

# The Mental Model Mapping Tool

#### **M-Tool Manual**

Web-based version

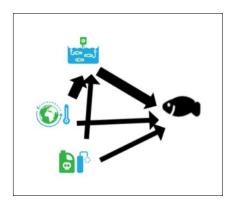
#### Welcome to M-Tool!

This manual lays out the key features and information on how to use M-Tool and tailor it to your needs.

#### What is M-Tool?

M-Tool is the Mental Model Mapping Tool developed by Dr. Karlijn van den Broek, Dr. Helen Fischer and Dr. Sina Klein at University of Heidelberg, and Joseph Luomba, researcher at Tanzania Fisheries Research Institute. M-Tool is designed to capture mental models, internal representations that describe an external environment. The external environment can be any type of system that consists of factors and causal links between those factors. M-Tool allows respondents to create models of a particular system by organizing relevant factors and linking them. M-Tool is available as a free app that can be downloaded in the google and apple app stores, and as a web-based version that can be used in a browser. The latter version also includes a bar chart drawing feature, in which participants display their views on their relation between two variables, for example the fluctuation of a particular resource over time. This manual lays out how to use the web-based version.

The left example below illustrates a fisher's mental model of the drivers of the changes of the Nile perch stock. It shows that this fisher believes that the strongest influence on the fish stock is fishing in breeding grounds (thick arrow), which is influenced by climate change, which in turn also has a direct influence on the Nile perch stock, as well as the use of illegal gear. The example on the right illustrates a more complex mental model captured with M-Tool. For more examples of applications of M-Tool in research projects see <a href="https://www.m-tool.org/Publications/">https://www.m-tool.org/Publications/</a>



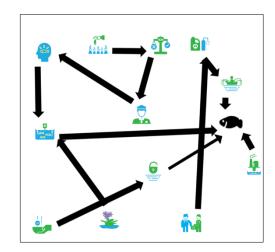


Figure 1. Examples of a simple (left) and complex (right) mental model created with M-Tool. The figure shows mental models of Tanzanian fishermen of the drivers that influence the target variable, the Nile perch stock.



# The Mental Model Mapping Tool

#### Why use M-Tool?

- A standardized tool for comparing mental models
- Suitable for large sample sizes
- Does not require respondents' literacy
- Available online as well as offline
- Can be tailored to map perceptions of any system or phenomenon

In contrast to other mental model elicitation methods, M-Tool uses a fully computerized approach that allows rapid collection of large samples. M-Tool's standardized approach ensures respondents will use the same system variables with which they draw their mental model. M-Tool hence gives you the unique benefit of comparing the mental models across and within (groups of) respondents. M-Tool is the first mental modelling tool to allow users to uncover differences in mental models which may keep stakeholder groups from addressing challenges jointly and effectively (van den Broek, 2018).

Because you can populate the tool with icons representing different system variables yourself, mental models of any kind of system can be captured. Some examples of how M-Tool can be used:

- Comparing mental models between groups of respondents (e.g. different types of stakeholders, experts vs. the general public, across cultures, communities from different geographical areas, comparing children's mental models).
- Assess changes in mental models over time, to investigate the stability of mental models or the impact of an intervention on the respondents' mental model.
- To start a conversation between stakeholders on the functioning of a system and how to address challenges within the system.

Compared to interviewing techniques, M-Tool allows respondents to draw more complex mental models, thereby giving more detailed insights into their understanding of a system (van den Broek et al., forthcoming). Moreover, by including video instructions, icons to display the relevant system variables, and accompanying audio files explaining each icon, M-Tool can be used without relying on respondents' literacy. This tool has been validated with rural fishing communities, demonstrating both convergent and external validity (van den Broek et al. forthcoming).

#### Tailoring M-Tool to your needs

With M-Tool you can include the system variables that are relevant for your project. These variables can be generated by your mental model target group, for example through short interviews or surveys (e.g. What are the elements of [a system], What factors do you think drive..., what are the consequences of ...).

