

User Manuals are an empathy-building team exercise commonly used on Tanzu Labs product teams. This particular version has been adapted from workshop-style activities, into one that can be done asynchronously—great for busy or distributed teams!

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Adapted from
[User Manual Workshop](#)
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Send feedback here!



What is a User Manual?

A User Manual are documents created by each member of a team, aimed at helping other team members understand how best to work with each other as individuals. User Manuals ask each team member questions about their professional life and sometimes questions about their personal life. User Manual questions can be shared with a group, put into writing, explored as part of a 1:1, facilitated as a workshop, or simply used as discussion prompts.

Why create them?

Rewards & Impact

User Manuals are meant to drive empathy. The rewards & impacts can be:

- Everyone will learn about how to interact with the different personalities on the team
- Fun questions lead to unexpected connections (“Oh, you also like making quilts?!”)
- A team has a shared/common vocabulary that helps us identify with each other and/or build additional empathy
- Individuals can refer to their own User Manual as a way to express themselves to the team
- Individuals can refer to their teammates' User Manuals to empathize and better understand how to collaborate effectively

Goals

- User Manuals **should** guide teammates on the “best practices” for working together. Effective User Manuals can give a common vocabulary or reference point for helping to encourage healthy relationships and fostering teamwork.
- User Manuals **should** empower each teammate to express themselves openly and honestly. The goal is not to seek out feedback, but rather to foster empathy and understanding so that teams can unify in a productive way.
- User Manual questions **should** allow a participant to answer as shallow or deep as they choose.

Anti-goals

- User Manuals **should not** be used for giving feedback, evaluation, or determination of overall team dynamics. Instead, user manuals should be used to allow team members to express themselves and give teammates guidance on how best to work together.
- User Manuals **should not** reduce an individual's or team's sense of psychological safety. Having a baseline of trust is a prerequisite for any type of User Manual activity.
- User Manual questions **should not** be invasive or overly personal. Rather, questions should be designed to open communication in a comfortable way for the team.

Articles to read



How-to Guide*

What you'll need

- This workshop guide & template
- 30-60 minutes of uninterrupted working time (to create the manuals)
- Variable amount of time for sharing manuals* (depending on how you choose to do it)

*The asterisk

User Manuals can be created in a 1-2 hour facilitated workshop session with a whole team. However, this particular guide was created to support User Manuals being created asynchronously by each individual team member. The 'Now What?' section below proposes ways your User Manuals can be shared within the team or used to inform subsequent teaming exercises.

Creating your User Manuals

Team Prep Work

Review this template in a team setting (i.e. standup) to make sure everyone understands the goals and has 'edit' access

As a team, agree on a timeframe for completion (i.e. "We all agree to complete our manuals by Friday")

- Pro tip: In your team backlog, create a story for Completing User Manuals and add a checklist where each team member can check their name off when they've completed their manual

Each person should then plan 30-60 minutes of uninterrupted time to create their manual within the agreed-upon timeframe

Individual Working Session

Make a copy of the template frame and add your name to the top title of your manual

Reflect on the prompts in each section and write down your responses in sticky notes

- Write as many or as few stickies as you'd like
- Remember, you only need to share what you're comfortable sharing

Pro Tips

- Be sure each team member feels comfortable with having their user manuals in writing. Psychological Safety matters.
- If a participant feels comfortable revealing something personal, that should be welcomed. If not, that should also be welcomed. Leave it up to each individual to decide how much to share about themselves.
- As a team, discuss what your next steps will be after you've created your manuals (see suggestions below)

Now what?

Once your team has completed their User Manuals, here are some suggestions for next steps:

At the end of standup, choose a section or prompt and have everyone share a piece from their manual

Make sure the team manuals are stored in a place that everyone knows about & can access

- Pro tip: put all your team's manuals in a single Lucid, and then link to the Lucid from a "team homepage" on Jedi Archives

Refer to someone's user manual when you begin pairing with them

Use manuals as a starting point for team working agreements

Look across peoples' definition of "success for the team" to see where you may have common goals to rally around

Look across peoples' motivators & de-motivators to see how you might focus retros or identify opportunities for change

- Common motivators / de-motivators can manifest in something like a Stone Soup Retro

Revisit manuals when team members join or depart

To individual levels of comfort, share your user manual(s), motivators, or de-motivators with your leadership



User Manual for [your name here]

Intro

I'm down to chat about...

What are some of your interests outside of work?
What are little things you like to chat about?

Communication & Collaboration

My communication preferences

What are your preferred methods of communication? Think about different situations: how and when would you like people to reach out?

My pairing & working style

How do you naturally process information? When are you most concentrated?
How do you like to take breaks? Are there times you need to step away?

Needs & Expectations

Things that support my motivation & productivity

What does a good day at work look like for you? In what conditions are you most productive?
What motivates you?

Things that hinder my motivation & productivity

What does a bad day at work look like for you? What de-motivates you or inhibits your productivity? What are your pet peeves or things that cause you stress? What would you like others to know, that you might be sensitive to?

