is not possible, this document will hopefully provide the necessary background information.

This tool builds on the method of Social Presencing Theatre (SPT), an embodied, arts-based approach to systems change developed by Arawana Hayashi in collaboration with the Presencing Institute. This document provides background for teachers to understand the principles behind the method and to prepare students for the 4D Mapping session.

What is Social Presencing Theatre?

SPT is a set of practices that combine movement, stillness, spatial awareness, and embodied dialogue to make visible what is often invisible in complex social systems. It allows groups to collectively see and sense themselves and uncover new pathways for transformation. The method draws on Theory U and focuses on creating the conditions for *presencing* — being fully present in the here and now, while sensing into emerging future possibilities.

Despite the word “theatre,” SPT is not about performance or acting. The word comes from the Greek *thea* — “a place for seeing”. In this context, it refers to a process of making visible dynamics, tensions, and possibilities within a social system.

SPT practices have been applied globally in business, government, education and civil society. At the heart of this tool is one of its core techniques: 4D Mapping.

What is 4D Mapping?

4D Mapping is a guided, embodied group practice that uses posture, movement and space to explore the current reality of a system and its potential future states. It helps reveal hidden dynamics, blind spots and deeper leverage points for change.

The process typically unfolds in two stages:

- Sculpture 1: Players embody the system as it currently is.
- Sculpture 2: They move into a shape that represents a possible emerging future.

Participants often report that just *seeing the system in motion* unlocks powerful insights and deepens awareness of complexity, roles and relationships.

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Case preparation and format

4D Mapping is always based on a concrete case and a complex question that relates to a societal issue. A good case:

- Includes 8–12 clearly defined roles (e.g. stakeholders or forces within the system);
- Involves no easy or predefined solution;
- Focuses on a system that is in transformation, such as housing, education or climate policy.

You can choose to bring a predefined case yourself or ask students to prepare and propose cases in advance. Alternatively, you might devote one session to defining cases together with the group and use a second session for the actual 4D Mapping process. For inspiration, see the case examples provided under Key Advice, which are drawn from *Social Presencing Theatre: The Art of Making a True Move* by Arawana Hayashi (2021).

Examples of suitable questions:

- "What would transform higher education in the Netherlands to be relevant for society?"
- "What would empower youth to learn, earn and contribute to sustainable development in Cambodia?"

Tip: Even the act of discussing and clarifying a case is instructive as it already deepens understanding of the system.

Roles and space

- There are two main types of roles: players and space-holders.
- A facilitator guides the process, and a note-taker writes down key phrases spoken during the mapping.
- The ideal group size is 8 to 12 players, with the rest as space-holders seated in a circle.
- The quality of collective attention is essential. Both types of roles are vital.

Suggested role types

- Structural or systemic actors (e.g. institutions, leadership);
- Marginalised or excluded perspectives;
- Environmental or ecological dimensions,
- A role that embodies the highest future possibility of the system (aspirational role).

Tip: Use role cards with visible labels to support clarity and engagement during the session.

This handout is based on insights from https://www.u-school.org/4dmapping and https://arawanahayashi.com/spt/.

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Key Advice

Case Examples of 4D Mapping in Practice

Hayashi, A. (2021) Social Presencing Theatre*: The Art of Making a True Move.* PI Press.

Application of 4-D Mapping to Systems Transformation in Cambodia: Youth-Led Collaborative Venture Lab
by Manish Srivastava

In 2018, the Presencing Institute worked with the Development Coordination Office within the Office of the UN Secretary General to pilot the SDG Leadership Lab in Cambodia. In 2016, the United Nations members adopted the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to achieve a better world for people and the planet by 2030. A key element of the Cambodia process was the Youth-Led Collaborative Venture Lab, which brought together leaders from UN agencies and from government, business, and civil society, along with Cambodian youth representatives, to generate a cross-sectoral partnership road map for addressing the challenges faced by youth in Cambodia. As facilitators, our role was twofold: to help this diverse group of leaders see and sense the systemic challenges together, and to support their development of partnerships and projects.

A few weeks before the lab, we formed a design team of young leaders within UN Cambodia. The team interviewed all youth stakeholders and invitees and summarized their reflections into one question: What would empower youth to learn, earn, and contribute to sustainable development in Cambodia?

