

Mapping Achievable Tomorrows (MAT)

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Abstract

Mapping Achievable Tomorrows (MAT) was developed in response to a perceived need for an improved tool to overcome the often alienating and disempowering aspects of traditional planning and engagement methodologies. MAT is a highly visual, graphics-based, user friendly technology that utilises culturally appropriate canvases and mediums. As an accessible low-technology tool MAT can be used in any setting, including remote, isolated and disenfranchised communities.

In addition to its accessible delivery modality, MAT's success comes from the fact that it is a flexible and adaptable interactive planning tool that can be used vertically through a community, encapsulating the contributions of all relevant interest groups. It does not rely on participants having sophisticated literacy capacities or an understanding of governance or strategic planning methodologies. It accommodates, during one development session, any number of different stakeholders from any number of different backgrounds, understandings and agendas. Through its reliance on pictographic representations of participants' input, MAT is able to cross barriers of hierarchy, culture, ethnicity, gender and socio-economic status.

In order to confirm its flexibility we have used MAT successfully to conduct sophisticated corporate strategic planning, good governance development in the not-for-profit sector, community development planning sessions and personal living plans for disengaged and/or disadvantaged individuals.

Keywords

Mapping Achievable Tomorrows, D PPAC, strategic planning, community capacity building, community engagement

Introduction

CJ Jones and Shay Zulpo, the principals of CA Pty Ltd and the designers of D PPAC© (Dream, Prioritise, Plan, Act, Check) and MAT© (Mapping Achievable Tomorrows), believe that 'communities' are looking for a more person-centred, inclusive and interactive way in which to engage their participant members in planning and action practices. We define 'communities' in their broadest sense, encompassing communities bound by commonalities of philosophy, geography, commercial purpose and/or community benefit. In our work we also challenge the dominant definition of 'technology', which generally refers to computer-based information technology. Our definition encompasses all forms of media including written, graphic, paper/canvas-based, computer-based

and audio visual. Throughout this paper 'community' and 'technology' are referred to in the context of these definitions. In this paper we explain the D PPAC framework with a focus on MAT, a stand-alone tool or one unique, innovative and essential component of D PPAC.

The power of planning

We at CA are strong proponents of the power of planning. Through a good planning process, communities imbue a sense of identity, discover purpose, compose a plan that formulates actions and instigate a check or review process. While these ideas and some of the language we use are most commonly identified with and used by ourselves and other professionals in strategic planning for corporate and third sector organisations, in our opinion they are equally valid in community engagement and capacity building projects. At the commencement of an effective planning process communities should first reflect on themselves and articulate their values, vision and mission. Having clearly articulated who they are and what is important to them they can move on to the dream, traditionally called the strategic vision, which outlines what it is they want for their community. The 'prioritise, plan, enlist and act' phases of a planning process develop a strategy for moving forward. In our opinion good planning should always incorporate a review or check phase in order to ensure adherence to or review of the original dream.

The challenge, in our opinion, is not in selling the idea of the necessity and the power of planning but in engaging participants in an egalitarian, effective and meaningful way which delivers significant and tangible outcomes for the community. We propose that our D PPAC framework, with MAT as the fundamental first step, accomplishes this. From our experiences both as participants and as consultants in community capacity building, strategic planning and governance projects, we recognised that constituents were becoming disengaged from and disenchanted with both the process and the outcomes of these planning practices. This was particularly the case when traditional and/or computer-based (e.g. PowerPoint) technologies were being used to facilitate the planning workshop. Traditional tools are primarily word-based and rely heavily on the use of sometimes confusing and alienating processes such as SWOTs and PESTs. The long-term strategic goals or dream aspect of a traditional strategic plan is encapsulated in what is often a wordy and complicated document, which does not lend itself to becoming an integral part of the day to day operation of the community. In the MAT process we do not focus on 'goal setting' but rather encourage communities to dream and then to action the dream in meaningful and inclusive ways. Without formal long-term community processes in place, traditional methodologies do not encourage constant referral to the dream. The simplicity and dramatic nature of the completed MAT allows it to be a living medium constantly present in a community. It is essential to the process that, at the conclusion of the development of the community's MAT, it is laminated (if done on paper) or preserved in some appropriate way and hung in a prominent relevant place in an organisation or community's central space. In this way it becomes an integral part of the community's day-to-day functioning and is available for constant referral to ensure the 'dream' is never lost.