Alternatively, you may be interested to see if your target group would make certain connections based on an existing set of variables. These factors may be informed by pre-existing knowledge of a system, i.e. to assess if you target group can draw up the 'correct' dynamics between factors. Furthermore, you can replace the audio instructions and videos with your own files to adapt the instructions to your needs, or to translate it to the relevant language.



# The Mental Model Mapping Tool

M-Tool can be set up in various ways:

- 1. The drivers and consequences of a target variable (i.e. the fixed factor: the fish in Fig. 1 or "Y" in the app) can be mapped separately (by placing the target variable on the left for mapping screen 1 and on the right for mapping screen 2). This eases the cognitive demands on the respondents.
- 2. The drivers and consequences of a target variable can be mapped at once, so a respondent can show how the drivers and consequences can influence each other (e.g. by placing the target variable in the middle).
- 3. The tool can be set up without a target variable/fixed factor, so the respondent maps the entire system.

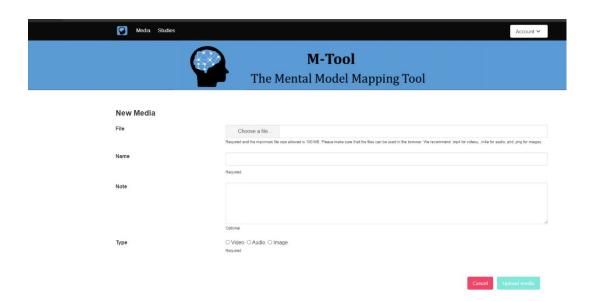
This means that you can map any aspects of any system (e.g. network of actors, dynamics of an ecosystem etc.).

#### How to use M-Tool?

To get started using M-Tool, follow these simple steps:

- **1.** Generate a list of relevant variables for the respective system.
- **2.** Turn these factors, as well as your 'target variable' (if applicable) into images (e.g. through a freelance graphic designer platform like <u>Fiverr</u> or use images with text).
- 3. Create a video that explains the meaning of each image (e.g. with PowerPoint)
- 4. Extract the audio files from this video for each image (e.g. with **PowerPoint**)
- 5. Upload these files in M-Tool under *media*, *upload media*.

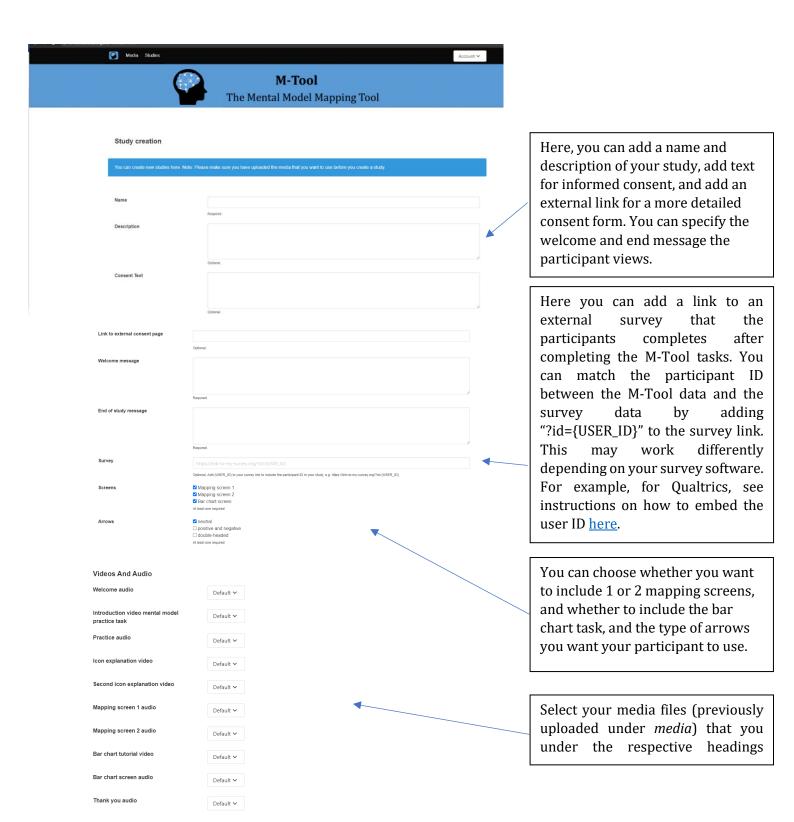
  Make sure you select the right type of format for the media file you uploaded, if this is incorrect, you will not be able to use it in the study creation. We recommend .mp4 for videos, .mp3 for audio, and .png for images. the files to be uploaded should not exceed 100MB, and can take a few moments to upload. The file names for the system variables will also be used in the data output. You can test your files under *media preview*