We then asked them to identify ten roles of stakeholders who mattered most for transforming the ecosystem supporting youth in Cambodia. We guided them to keep the three divides (ecological, societal, and spiritual) in mind while selecting roles. While facilitating the 4-D Mapping, I was a bit skeptical that such a diverse group would engage effectively with an embodiment-based creative process. To my surprise, Social Presencing Theater provided them a method to make visible their collectively felt reality beyond the limitations of sectoral, generational, and gender divides.

As we mapped the current reality in Sculpture 1, the systemic divides became visible and evident to all. Everyone in the room was quiet and fully tuned in.

As we moved from Sculpture 1 to Sculpture 2, clusters emerged among the roles, crystallizing the potential places where collaborations could be fostered to transform the ecosystem.

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After initial reflection, we asked participants to identify places in the map that had the most potential to shift the ecosystem. They identified six such venture areas. We then formed six cross-sectoral teams to develop change prototypes based on the insights generated from the map. Over the next twelve months the teams experimented with the prototypes and shared their learning with each other.

Here is one example of an outcome from their 4-D Mapping. Participants noted that when Social Enterprises and Business came together in the map, their attention shifted to the Youth. An insight arose in the group that those two groups could work together toward inclusive development. A prototype idea was born to create an SDG Business Award for local businesses that partnered with youth representatives.

Participants said that 4-D Mapping helped them to see and sense the whole system together and to create collaborations on what mattered most. It also transformed the intergenerational dynamics between youth leaders and institutions. Fabienne Moosmann, UNFPA youth coordinator in Cambodia, shared this observation at the end of the workshop: “I’m not sure what the future holds, but after this week, I know young people in Cambodia will have a say and they will have the space to lead.”

I am grateful to UN leaders, including Pauline Tamesis, Ifoda Abdurazakova, and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), as well as to the Presencing Institute facilitation team, including Becky Buell, Katie Stubley, and John Stubley, for co-creating this experience.

Application of 4-D Mapping in a Banking Institution
by Daniel Ludevig

A critical European banking institution brought together its top leadership team of about thirty people to explore strategic options and its five-year plan. With the client open to doing a 4-D Mapping. I worked in advance of the workshop with a colleague, Hendrik Backerra, and the team’s manager to identify the most relevant elements and stakeholders to include in the mapping.

These included the internal roles: Leadership Team, Company Staff, and the various Committees within the organization. The list included external roles: Economic Markets, International Institutions, Internationally Minded People, People in Creditor Countries, and People in Borrower Countries. In addition, to embody the three divides, they chose the roles of Changing Environment (Earth), Immigrants (Excluded), and Stability and Success of the Euro (Aspirational Self).

As the mapping began, the participants sensed into the starting place and gesture for their chosen role (Sculpture 1). They then began their slow and tentative movements toward their second sculpture. Despite some initial skepticism, as they began to observe the movements around them a hush came over the group. Within seconds, it

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was as if all thirty people in the room became one body, noticing with both fear and recognition the dynamics that were playing out in front of them.

After seven or eight minutes of movement, the participants arrived in their Sculpture 2 and began sharing their individual observations and experiences.

Those in the roles of the Leadership Team and the Company Staff were shocked at how inward their focus of attention had been throughout the mapping. The bank's Aspirational Self and Purpose, Stability and Success of the Euro, had felt entirely ignored. Adding to that, Immigrants and People in Borrower Countries had found themselves on the very edge of the room in which the map was unfolding. They were entirely out of sight of the key players who were huddled together in the center of the room moving around one another in circles for the majority of the journey from Sculpture 1 to 2.

After the mapping we engaged the group in a rich debrief around their observations, reflections, and interpretations of what had taken place. While many expressed sadness at the reality they had just experienced, there was also a new openness to recognizing their attention gaps. One participant mentioned that it reconnected him with the reason he had joined the bank in the first place. Another stated that she was shocked to see how accurately the mapping shed light on the dynamics and habits present in her system of work.

The insights on strategic possibilities obtained from the visual and embodied dimension of these sculptures were so meaningful to the leadership team that they decided to use photos of Sculptures 1 and 2 to support their presentation of strategic options to the rest of the company. I have no doubt that the experience of the 4-D Mapping acted as a cornerstone for their development of a stronger foundation together, and consequently, a more fully lived purpose.

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V. References

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