What is D PPAC?

Normann and Ramirez (1993) propose that “Strategy is the art of creating value...provid[ing] the intellectual frameworks, conceptual models and governing ideas ...to identify opportunities for bringing value ...and for delivering that value...”. Although Normann and Ramirez were talking exclusively about the corporate world when they articulated this idea we feel it is equally relevant to communities engaging in planning and capacity building projects. We realised during our early trial workshops that we needed to create a holistic but adaptable framework within which communities, including organisations of all types and sizes, could conduct this vital value-adding strategic planning. The framework we developed is called D PPAC, a planning framework that successfully addresses the strategic planning needs of a multiplicity of communities.

The phases of the D PPAC framework are Dream, Prioritise, Plan, Act and Check. We agree that “Strategic thinking is difficult...requir[ing].....the application of creative, intuitive and innovative thinking.” (Hubbard et al. 2000). Utilising MAT, which we will discuss in more detail later, we overcome this potential barrier during the Dream phase of D PPAC by engaging participants in an innovative way in an interactive visioning session. The ‘Prioritise’ and ‘Plan’ phases are also initially addressed in the MAT and then developed further as a component part of D PPAC. In the Prioritise phase participants are asked to rank the previously articulated dreams for their ‘community’. During the Plan phase the participants decide what needs to be done in order to move towards realising the prioritised dreams. They allocate tasks to individuals or working parties and set timeframes. The Act phase encompasses research, analysis and sometimes project trials. It can include market research, assessment of human resource requirements, financial projections and potential revenue-raising sources, as well as risk management assessment and strategy development. Where appropriate, applicable documentation is developed. In conjunction with D PPAC we have developed several innovative, user-friendly and comprehensive documentation frameworks to assist in the compiling of formal paperwork. This analysis is then reported back to the entire group of original MAT participants and any other relevant additional personnel as the Check phase of D PPAC. During this phase a decision is made as to which and how many of the reported projects are to be implemented or developed further, a process for this agreed upon and timelines set. During all the subsequent phases it is essential that there is constant referral to the MAT to ensure relevance to the Dream, adherence to mission and continuity of purpose so the articulated vision and purpose is never lost in the development and implementation processes.

The Plan, Act and Check phases can then be utilised as organisational or community development tools. In this instance the Plan is the formulation of a development action plan and timelines, the Act is the implementation of projects and the Check is the project review process. Again, for reasons already stated there must be constant referral to the MAT.

D PPAC is a versatile framework, which can be adapted for utilisation in almost any community or physical setting. A significant strength of the D PPAC framework is that it has multiple exit points and

therefore communities can self-determine how much or how little of the process they wish to undertake. Communities always enter the framework at the Dream phase utilising the MAT tool. However, the point at which a community exits D PPAC, and how formal the documentation arising from the remaining phases are, depends entirely on the resources and the outcome requirements of the participant community. Additionally the component parts sitting under each section can be manipulated to fulfil the needs of any community. The components can be preset by the facilitators or they can be negotiated with participants as the first stage of a D PPAC project. The D PPAC framework has multiple applications and we have utilised it for community engagement projects, strategic planning, organisational systems development, single-project development, governance systems development and team building. D PPAC potentially has a myriad of other exciting possible applications, the scope of which is bound only by the imagination and requirements of participant communities and the skill of the facilitators.

CA project manages the D PPAC process and delivers MAT and some of the other D PPAC components whilst facilitating communities to utilise internal capabilities and resources and, if needed, other external specialist services, to complete the component parts of D PPAC. At present, 'train the trainer' modules are being developed in order to educate contracted D PPAC and MAT facilitators. We feel identifying and training 'local' facilitators is particularly important in Indigenous and other 'specialist' communities in order to ensure maximum community participation through ethnic and cultural relevance. The D PPAC and MAT processes, however, both allow for experienced facilitators to 'stand beside' and support these newly trained facilitators in an ongoing mentoring capacity.

What is MAT?

Having identified the need to develop a new user-friendly method of engaging participants in a more participative planning venture, with some of our client's cooperation we experimented with returning to using a pen and paper graphics-based methodology. These trial workshops proved an outstanding success and we went on to formalise the technology by developing MAT.

