

SERENDiPiTY CARDS

Facilitate your own
workshop on designing
for serendipity



SERENDIPITY CARDS

The **Serendipity Cards** help you think about **how to design environments, interfaces, or processes that enable unexpected yet valuable discoveries**. The card set was developed based on academic research into *affordances for serendipity* and translates these insights into an **accessible, practical tool**.

The set is built around three **design principles** that can support serendipity:

1. **Diversifiability:** variety, heterogeneity, unexpected combinations
2. **Traversability:** movement, detours, alternative routes, intersections
3. **Sensoriability:** stimuli, contrasts, signals, details

The cards are **context-independent** and can be applied to websites, physical spaces, procedures, social meeting places, and much more.

The card set can be used both to **evaluate existing designs** and to **generate new ideas** for designing with serendipity in mind.



WORKSHOP FACILITATION GUIDE

Want to think about how to design for serendipity? This guide offers a straightforward method for working with the Serendipity Cards. The total duration of the proposed workshop is **approximately 2.5–3 hours**.

Who should participate?

For this workshop, it is best to bring together a **range of perspectives**. Ideally, this means combining people who know the context or its use well (e.g. end users, residents, students, visitors, staff) with people who are involved in shaping the design or how it functions (e.g. designers, teachers, project leads, policy officers, developers, etc.).

When participants are not directly involved in the case (for example, in an educational setting), you can simply assign stakeholder roles. This ensures that each participant consciously approaches the topic from a different angle.

How should you start the workshop?

Begin the workshop with a concrete case you want to explore (for example, a digital application or a physical space). The more concrete the case, the easier it will be to formulate ideas that are relevant to your context. You can approach this case in two ways: to **explore new design ideas**, or to **analyse which serendipity principles are already present**, and which you want to retain, strengthen, or reconsider.

How does the workshop unfold?

On the following pages you will find a clear step-by-step plan. For each step, we describe the **duration**, the **objective**, the **approach**, and the **materials** needed. During the workshop:

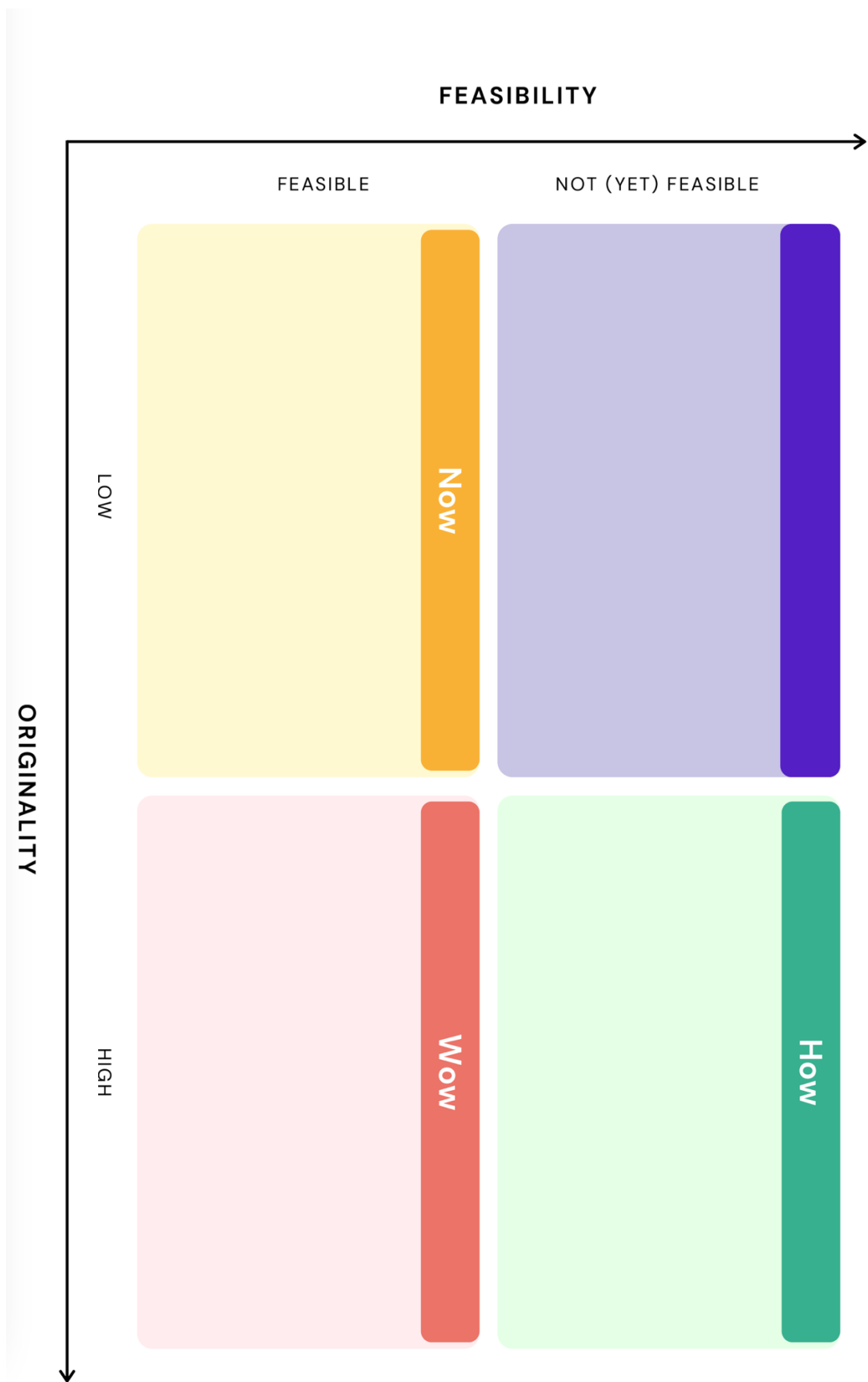
1. You **jointly explore what serendipity means** in the chosen context
2. You **use the Serendipity Cards** to generate ideas based on the three design principles.
3. You **select the most promising ideas** and develop them into concrete directions or actions.

