HOW A ‘DISCOVERY PHASE’ CAN HELP YOU BUILD BETTER THEORIES OF CHANGE

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WHAT WE WILL COVER

- **Intro**
  - What is a discovery phase?
  - How is it done?
- **Case study 1: Global problem mapping**
  - What is it?
  - Example
  - When it works & doesn't
- **Case study 2: Future state mapping**
  - What is it?
  - Example – when it worked well
  - Example – when it didn't work well
- **Reflection & Discussion**

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THE DISCOVERY PHASE

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WHAT IS IT?

- The ‘pre-work’ that we do before we even begin to develop a theory of change
- It’s about understanding the need and/or opportunities for change, rather than assuming we know what they are
- An excellent opportunity to bring lived experience into the design process
- Has specific meanings in some fields, like software development and service design

HOW IS IT DONE?

- Techniques and methods include:
  - Traditional or widely used methods, like **literature reviews, environmental scans** and **stakeholder mapping**
  - Service design techniques like **journey mapping** and **user personas**
  - Problem definition techniques, like **problem trees** and **problem mapping**
- Can use more than one approach to build a more comprehensive picture

CASE STUDY 1:
GLOBAL PROBLEM MAPPING

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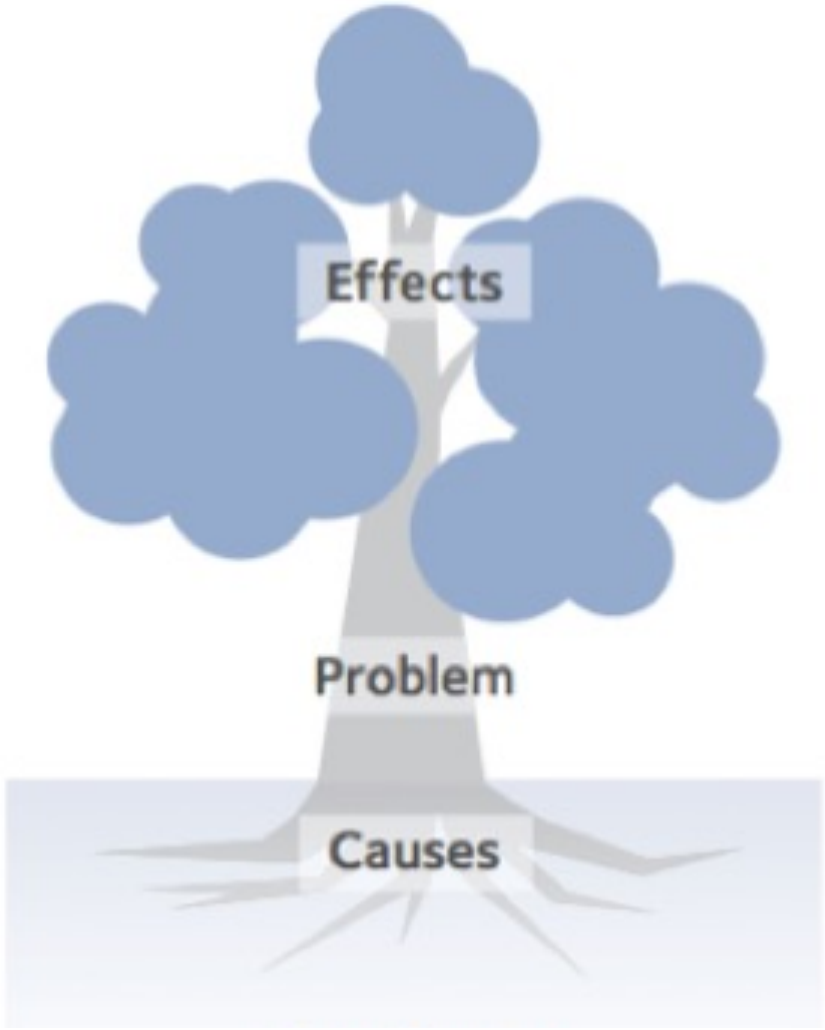
FIRST – WHAT IS A PROBLEM TREE?

A tool to investigate the causes and effects of a problem, and the relationships between them

- The **trunk** represents the core problem
- The **roots** represent the causes of the core problem
- The **branches** represent the effects of the core problem

Can be flipped into a ‘solution tree’ to form the basis for a theory of change



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WHAT IS GLOBAL PROBLEM MAPPING?

A zoomed-out version of a problem tree! It shows the network or system of causes that hold a problem in place.