The process of achieving a completed MAT with a community begins with a large continuous piece paper or other selected canvas on which the MAT template is pre-drawn. We usually use a variety of colourful felt-tipped pens. However, the medium can vary according to the appropriateness for a particular community. For instance we have utilised cloth and paint and collage mediums. Two facilitators manage the process, one graphing and reflecting, the other assisting the engagement process. The initial phase focuses on the existing values and vision of the participants for their community. We go on to create an environment where the community can dream unfettered by traditional barriers such as hierarchy, gender and education. These dreams are represented in dramatic pictographs. Participants are then asked to formulate or review, with reference to their dreams, their mission. This is usually represented in word form but, if appropriate, could also be graphed. In place of a traditional SWOT analysis MAT then looks at community Strengths and

STRATEGIC PLANNING FRAMEWORK
FOR
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

D PPA ©
Dream — Prioritise — Plan — Act — Check

DREAM

MAT©
Mapping Achievable Tomorrows

MISSION	STRENGTHS	BLOCKERS	PRIORITISE	PLAN	ENLIST
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VALUES	VISION
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PRIORITISE	PLAN	ACT	CHECK
<i>What's achievable?</i>	<i>What needs to be done?</i>	<i>Let's go do it!</i>	<i>Report back to 'community'</i>
<i>What's most important?</i>	<i>Who does it?</i>		<i>Did we achieve?</i>
	<i>How do we do it?</i>		<i>Benchmarking?</i>
	<i>When do we do it?</i>		

Blockers. We feel the use of the terminology 'Blockers' is more meaningful to most people and eliminates the perennially misunderstood distinction between Threats and Weaknesses which are significant elements in a SWOT analysis. The Opportunities section of a SWOT is encapsulated in the Dream section of MAT. We then assist communities to prioritise their dreams. Referencing the identified Strengths and Blockers they decide which dreams are achievable in an agreed timeframe, usually eighteen months although this can be up to five years if appropriate. The process moves on to formulate a short-term plan for beginning the process of developing selected projects. The final step of MAT is to identify who and/or what can be enlisted to assist in the fulfilment of the priorities identified from the Dream.

As stated previously, in order for the MAT to remain a living 'document' and an integral part of the community's functioning and development it must be prominently displayed in a central community space. It is also important that the MAT is formally revisited regularly (usually annually) in order to ensure the Dream remains applicable and progress can be charted. As a living document the MAT is always accessible for change. However, to retain its integrity as an inclusive process the MAT should

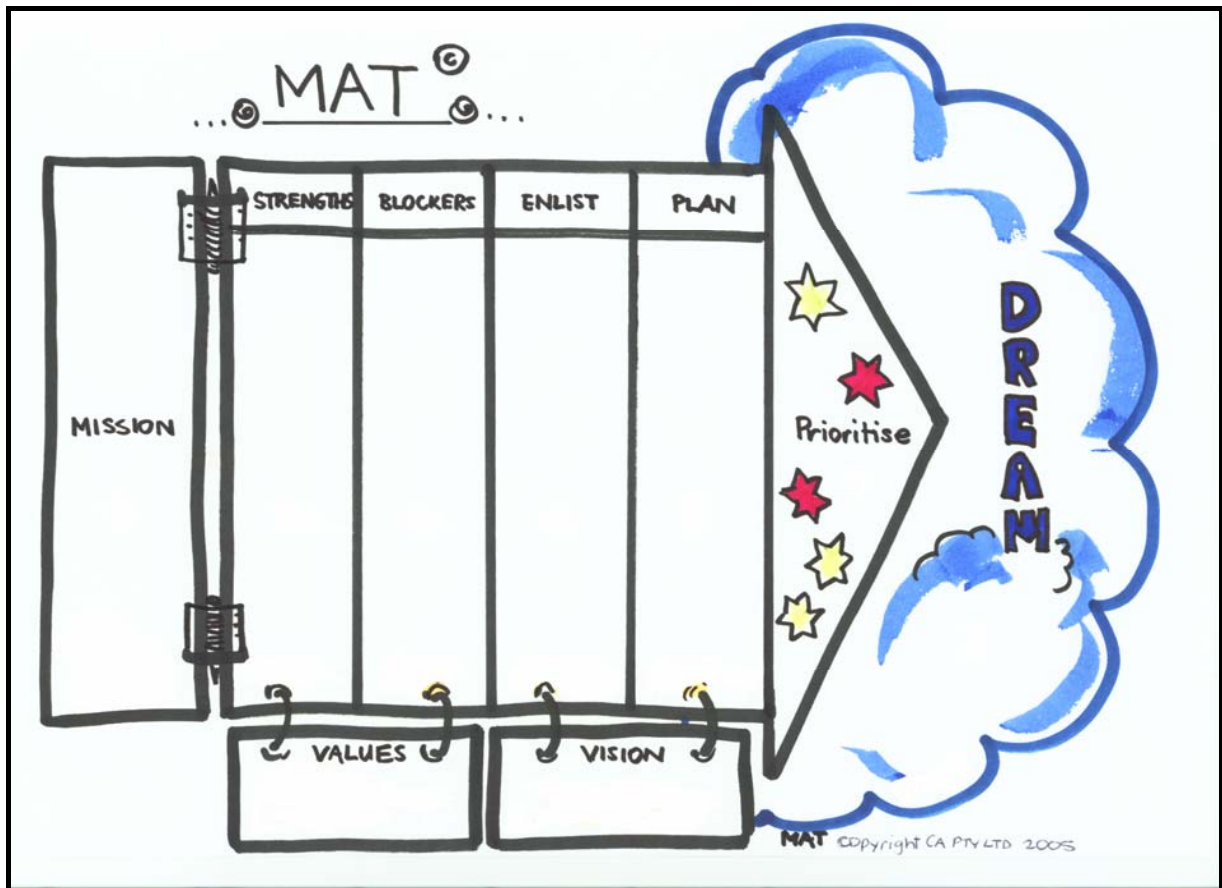
never be changed by one community member. Changes should always be made through a facilitated MAT workshop.

