

Mental Models Cheat Sheet

BONUS CONTENT

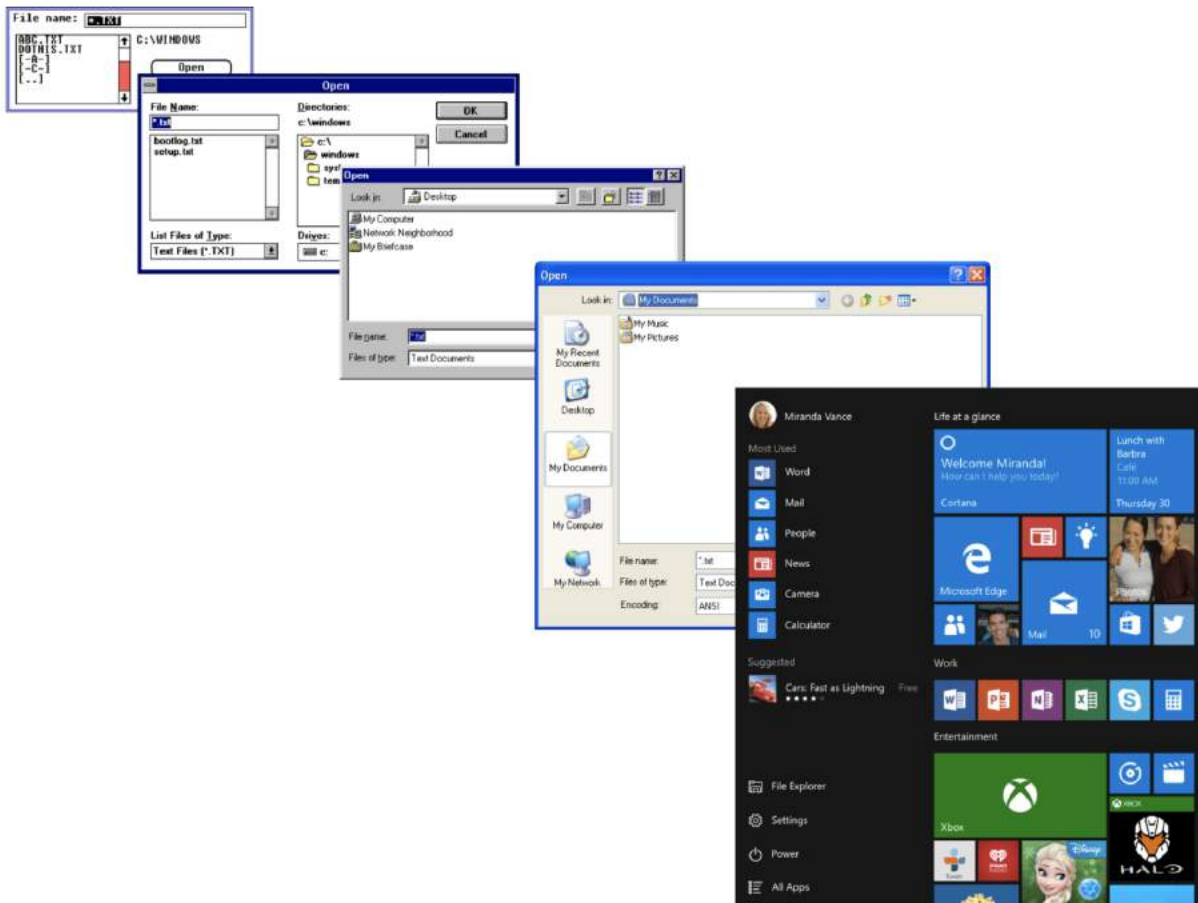


👁 7 additional examples of Mental Models

Here are more *Mental Models* examples from different companies and industries:

1. Computers

When computers with graphical user interfaces first emerged, it was totally new. Nothing like that had ever existed before. There was a real challenge to explain to people how to use this. So they came up with analogies with physical counterparts like files, folders, desktops, trash bins, etc. Those analogies were so successful that they are still used today.



