

# making the network



## Workshop games

The game featured on the Making the Net Work site at <http://www.makingthenetwork.org/pgame> has been developed by Drew Mackie and David Wilcox, who have worked together as consultants and facilitators in community-based regeneration for over 20 years. Drew in particular has specialised in the use of simulations, games and other creative workshop techniques in community participation and partnership-building.

Early versions of the game were developed by Drew for professionals and practitioners working in sustainable development – a difficult concept to explain to wider communities. Helping people plan the use of new technology was an equally difficult challenge, but Drew and David found similar techniques for discussion and collaboration worked there too.

Games they produced for development trusts, sustainable development projects, community networks and online centres have been supported by the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI), BT, IBM, DfES, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Communities Scotland, the New Zealand Government and RMIT University, Melbourne. Below Drew explains the general benefits of games for engagement, partnerships and visioning. A description of the game follows.

## Why games?

Current ways of thinking about, and developing, user involvement and partnership processes do not always reflect the complexity and inherent "messiness" of planning – whether in neighbourhood renewal or technology system development. Everyone may be doing things "by the book" yet fail because each party sees things from their own perspective. They may not get the whole picture until conflicts or delays create a crisis.

Participation, partnership and active citizenship are now all accepted in policy, and reflected in procedures. Yet on the ground residents increasingly complain of participation fatigue, activists are overwhelmed by the demands of more and more meetings, and policy makers frustrated by ensuing delays and delivery failures.

Technology planners may accept that system success or failure will ultimately depend on user understanding and commitment – yet somehow end up focusing on 'wires and boxes' not people.

We believe that 'try harder' isn't going to be enough: we need both skills development for the different interests, and ways for participants to work through together the kinds of issues they must address.

Games and simulations provide one way in which both agencies and communities can build real co-operation in a safe, experimental environment. The "play" will not necessarily be predictive - but will yield insights that help people see what may happen, and understand each other's point of view . Workshops and games also provide informal settings for people to get to know each other and develop relationships outside the formality of committee meetings.

Here's why conventional participation and partnership processes need the addition of a new approach for the benefit of all those involved

#### **For residents**

- Most engagement processes don't offer a level playing field. People are baffled by structures, jargon and funding regimes and yet find it difficult to challenge power-holders
- Processes are often repeated by different agencies, without the data gathered being consolidated

The potential benefits of a games-based approach:

- everyone has an equal role
- the rules and language have to be understandable
- play provides a safe environment to ask questions.

#### **For practitioners**

- People suffer burn out through attending working groups and committee meetings
- Yet those meetings are often not run creatively to maximise the input from participants

Potential benefits of a games-based approach:

- demonstrates that there are other ways to run meetings
- creates a forum to share ideas across boundaries

#### **For professionals**

- Conventional public meetings can be unproductive
- There may be problems of finding common language and frameworks to develop ideas with residents, practitioners and other professionals

Potential benefits of a games-based approach:

- as above
- Establishing a creative, time-effective environment

### For local authorities and agencies

- Participation processes can be costly
- It can be difficult to explore 'what if?' without raising expectations
- Delivery depends on many stakeholders and it is often difficult to get buy in
- Processes are messy : methods should reflect that reality

Potential benefits of a games-based approach:

- cost-effective way to organise participation and partnership building processes
- a good way to engage a wider range of interests;
- offers 'what if ?' insights;
- helps get buy-in and build relationships.

### For policy makers

- Policy commitments to participation and empowerment are not carried through into practice
- It is difficult to find instruments that will help create participatory cultures across sectors
- It is difficult to get an approximation to front-line experience quickly
- Case studies don't reveal complexity and messiness.

Potential benefits of a games-based approach:

- games design offers a way of mapping reality;
- games play provides insights into the attitudes of different interests and possible outcomes.

## Games overall

The game featured on Making the Net Work is only one simple example, and we are not of course suggesting that games and simulations resolve all of these problems. However games do open the door to a range of creative approaches. They get people out of their boxes. They also underline one of the key lessons from partnership and participation work: however highly skilled the participants, what counts is the nature of the relationships that they develop with each other .