MAT functions successfully as a stand-alone planning tool when conducted with either a single participant or a group. It is more often the case however that it fits into the D PPAC framework which comprehensively facilitates the actualisation of a project. Again, we have used MAT successfully to conduct sophisticated corporate strategic planning, good governance development in the not-for-profit sector, community development planning sessions and personal living plans for disengaged and/or disadvantaged individuals.

As a technology, MAT represents a major breakthrough in community engagement and empowerment technology. It is a shift away from culturally bound, language-based planning workshop processes. Participants in MAT workshops are engaged because the technology is driven by different responses and cues. Ironically, it builds on our increasing dependence on electronic visual texts whilst employing the simplest of technologies, pen and paper. As an innovative and accessible graphics-based tool, MAT can be used in any setting and is easily adapted for work in remote, isolated and disenfranchised communities engaging in community capacity building projects. For example, communities could replace pen and paper with paint and canvas, thread and cloth or any other culturally appropriate medium. MAT could also be totally 'word-free' relying completely on a pictorial representation of the participants' input. In this way, communities who rely on verbal communication rather than written documentation can develop a visual 'storybook' of their dreams and the planning process to achieve this. Furthermore, as a non-computer based technology, MAT can be adapted for work in communities where computer-based technologies are unavailable, impractical or impossible. Even were it possible to 'import' computer-based technologies into communities for the planning workshop process, it may not be possible, for varying reasons, to leave this equipment behind, thereby making the 'plan' less accessible to the community.

MAT engaging communities

Since MAT is a flexible and adaptable tool that can be used vertically through a community or organisation, it encapsulates the contributions of all participants at a variety of levels. It does not rely on cultural homogeneity, common hierarchical plateaus, sophisticated literacy capacities or an understanding of planning or governance methodologies. It can accommodate, during one MAT session, any number of different stakeholders of differing hierarchical status from any number of different backgrounds, understandings and agendas. It is also possible to conduct several complementary MAT sessions with different stakeholder groups as part of a community engagement and capacity building project. In this case we have developed a process for drawing all the resulting MATs into a comprehensive community MAT.



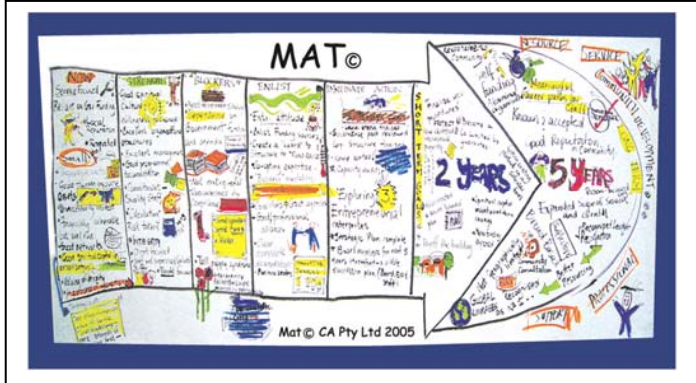
The strength of MAT lies in its ability to encourage active, honest and meaningful input from participant community members. As a fun, colourful and boldly graphic process, it encourages participants to think outside the square. Planning occurs in a non-threatening environment because MAT subtly identifies and utilises the crossover points for boundaries of personal difference and hierarchical constraints. It does this by breaking down the formality of the process allowing for the foregrounding, through graphic representations of simple, often pivotal issues that can be marginalised in traditional planning. As a tool, MAT invokes an egalitarian system which values equally the input of each participant; no one need feel left out or that their idea is too silly or trivial to be included in their community's planning and development.