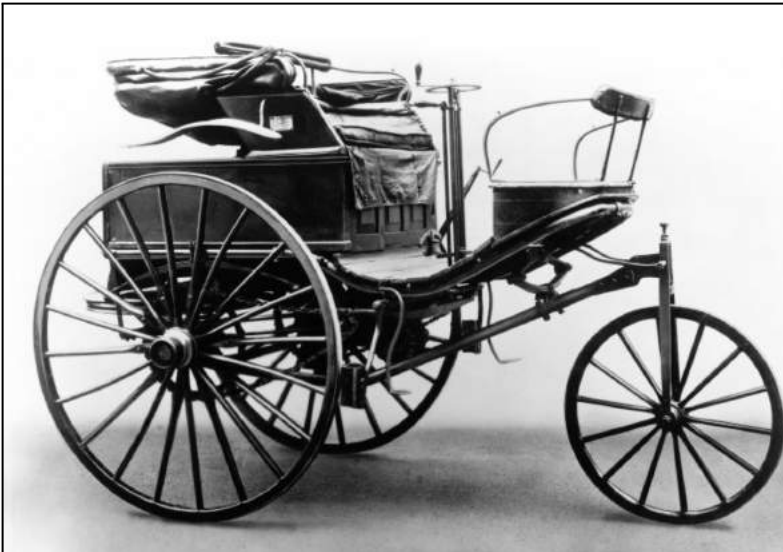
2. Tesla charging ports (B2C, physical)

Tesla chose to place the charging port at the same spot you'd typically fill your tank at the gas station. That's not because the battery is there. It's simply because Tesla wants to give customers a location that made the most sense for them and would seem as simple as filling up at the gas station. In other words, Tesla wanted to match their customers' mental models to facilitate the transition to electric vehicles.



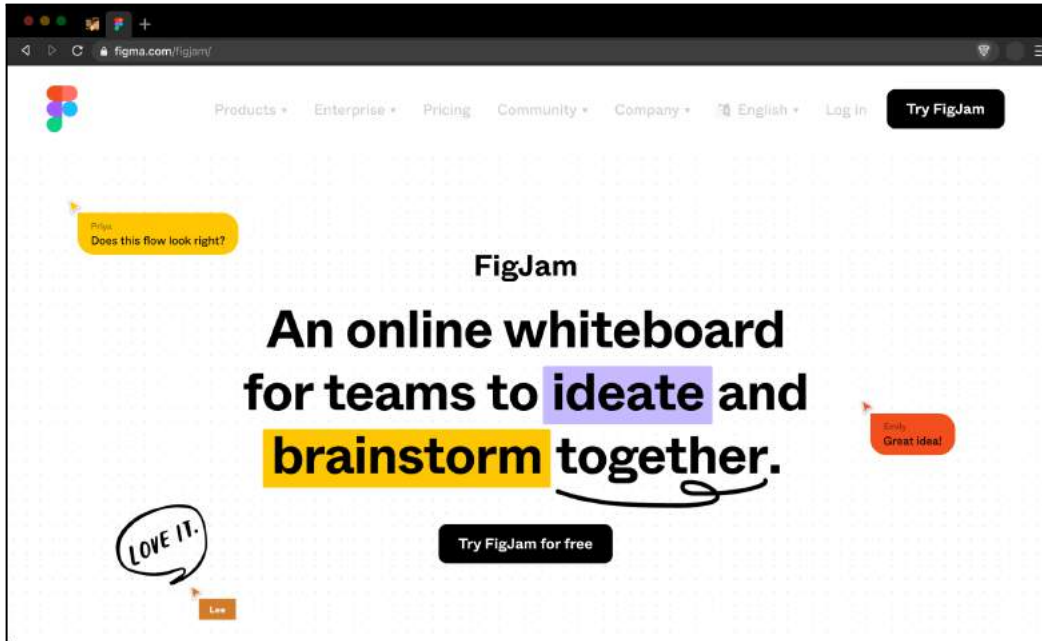
3. Early cars in the 1900s (B2C, physical)

Below is a photo of one of the first models of cars. What do you notice? That's right—it looks like a carriage. That's not a coincidence. The idea of rolling around without a horse was extremely odd back then, so industrial design had to evolve beyond this gradually.