This gives you a structured, accessible, and creatively stimulating way to deliberately embed serendipity into your design, space, or process.

Exercise	Duration	Approach	Materials
Introduction workshop	10 min	Objective: Inform participants about the workshop and help them feel comfortable. Approach: The facilitator provides background on the purpose of the workshop and why it was organised. The facilitator emphasises that everyone's perspective matters.	
Introducing the case	10 min	Objective: Ensure that everyone understands the context to which the workshop is being applied. Approach: The facilitator or case owner briefly explains, in no more than 5 minutes: • What is the context? • What do you want to enable or improve? • For whom? • Why does serendipity seem relevant here? Allow sufficient time for participants to ask questions.	Optional: a short presentation about the case
Why serendipity?	15 min	Objective: Build a shared understanding of <i>why</i> and <i>for whom</i> serendipity is valuable. Approach: Discuss together: • Who are the relevant stakeholders? • Why would they benefit from more serendipity? • What concrete outcome would this make possible? Based on this discussion, collectively formulate the following sentence: "<i>We want to enable serendipity because ... for ... so that ...</i>" Tip: Depending on the size of the group, you may choose to first discuss this in smaller groups before arriving at a shared formulation in plenary.	Post its + markers + flipchart

How is serendipity experienced?	15 min	Objective: Build a shared understanding of <i>how</i> serendipity will manifest in practice. Approach: Discuss: Who will ultimately experience serendipity? What tasks or activities do they carry out? For each task or activity, consider: • Is serendipity desirable here or not? • If yes, what does "serendipity" mean to the user in this specific task? • You can make this concrete by specifying what "unplanned" and "interesting" means in this context. Tip: For tasks and activities, use simple user-story sentences: "<i>As a [user], I want to [task], so that [outcome].</i>"	post its + markers + flipchart
Ideation with serendipity cards	65 min	Objective: Explore the case through the three design principles and gain insight into how these principles can be applied or strengthened. Approach: The facilitator briefly explains how the card set works. The three main categories of design principles (diversifiability, traversability, and sensoriability) are introduced. The group is divided into smaller subgroups. Ideation takes place in three rounds: in each round, each group works with one principle. Switch after 20 minutes. Per round: • Read the cards • Select 1–2 sub-principles that seem relevant • Discuss as a group how this principle can be applied to the case • Write each idea separately on a post it Facilitator tips: Keep an eye on the pace and remind participants to write down their ideas. Ideas can be posted on a flipchart organised by principle.	Serendipity Cards + 3 colours of post its + flipcharts + pens

Idea selection	20 min	Objective: Cluster the generated ideas and collectively determine which ones are most relevant, interesting, or promising for the chosen context. Approach: Post all ideas (post-its) visibly on a wall or flipcharts. Briefly explain the NOW-WOW-HOW framework: • NOW: ideas that are simple and quick to implement. • WOW: surprising, innovative ideas with strong potential. • HOW: ideas that are interesting but seem (currently) difficult to execute. • As a group, go through the ideas and assign each one a place in the framework. Group similar ideas where useful. .	Flipchart + markers + NOW-WOW-HOW framework
Elaborating on selected ideas	10 min	Objective: Further develop the selected or most promising ideas so that they can inform possible actions or future design phases. Approach: Divide into small groups again. Each group chooses one idea from the selection (NOW, WOW, or HOW) and briefly works it out using a simple worksheet: • What exactly does the idea entail? • Who does it create value for? • Which serendipity principle does it support? • What is a possible first next step? Share briefly in plenary.	Worksheet (multiple copies) + pens
Closing the workshop	10 min	Objective: Thank participants for their input and bring the workshop to a close . Approach: The facilitator thanks participants for their contributions and ideas. Where relevant, the case owner outlines what the next steps in the process will be.	



TEAM

WE GOT INSPIRED BY

NAME YOUR CONCEPT

MECHANISM

FOR WHOM AND WHEN?

HOW DO WE GATHER FEEDBACK?

WHEN DOES IT GO WRONG?

ACTION POINTS

COLOPHON

This facilitation guide for the Serendipity Cards was developed as part of the Serendipity Engine research project, supported by the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO). The concept is based on research by Annelien Smets at imec-SMIT, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, and was developed with input from the Knowledge Centre Data & Society.

Year of publication: 2026

Responsible publisher:
Annelien Smets
imec-SMIT, Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Pleinlaan 2 1050 Brussels



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