In traditional word based planning methodologies differences in a community's collective understanding of particular concepts can go undetected because participants are unaware that there may be differing interpretations of the nuances of words. The reflection phase of the MAT process is able to highlight 'cracks' in a community's collective understanding of a cornerstone concept. This was vividly demonstrated to us during a trial workshop in which the concept of 'spiritual capital' was identified as a guiding principle for that organisation. 'Spiritual capital' for this group of people was not used in a religious context but rather to describe the organisation's culture. During the reflection process the graphic representation on the MAT of this concept immediately stimulated vigorous

debate about the interpretation of this concept in relation to that community. After discussion, the graphic was modified to reflect the newly agreed understanding of what 'spiritual capital' meant to that group. This example highlighted the way we believe MAT allows focus on the graphic to move the discussion away from personal disagreement between individual community members, and transfers opinions into a philosophical realm.

Conclusion

Although we have been using MAT and D PACC successfully for almost a year now, the concept is still in its infancy. While the development of the frameworks is completed, as we expand the use of these technologies into different 'communities' each CA MAT workshop raises new issues that we take on board as exciting possibilities. The greatest asset of both MAT and D PACC is their flexibility and we are continuously energised by the opportunity to adapt the process to the needs of a particular participant community. Our next challenge is the development and application of the training modules for new facilitators. We are also interested in the possible academic theorisation of the planning modality and the psychology behind the success of these tools. Our primary dream however, is to have the opportunity to utilise this tool to assist as many and varied communities as possible in their quest for inclusive and meaningful engagement and capacity building programs.



Acknowledgments

The idea of using a graphics-based tool for this type of work first came to us when we were 'exposed', during a Parent to Parent Queensland Ass. Inc. workshop, to an individual life planning tool called PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope). PATH has many variations and is used primarily and extensively in the disability sector. The facilitators of the workshop, Ray and Debbie, inspired and encouraged us to take this idea and adapt and develop it for use in other settings. We would like to thank Parent to Parent Queensland Ass. Inc. for introducing us to PATH, and Ray and Debbie for their support and encouragement.

We would also like to acknowledge and thank all those communities who have allowed us to trial our ideas with them. Their enthusiastic participation and constructive feedback have been invaluable to the continued development of D PPAC and MAT.

References

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ca provides a copyrighted, innovative, comprehensive, effective framework for strategic planning and operational and review processes to assist Boards, governing bodies and communities to achieve their full potential.

ca identifies communities in their broadest sense encompassing communities bound by commonalities of, philosophy, geography, commercial purpose and/or community benefit.

About the principals

CJ Jones has a doctorate in Arts Administration and is a qualified teacher/trainer with additional experience in conflict resolution and negotiation skills training. Before recently returning to live in Australia she was based in Africa, working internationally with boards of companies being privatised. Her experience with these emerging economy 'companies in crisis' has made her work pragmatic

and user-friendly. CJ has worked for the World Bank, IMF and has been a director on several emerging market stock exchanges. During her years residing in Africa she was also involved in many community capacity building and community enterprise projects. She has continued this work on her return to Australia.

Shay Zulpo has a BA, is a qualified trainer and is currently undertaking postgraduate studies in Applied Corporate Governance. She is an Honorary Senior Fellow of the University of the Sunshine Coast and an affiliate member of Chartered Secretaries Australia. Shay has received two Australia Day awards for her work in the community sector. She is currently a director of two not-for-profit boards. Shay has worked for many years in the Third Sector including at management level. She has had experience establishing not-for-profit organisations, including the award-winning Sunshine Coast Street Angels, and has facilitated several community engagement projects. Shay has extensive experience in assisting and training management, boards and/or management committees.



Shay



CJ