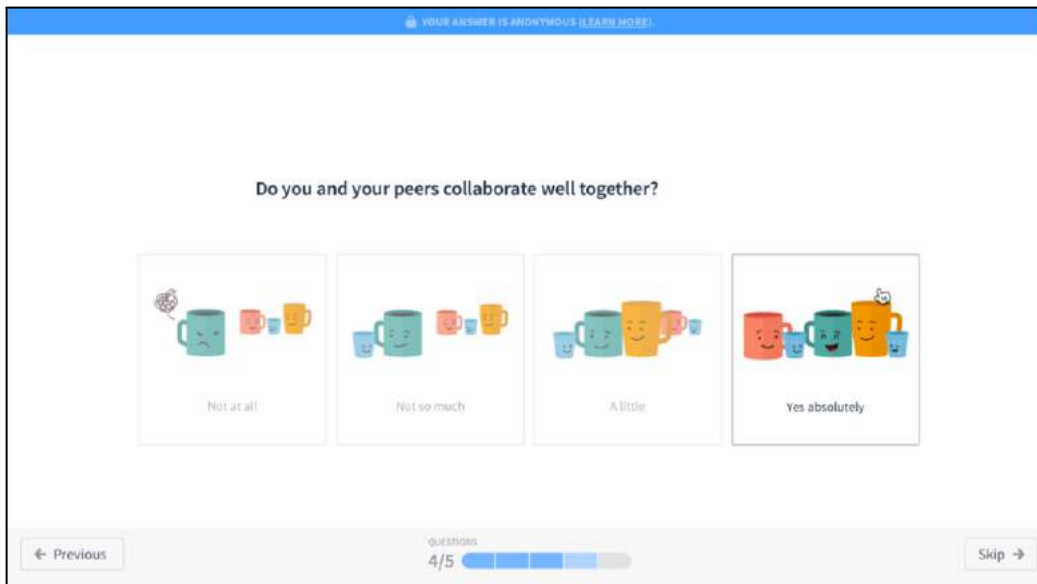
4. Figjam and Miro (B2B2C)

Every part of Figjam (and Miro) is designed to feel like a real whiteboard so that people could quickly adapt. From the colors of the markers to the post-it subtle skeuomorphic shadows. That was especially important in 2020 when millions of people (some less tech-savvy) migrated to a remote-first workplace because of COVID-19.



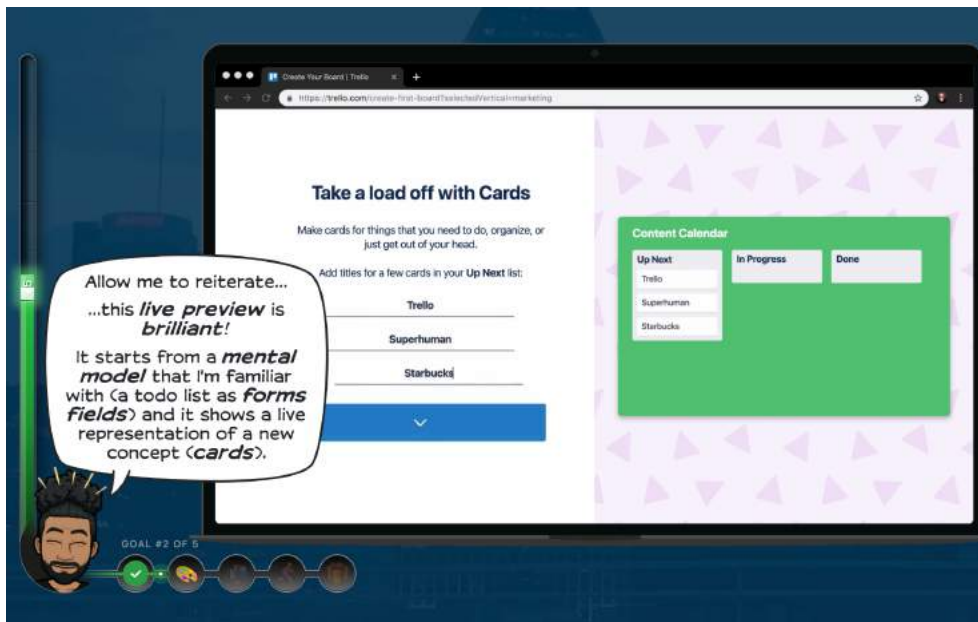
5. Officevibe (B2B):

A previous company I co-founded in the early 2010s was an employee pulse survey platform. It allowed managers to measure employee engagement in real-time through automated weekly surveys. But back then, the only survey people knew was the "annual satisfaction survey" so most new users sent us support tickets asking us how to "send our surveys" even though the process was already done for them automatically. Years later, the mental model of an automated survey became better known in human resources technologies.