Strengths & Experience

My strengths & experience

What are some strengths you bring to the table?
What's a past project or achievement you're proud of?

My growth areas & feedback preferences

What are some areas in which you're looking to grow? Is there anything your teammates can do to support your growth? How do you prefer to give feedback to others? How do you prefer others frame & deliver feedback to you?

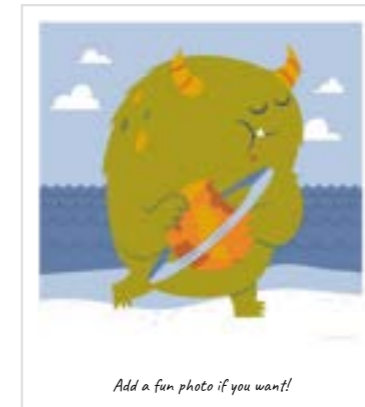
To me, success for my team looks like...

What deliverables is your team going to be measured by? What does an engaging & exciting team environment look like to you?

Fun facts

A fun fact about me is...

What's an unexpected fact or story about yourself you're willing to share with us?



User Manual for Carolyn

EXAMPLE

Intro

I'm down to chat about...

What are some of your interests outside of work?
What are little things you like to chat about?

- Philosophy & mindfulness
- Music (especially songwriting)
- Books (Fiction & non-fiction)
- Really good movies
- Really bad movies
- Creative pursuits

Communication & Collaboration

My communication preferences

What are your preferred methods of communication? Think about different situations: how and when would you like people to reach out?

- I prefer zoom & DM for most communication
- I don't check email very often, so it's not a great way to get my attention
- I prefer to have group-decision-making talks over zoom—I can get lost in message threads
- I'm an inbox-zero type, so I often mute channels with a lot of noise, to mitigate distraction

My pairing & working style

How do you naturally process information? When are you most concentrated?
How do you like to take breaks? Are there times you need to step away?

- I gather info quickly, but process it slowly
- I'm most concentrated when I have at least 60 minutes to focus on a task
- I like to take breaks ad-hoc
- I can forget to take breaks when I'm in a flow state, so I sometimes need reminders from my pairs
- I often need time to step away from something and think about it
- I sometimes have what my husband calls "learning face"—I'm not upset, I'm just thinking deeply

Needs & Expectations

Things that support my motivation & productivity

What does a good ay at work look like for you? In what conditions are you most productive?
What motivates you?

- I'm motivated by focused goals
- I'm most productive with dedicated blocks of working time
- I'm motivated by understanding & problems (not so much by being given solutions)
- I really enjoy solid balanced team pairing
- A good day for me is one where I've completed something on my to-do list, collaborated with my teammates on something, and kept it all inside an 8hr day
- I do my best work with tight, friendly feedback loops

Things that hinder my motivation & productivity

What does a bad day at work look like for you? What de-motivates you or inhibits your productivity? What are your pet peeves or things that cause you stress? What would you like others to know, that you might be sensitive to?

- I'm very sensitive to myself or others being interrupted or spoken over in meetings
- I need time to be productive or I feel aimless and ineffective, and my mood suffers
- Constant context-switching zaps my energy
- I get frustrated when meetings don't have clear goals or next steps
- A bad day at work is one where I'm in meetings all day, don't get a break, and don't feel like I accomplished anything
- It messes my day up when meetings don't end on time

Strengths & Experience

My strengths & experince

What are some strengths you bring to the table?
What's a past project or achievement you're proud of?

- Visual design & communication
- Empathetic & adaptable
- Good instincts
- I'm usually good for generative brainstorming sessions
- Good at wordsmithing
- Analogous reasoning & metaphors

My growth areas & feedback preferences

What are some areas in which you're looking to grow? Is there anything your teammates can do to support your growth? How do you prefer to give feedback to others? How do you prefer others frame & deliver feedback to you?

- I lose track of time when facilitating a meeting...I need help watching the clock
- In general, I prefer to give & receive feedback in 1:1s
- For positive feedback, a brief DM usually does the trick for me
- I usually feel nervous about giving constructive feedback—it's not an easy thing for me to do
- I can sometimes overthink or overplan things—my team can help me by calling out when I may be doing this

To me, success for my team looks like...

What deliverables is your team going to be measured by? What does an engaging & exciting team environment look like to you?

- Psychological safety and healthy team dynamics
- Openly discussing blockers and adjusting plans if necessary
- Rallying as a team to achieve agreed-upon milestones
- Putting our brains together to dissect & solve difficult problems

Fun facts

A fun fact about me is...

What's an unexpected fact or story about yourself you're willing to share with us?

- I have 2 dogs & way too many houseplants
- My husband & I play music together
- I'm shorter in person
- My favorite breakfast is milk & cookies
- I worked for 1 week on a Nickelodeon cruise ship
- I grew up in Florida and was once tan



me & my doggos!

User Manuals

Asynchronous

Build Empathy :: Work Better Together

