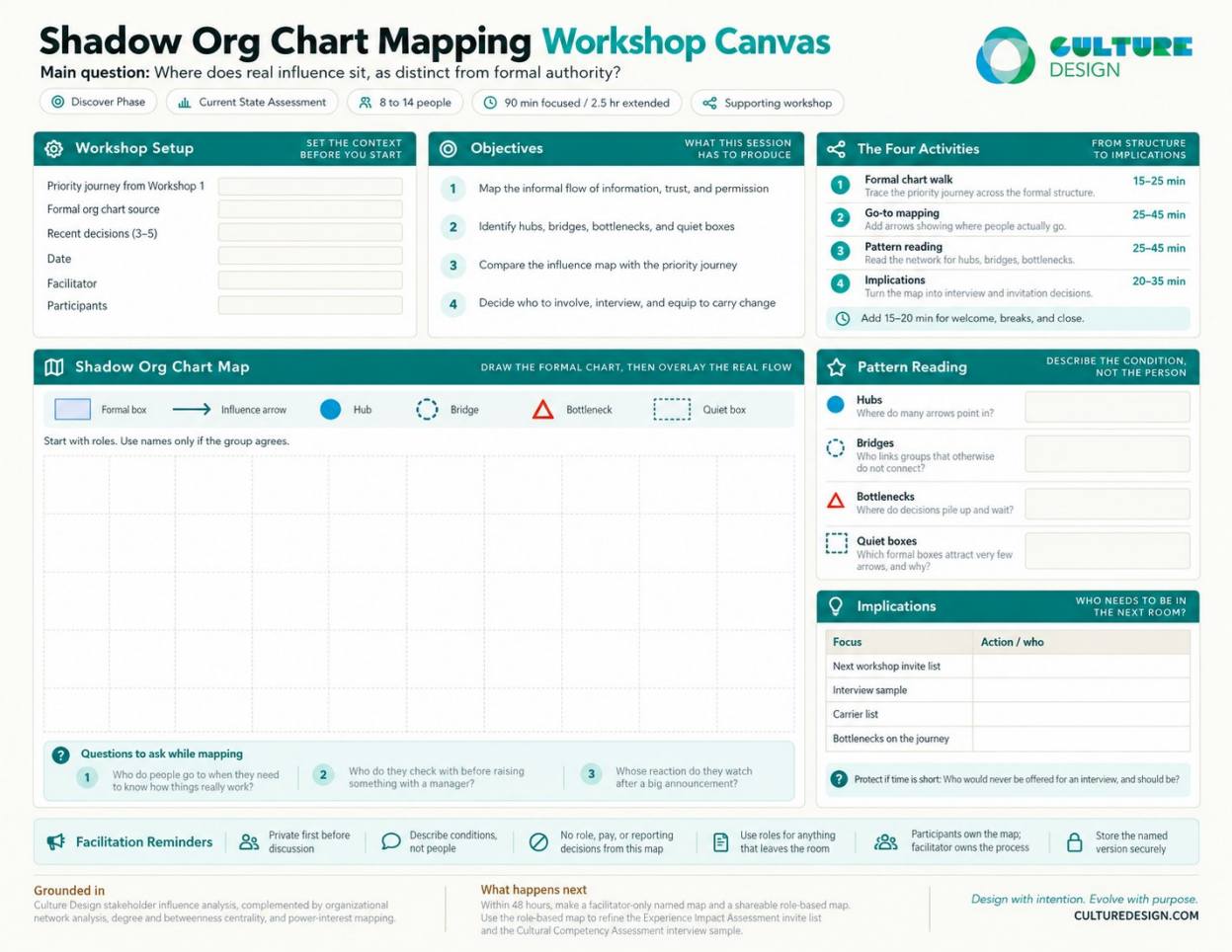
Shadow Org Chart Mapping

Workshop Wednesday 9.23.26 | Authored by Jason Burnham



Every organization runs on two charts, and only one of them is ever printed. Shadow Org Chart Mapping is a supporting workshop in the Culture Design Discover phase that draws the second one. It maps where real influence sits across your organization, meaning the people others go to for how things actually work, the people who connect groups that otherwise never talk, and the places where decisions quietly wait. The output is an influence map drawn over your formal structure, which tells you who will carry a change, where it will stall, and whose voices your diagnosis still needs to hear.

Main question: Where does real influence sit, as distinct from formal authority?

Formal structure is doing honest work and deserves credit for it. The org chart settles reporting lines, budgets, and accountability, and a company without one would struggle to pay anyone on time. It was never built to show how trust, information, and permission actually move through a building, and it is no worse for that. The gap matters because every change travels through the second chart. If you have watched an announcement land well with the leadership team and then disappear somewhere between the third floor and the loading dock, you have already met the chart this session draws.

Where this sits in the process: A supporting workshop that runs between Stakeholder Journey Mapping, Workshop 1, and the Experience Impact Assessment, Workshop 2, in the Discover phase. Its inputs are the formal org chart and the priority journey mapped in Workshop 1. Its influence map shapes the invitation list for Workshop 2 and the interview sample for the Cultural Competency Assessment in Workshop 3. Later in the series the same map becomes the starting point for the Meme Inventory Sprint, Adoption Sequencing, and Champion Network Design.