It:

- Identifies a core problem
- Maps all known causes and effects of that problem, whether or not they're 'in scope'

From there you can:

- Identify which causes fall within your sphere of influence
- Identify which causes are being tackled by others
- Decide which causes your program or initiative should target

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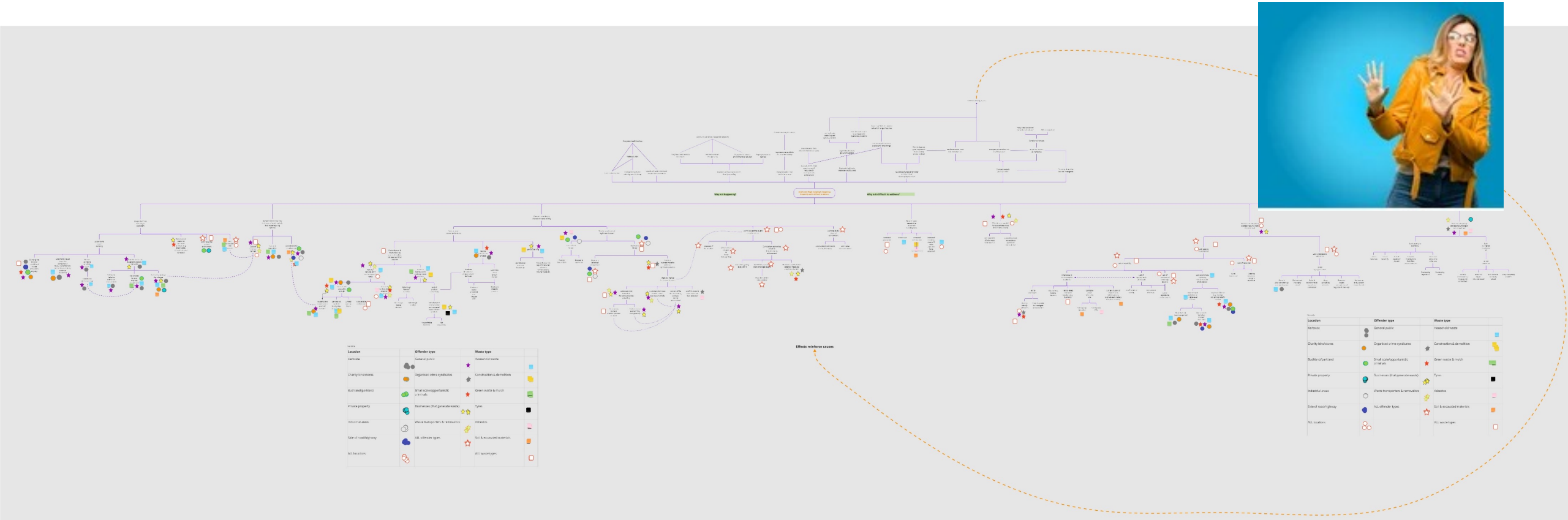
EXAMPLE

Client: A government agency that was designing programs to tackle small-scale illegal dumping



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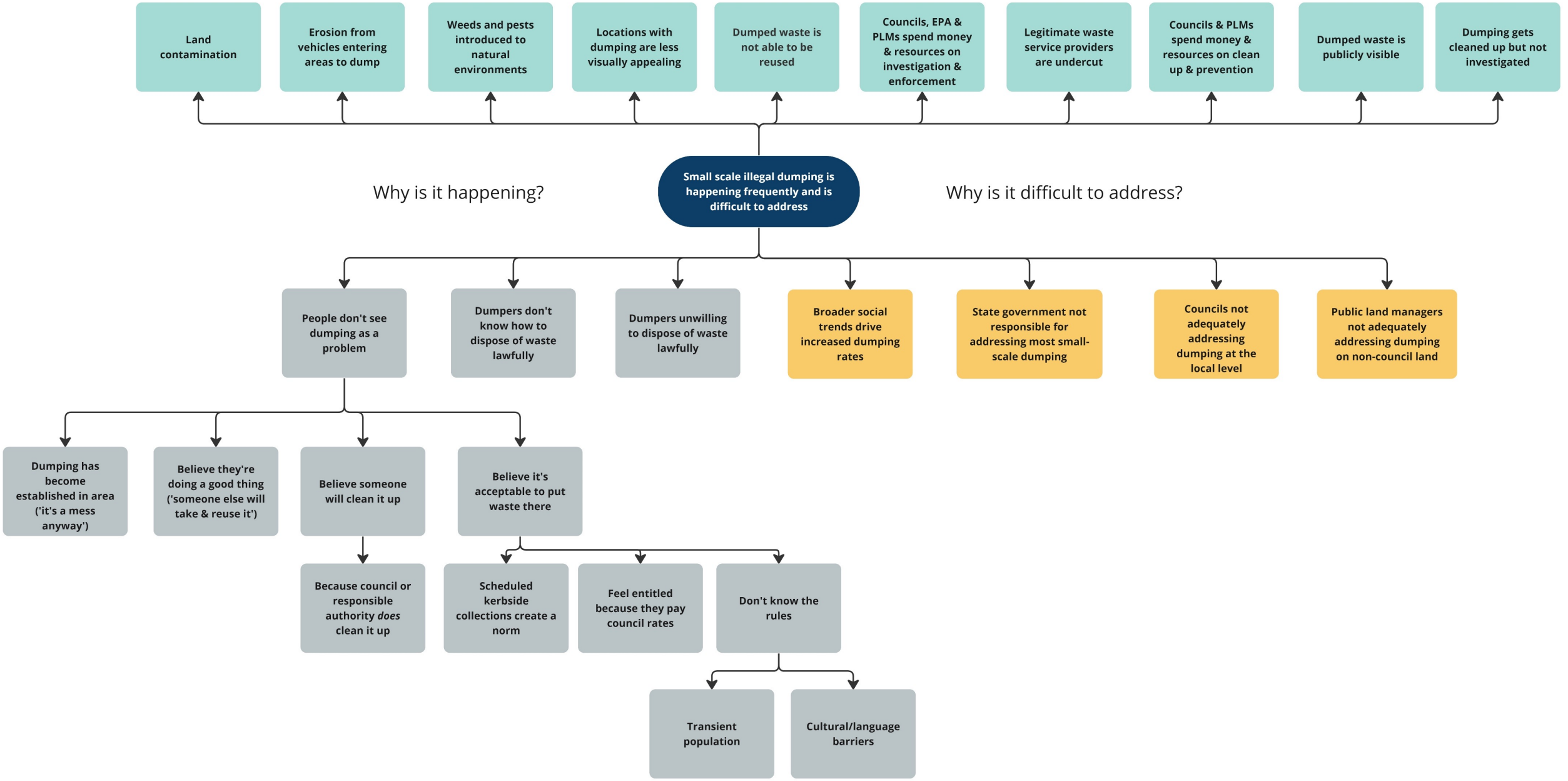
Example: excerpt from problem map



