

Wardley Mapping

Plot the components serving one user need against visibility and evolution so build/buy/borrow decisions are made from a picture of market position, not from taste or the loudest voice.

DURATION

2

hours

GROUP SIZE

—

people

WHAT YOU BRING

Bring market knowledge and the user need you're serving; a large wall, sticky notes in two colours, and arrows.

WHAT YOU LEAVE WITH

- A strategic map of one user need's full value chain
- 3-6 concrete build, buy, borrow, or watch decisions
- Movement arrows showing which components commoditise next
- Named owners and dates for each decision

WHO TO INVITE

- **Facilitator.** Draws the axes, keeps the chain moving downward, forces evolution debate, stops drift into architecture.
- **Product or strategy lead.** Owns the user need at the top and the competitive context; anchors why each component exists.
- **Technical leads.** Know the current stack and, crucially, what else exists in the market beyond it.
- **Operations / SRE.** Essential when the map touches infrastructure; know which managed services have matured and which vendors page at 3am.
- **Someone with market exposure.** Advisor or consultant who reads release notes; evolution is a market question, not a team question.

USE WHEN

A build/buy/borrow argument is circling and nobody has shared language

An SRE team is weighing self-hosted versus managed service

Planning strategy and separating differentiators from plumbing

Onboarding a technical leader who needs to see the whole board

AVOID WHEN

You need to plan a sprint or prioritise features – this is strategy

The domain is still unknown – event-storm it first

Nobody in the room knows the market well enough to place components

A senior decision is already made and the session would be theatre

How the session runs

● Phase 1 – Frame the user need, draw the axes (10 min)

Draw visibility (y) and evolution (x, Genesis to Commodity), and write the user need as a sentence at the top. Push back on features dressed as needs and on anyone jumping straight to components.

● Phase 2 – Build the value chain (25 min)

Work downward from the user need, asking what each layer depends on. Place components vertically by visibility only, include people and processes, and draw dependency lines until you hit obvious commodities or single owned things.

- **Phase 3 – Assess evolution (30 min)**

Slide each component horizontally through Genesis, Custom-built, Product, Commodity. Use the fresh-start question and the three-vendors heuristic to cut through emotional attachment and the "we're special" claim.

- **Phase 4 – Annotate movement (15 min)**

Add arrows showing direction and speed of evolution for each component. Prompt on when the team last checked the market, and refuse wishful arrows that reflect hope rather than vendor reality.

- **Phase 5 – Strategic decisions (20 min)**

Walk the map and mark BUILD, BUY, WATCH, or MIGRATE on each component. Push for concrete actions with owners and dates, and counter sunk-cost, build-everything, and buy-everything biases as they surface.