Best for: A mixed-level core group of eight to fourteen (8 to 14) participants, deliberately including people two and three levels below the leadership team.

Inputs: The current formal org chart, the priority journey from Workshop 1, and a short list of three to five (3 to 5) recent decisions that affected that journey.

Outputs: An influence map by role showing hubs, bridges, and bottlenecks, a confidential list of likely carriers for the change, and a revised interview sample for the rest of the Discover phase.

Purpose & Objectives

Influence is the part of structure nobody signs, and naming it carefully is most of the value. The objectives stay narrow on purpose, because a session that drifts into judging individuals produces gossip rather than insight, and gossip ends engagements.

- Map the informal flow of information, trust, and permission across the formal structure.
- Identify the hubs people rely on, the bridges between groups, and the bottlenecks where decisions wait.
- Compare the influence map with the priority journey from Workshop 1.
- Agree who needs to be heard, and who needs to carry the change, in the phases that follow.

Agenda & Activities

A focused session runs in about ninety minutes and a half-day version in about two and a half hours. Both are assembled from the same four activities: walk the formal chart, map the go-to flow, read the patterns, and draw the implications. Add fifteen to twenty (15 to 20) minutes for welcome, breaks, and close.

1. Formal Chart Walk: Put the formal chart on the wall and mark where the Workshop 1 journey crosses it. [15-25 min]
2. Go-To Mapping: Each participant answers three influence prompts privately, then plots the answers as arrows on the chart. [25-45 min]
3. Pattern Reading: Identify hubs, bridges, bottlenecks, and formal roles with few arrows. [25-45 min]
4. Implications: Decide who must be heard, who will carry the change, and where it is likely to stall. [20-35 min]

Total Core Time: ~85-150 minutes

Facilitator Instructions

The facilitator protects one boundary all session, which is the line between describing how influence flows and judging who is valuable. Every activity below fails in a predictable way when that boundary slips.

1. Formal Chart Walk: Keep this short and neutral. Draw the journey from Workshop 1 across the formal boxes in one color, so the group sees how many reporting lines a single stakeholder experience crosses. Ask where the handoffs are, and resist any discussion of individuals. This activity exists to give the rest of the session a shared floor plan.

2. Go-To Mapping: Hand out three prompt cards and ask for private answers before anyone speaks. Who do you go to when you need to know how things really work here? Who do you check with before you raise something with your manager? Whose reaction do you watch after a big announcement? Participants plot each answer as an arrow in a second color, naming a role or a person as the group agreed in the opening rules. Private first matters, because the loudest person in the room will otherwise draw the map for everyone.

3. Pattern Reading: Read the arrows as a network rather than as a list of names. A hub has many arrows pointing in. A bridge is the only link between two groups that otherwise never connect. A bottleneck is where arrows converge on a decision that then waits. Some formal leaders will have very few arrows, and that is the moment to hold the

boundary hardest. Describe the condition, which is often span, tenure, or a recent reorganization, and never the person.

4. Implications: Turn the map toward the work. Which hubs and bridges need to be in the Experience Impact Assessment? Which bottlenecks sit on the priority journey? Who would never be offered for an interview and should be? Close by agreeing the carrier list, and agree in the room where that list will and will not travel.

Ownership lines worth stating at the open: The map describes how information, trust, and permission move. Nothing in it is a rating of anyone's performance or worth. No role, compensation, or reporting decision is discussed in this room or made from its output. Participants own the map, the facilitator owns the process, and the sponsor sees the synthesis only in the anonymized form agreed at the start.

Synthesis After the Session

A map this sensitive is only as useful as the care taken after the room empties. Treat synthesis as two documents with two audiences, and never let the first one become the second.

Within 48 Hours: Consolidate the arrows into a single influence map. Produce a working version with names for the facilitator only, and a shareable version where every name is replaced by a role. Flag the three to five (3 to 5) strongest hubs and bridges and every bottleneck that sits on the priority journey.

Within One Week: Write a one-page readout with the role-based map and two to three (2 to 3) paragraphs on the pattern. The pattern is usually one of three things: influence concentrated in a few overloaded people, a group cut off from the rest, or a formal layer that information routes around. Name the pattern as a condition of the structure rather than a failing of anyone in it.

Before the Next Workshop: Use the map to adjust the invitation list for the Experience Impact Assessment and the interview sample for the Cultural Competency Assessment. Store the named version securely, and delete it once the Discover phase closes unless the group agreed otherwise.

Run It Yourself

The prompt cards, the three-color mapping key, and the opening anonymity rules are all you need, and the session assumes no software you do not already have. A whiteboard or a Miro board carries it comfortably. If you want the prompt cards and the anonymity rules sheet we open with, send me a message and I will send both back the same day.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY: Who do your people check with before they raise something with their own manager? Is that person the manager? What would change in your next initiative if you invited the person they actually check with?

Benefits & Outcomes

- ✓ A picture of the organization as it actually runs, drawn over the one it prints.
- ✓ Named carriers for the change, held in confidence and invited with care.
- ✓ An interview sample that reaches people who would never be offered.
- ✓ Early warning on the bottlenecks most likely to stall the priority journey.

Grounded in: Culture Design stakeholder influence analysis, complemented by organizational network analysis, degree and betweenness centrality, and power and interest mapping.