TAKING IT FURTHER

- Map stakeholders, variables, existing programs/policies, etc. to the causes

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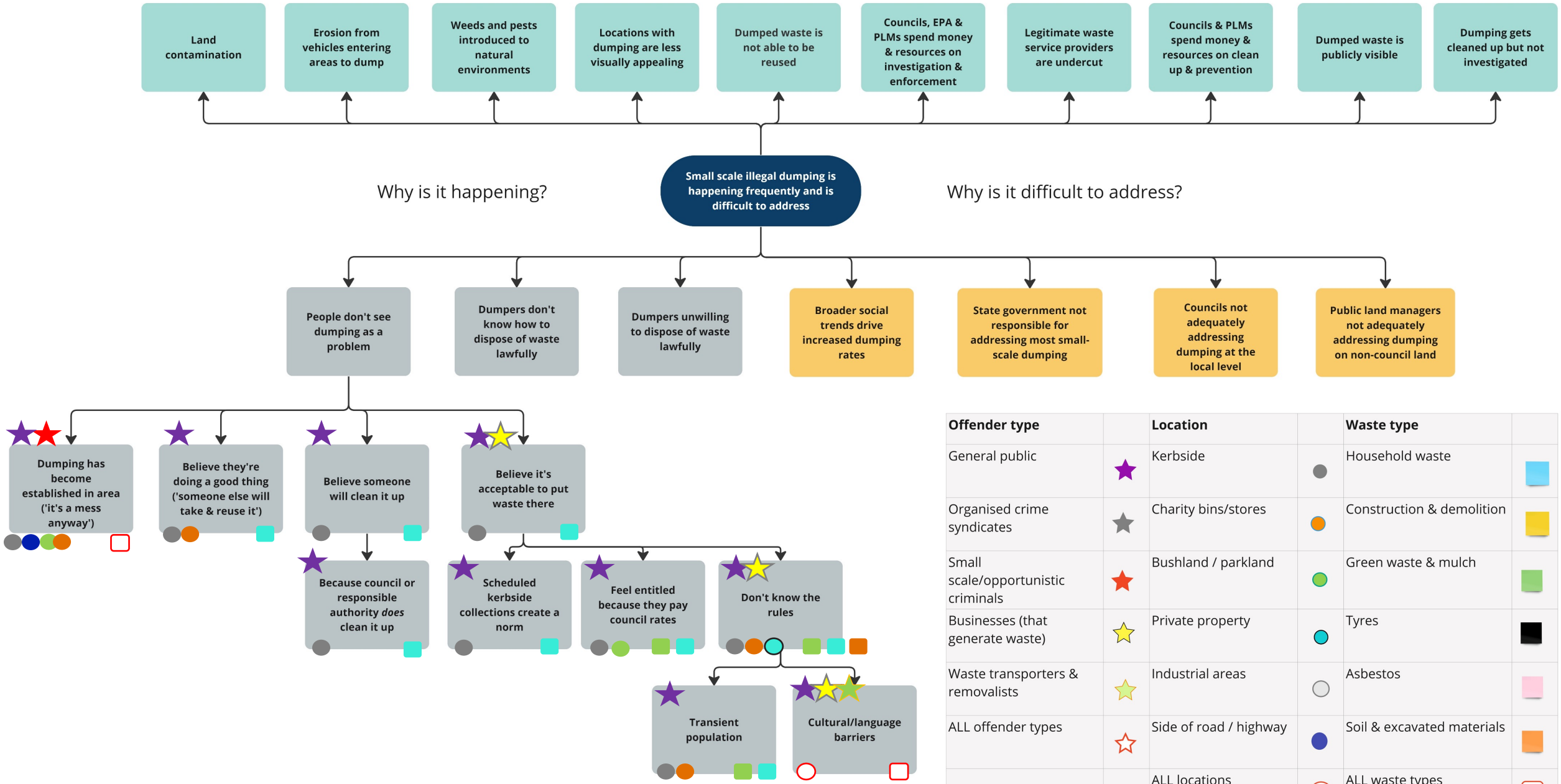