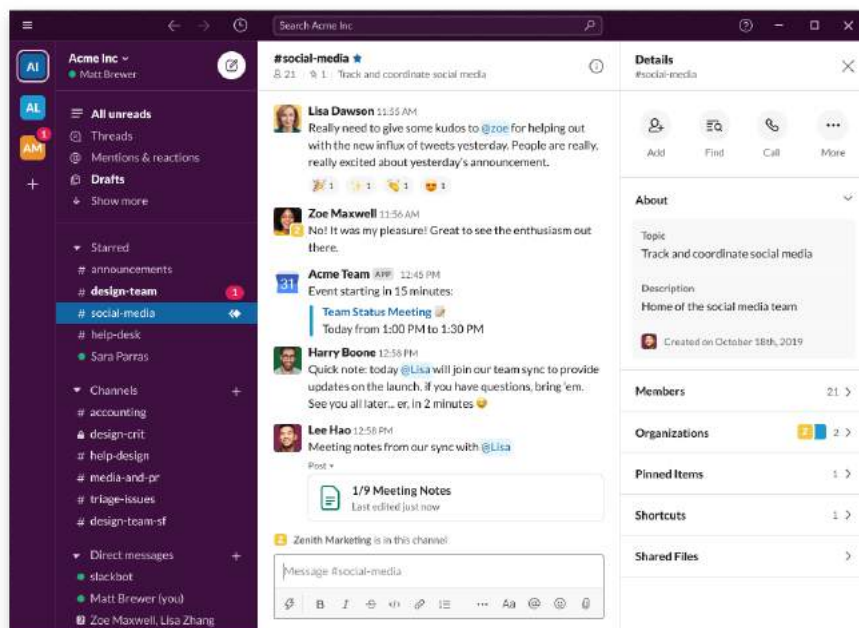
6. Trello

When Trello started in 2011, the idea of a virtual Kanban to-do list was unheard-of. So they had to do a ton of education (and clever onboarding tactics) to get people to understand and use their product correctly ([see case study here](#)).



7. Slack

The idea of "message channels" was novel back in 2014. Slack product teams focused most of their onboarding efforts on explaining to new users what a Slack channel was:





Summary of UX and Psychology Insights from the case study

- [Social Norms](#)
- [Familiarity Bias](#)
- [Skeuomorphism](#)
- [Mental model migration](#)



3 Tips to find your users' mental models

1. **Curse of Knowledge:** First, acknowledge that if you and your team have worked on your product for a while, you certainly have a [Curse of Knowledge](#). You need to understand that the perception that your new customers have is entirely different from yours.
2. **User Research:** You need to put yourself in your customers' shoes. User research is a critical part of understanding how your customers think. A great tool to capture the mental models in your users' brains is the "[Think Aloud User Interview](#)", where users verbalize what they think and predict while they use your design so you can piece together their mental models. There are some specific questions that you can use to dig up mental models quickly. We use them in our user research (and for products we analyze). We dedicated an entire lesson to explaining them in our [Product Psychology course \(Module 1, Lesson 2\)](#).
3. **UX IRL:** This is one of our favorite tactics. We call it "UX In Real Life" or "If UX Was Alive". You've probably seen it in several of our case studies in the past. It comes down to imagining if your product was a real person interacting with your customers. Based on the user research you've done in the previous steps, which part of the experience would be most awkward and why? The "why" part is critical because it will force you to put yourself in the shoes of your customers (see our [Adobe offboarding case study](#) for another example of "UXIRL").



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Cognitive Biases Cheatsheet.

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—Dan Benoni & Louis-Xavier Lavallée