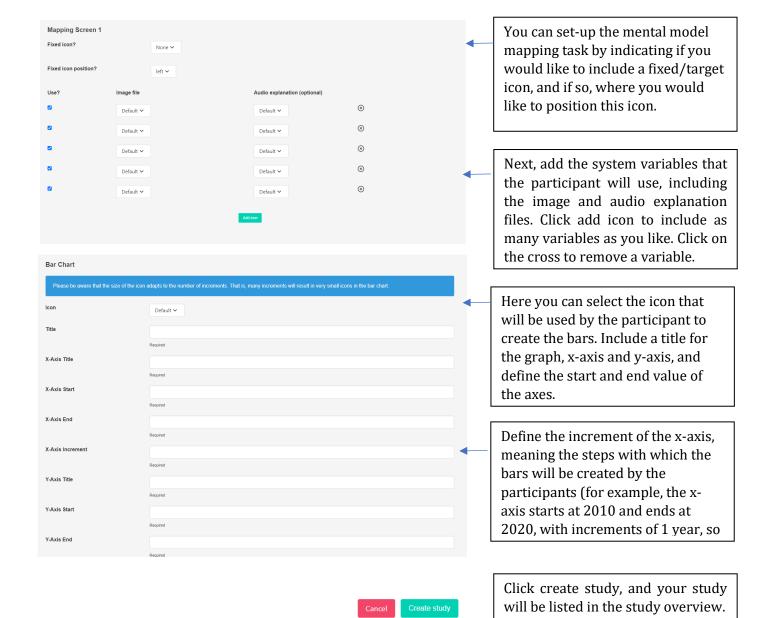
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6. Next, create a study by going to studies, and add new study.





# The Mental Model Mapping Tool





In the study overview, you can modify your study, download the data, or access the link to the study that can be shared with participants.

# The Mental Model Mapping Tool

#### **Data safety**

The data generated with M-Tool can be downloaded by the account holder only. The data is stored safely on the Heidelberg University server, complying with GDPR guidelines. No third parties (neither the creators) have access to this data.

#### **Recommendations for using M-Tool**

M-Tool works best on Chrome, as Firefox and Safari block audio auto-start. This means that participants using Firefox or Safari may not automatically hear the audio welcome message when they start the tool, unless they activate this in their browser. All other audio files will not have this issue. We therefore advise users to include all necessary information on the welcome page.

We have developed the tool so that a participant can close the window of the study and continue working on the tasks at another time. This ensures the data is not lost when losing connectivity. However, this does mean that the data of second session overrides the previous session. If you would like to collect several responses from one device (e.g. a tablet or PC), add "?persist=false" to the end of the participant link to ensure the data of the next participant does not override the data of the previous participant.

#### Acknowledgements

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#### References

van den Broek, K.L. (2018). <u>Illuminating divergence in perceptions in natural resource</u> management: A case for the investigation of the heterogeneity in mental models. *Journal of Dynamic Decision Making*, 4, 2-2.

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# **M-Tool**The Mental Model Mapping Tool

#### Contact

For more information on M-Tool, go to www.m-tool.org

For any comments, questions or collaborations contact: <u>Dr. Karlijn van den Broek</u>