Offender type		Location		Waste type	
General public	★	Kerbside	●	Household waste	■
Organised crime syndicates	★	Charity bins/stores	●	Construction & demolition	■
Small scale/opportunistic criminals	★	Bushland / parkland	●	Green waste & mulch	■
Businesses (that generate waste)	★	Private property	●	Tyres	■
Waste transporters & removalists	★	Industrial areas	○	Asbestos	■
ALL offender types	☆	Side of road / highway	●	Soil & excavated materials	■
		ALL locations	○	ALL waste types	□

TAKING IT EVEN FURTHER

To make it really powerful:

- Bring potential beneficiaries/target communities into the process, or test a draft with them
- Develop it with all the key stakeholders from across a sector, and use it to decide who needs to do what to create change at the systems level
- Use it as a dynamic strategic tool that you return to and update again and again

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WHEN DOES IT WORK/NOT WORK?

- Most useful when causes and causal pathways are well known/there is good evidence to draw on
- Difficult to do it well and make it meaningful if you have a very tight timeframe
- The ‘problem’ framing is not always appropriate or well-received
  - Preference for strengths-based or opportunity-focused approaches
  - Resistance in returning to ‘the problem’ – we already know what it is, we just want to move forward

CASE STUDY 2:
FUTURE STATE MAPPING

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WHAT IS FUTURE STATE MAPPING?

Imagining an ideal future state with fleshy details, then working backwards

It:

- is a flexible approach
- invites people to use blue sky thinking
- gets people to imagine what a specific person or group (hypothetical or real) might be doing, thinking and feeling in the future
- is a more story-based way of understanding the desired state beyond End of Program outcomes, and required change

It helps the stakeholders to:

- express wants and aspirations in fleshy stories
- develop emphatic and mutual understanding about the impact/outcomes
- build consensus about the main ‘beneficiaries’, key change and change drivers
- hypothesise the intervention’s attribution and/or contribution

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EXAMPLE 1

- Relatively new initiative, with clearly defined high-level vision and purpose but less specific ‘what’ and ‘how’
- We used scenarios in first person narrative from the perspectives of fictional or semi-fictional persons
  - As much details about the personas
  - A story format: beginning, middle, and end
  - Prompts based on ‘the six conditions of systems change’ (Kania, Kramer & Senge 2018)
  - After reading the stories, discussing how and to what extent the initiative had caused/ contributed to the imagined change

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EXAMPLE 1: WHY DID IT WORK?

- It was about a relatively new initiative, so lots of opportunities
- Energy and enthusiasm in sharing personal experiences
- People saw it as an opportunity to get concrete about change
- First laying out the ideal future state, then carving out the sphere of influence and mechanism

EXAMPLE 2

- An organisational change initiative
  - Pre-existing issues due to organisational culture and structure
- A similar ‘scenario activity’ format to Example 1 but…
  - Stakeholders struggled to imagine an ideal future
  - Surfaced underlying tensions and frustration
  - The activity seemed to reinforce a sense of helplessness and hopelessness

EXAMPLE 2: WHY DID IT NOT WORK?

- Not yet an enabling environment for the initiative (i.e. trying to build legitimacy and authorising environment)
- Yet there was a pressure to produce ‘results’ for reporting
- Low morale – people didn’t see a point
- Blue sky thinking was too far removed from the reality of everyday struggles
- We took at a face value what the organisation said they needed, and the timing of it
- Perhaps we needed ‘discovery for discovery’

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Reflection & Discussion

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How do these approaches support better theories of change?

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QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

In small groups:

- In what contexts might each technique work/not work?
- How could you build this work into your existing theory of change development processes?
- What other discovery phase techniques have you used?
  - What was the context?
  - How well did it work?

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