The best way to develop relationships and trust is to get people together doing something – not just talking about it around a committee table. A game is next best thing to doing it for real – and a good route to action.

## Playing the game

There are four phases to playing the game. First of all, ask people to form groups of not more than eight people. Then the phases are:

1. Describing the situation
2. Choosing the cards
3. Planning action
4. Presenting the solution and discussion

### 1 Describing the local situation

When the Game is being used with communities or agencies to explore a real situation, players begin by describing that situation, identifying the main characteristics and listing those on a flip chart.

Alternatively, the facilitator can ask people to describe the strengths and weaknesses of the community, and the opportunities and threats it faces. This is sometimes called a SWOT analysis.

If the game is being used for awareness raising, perhaps at a seminar, participants who have no common backgrounds can be asked to invent a fictitious scenario. Different groups can be asked to prepare different situations - say inner city, peripheral housing, rural village - and then exchange scenarios. That way each group can prepare a tough challenge knowing they won't have to solve it.

### 2 Choosing the cards

In this phase, each group receives and familiarises themselves with a pack of cards. Each card shows:

- a cartoon - to distinguish cards easily from each other
- a project title and description - which can be interpreted by players according to their experience and expertise
- an indication of the resources needed for the project to happen (e.g. staffing)
- a point number in the bottom right hand corner to indicate (broadly) how much the project - costs -. Facilitators should give each group a budget. This is usually represented as 15 points but you can decide how tight things are.



Each group now selects a set of cards which addresses the challenges in their local situation, or invented scenario, form a sensible plan, and doesn't add up to more than the budget.

Players may write their own cards to include in their set using sticky notes. These can be for projects they have already (in the real situation or in the invented scenario), in which case they don't carry a cost against the budget. Players can also create new projects and these will count towards the budget. The cost (or point number) must be negotiated with the facilitator.

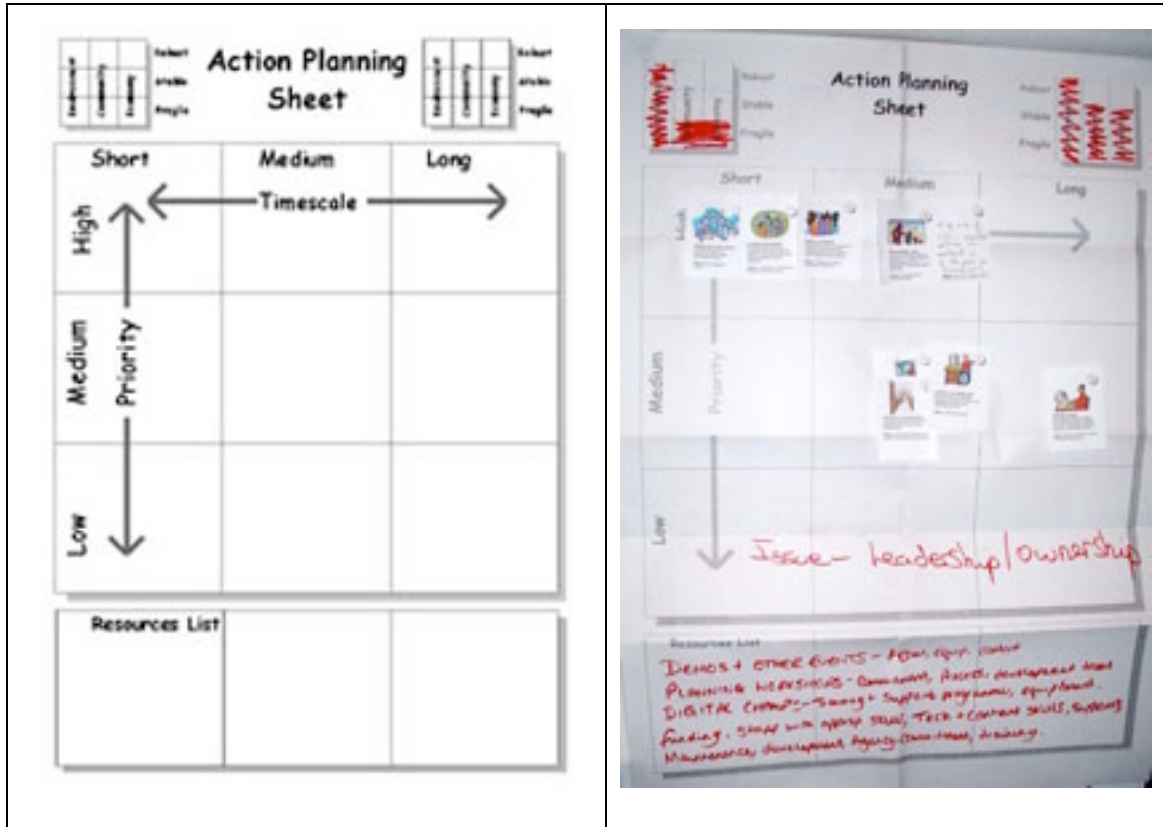
### 3 Planning action

Once groups have selected their cards they move on to the planning phase using the Game Planning Sheet available on the site as a download (redraw larger on a flip chart). The Sheet has two main elements: two small sustainability indicator grids - or models; and a large planning matrix .

The small sustainability indicator grids are used by players to assess the Environment, Community and Economy of their context or scenario in terms of how Robust, Stable or Fragile they are. This assessment is done before the issues and problems have been addressed by the group, and again after the discussion and planning have happened. Players shade the left-hand grid to start with and end by shading the right-hand grid.

The large matrix on the Planning Sheet is the main planning tool. It has two dimensions, timescale and priority, and players should stick cards - using Blu-tack or similar on to the sheet to create an action plan.

Players should then look at the 'needs' on each of the cards and add up these resource requirements at the bottom of the sheet. This summary should prompt discussion about what funding, staff resources, volunteers and collaborations are needed.

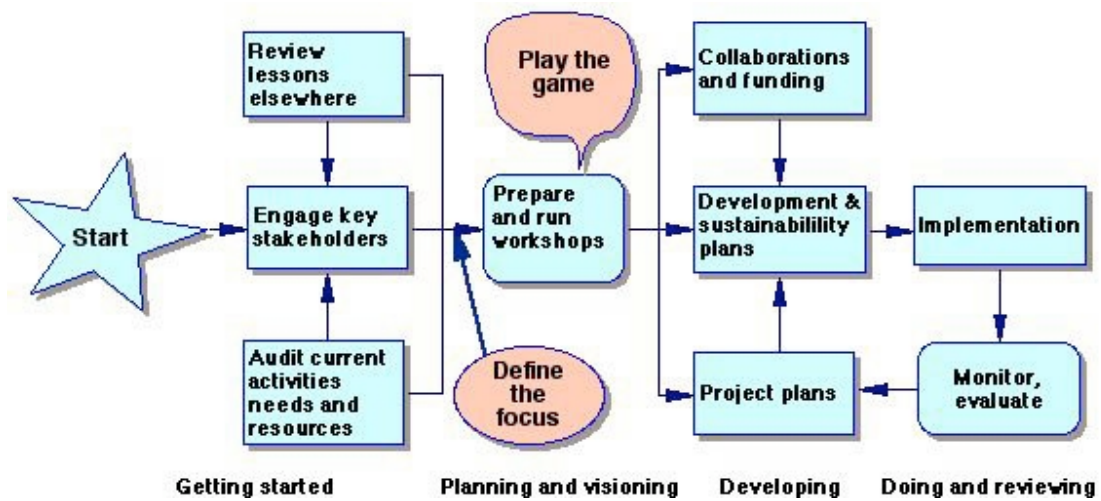


#### 4 Presenting the solution and discussion

When each group has completed their action plan, they should present their solution, discuss key points to emerge, and next steps.

#### The game as part of a development process

The game can stand alone as a visioning workshop exercise, or become part of an overall development programme, shown diagrammatically below



The diagram above shows an idealised process in which the game might be used 'for real'.

This routemap is described in more detail at <http://www.makingthenetwork.org/process/route.htm>

Game example and introduction at <http://www.makingthenetwork.org/pgame>

Instrtuctions at <http://www.makingthenetwork.org/pgame/game.htm>