Why We Won't Produce a Digital Template for MAPS and PATH

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As an inventory of the power adapters in our carry-on luggage attests, we yield second place to no one when it comes to delight in the capacities offered by digital media. Indeed, some who know and love us might use the word "obsessed". We make regular use of digital photographs and video to record and enhance our work, state-of-the art interfaces add value to our DVD's, we argue over ways to make www.inclusion.com more useful and interesting, and we compulsively upgrade our publishing software. As well, our mission is to produce materials that make the work of advocates for inclusion more effective, easier, and more fun –and, thanks to many users of our books and DVD's, we make part of our living by following our users suggestions about how to fulfill this mission. Yet, despite repeated requests, we have chosen not to produce a digital template for MAPS and PATH.

To understand why we would say no to the combined appeal of employing media we love to use for a purpose that would probably earn us some money, it's important to know that we both love having guests for dinner. We each have different customs and preferences –Jack and Lynda often host a "the more the merrier" table while John and Connie usually compose a dinner party according to Australian poet Les Murray's sentiment: "Whenever two or three are gathered together, that is about enough." But all of us like thinking about what tonight's particular guests will enjoy and we like making some time to prepare the food, the space, and the service. Indeed, we think that making the time to bring thoughtful intention to preparing the occasion is necessary to its success, even if this is no more than a few moments of selecting the right bowls to hold the Chinese take-out and brewing green tea for guests invited impromptu after a meeting. In short, we think that good dinners call for a thoughtful, intentional, personal welcome, hospitality that bears the mark of the hosts' hands, and time for the enjoyment of food, company, and conversation.

We see person-centred planning in the same light. It seems to us to be at least as special an occasion as a well-presented dinner party in the person's honor. The setting and order of the meeting ought to reflect the seriousness of its purpose and facilitate its accomplishment –for PATH, to mobilize a person and her supporters to move toward a desirable future; for MAPS, to bring a person's gifts into focus and to define the conditions under which those gifts can thrive. The person deserves careful attention to the guest list, concern for comfort (including suitable refreshments), a setting that reflects the person's identity and purpose, and support to be a good host to the process.

Capable facilitation as essential to a person-centered plan as good cooking is to a dinner party. Good cooking thoughtfully matches the guest's tastes with available ingredients and the cook's skills. This match is most likely to succeed if the cook makes time to prepare the ingredients –a process best begun by sharpening the knives. The ritual of knife sharpening not only makes for cleaner cuts, it also concentrates the cook's intention on the success of the meal. Capable facilitation encourages the emergence of a social container that holds people safe enough to allow them to share the imaginative and emotional work necessary for creative action. The chances that this effective holding will emerge increase if the people who take the role of facilitator make time and have thoughtful ways to focus their intention on the success of the meeting.

For us, the simple rituals of arranging space, hanging paper, arranging markers and chalks, and sketching the outlines of the PATH arrow or the MAPS horizon serve to claim the space for the group's work while it concentrates the intentions of the facilitators and begins to claim the attention of the participants.

The handmade template on paper sends a message that is literally the graphic facilitator's own mark. It says, "Today's meeting happens in a tradition of meetings that have followed a similar shape, and, today's meeting is being created just for you. These shapes link you to many others who have met for similar purposes, and they are being drawn here, now, for you, by those who commit themselves to guide you through this process."

Some of the arguments we have heard for the production of digital formats seem to us to reflect a different understanding of MAPS and PATH than we have.

Some people say that a digital format would allow people who "can't draw" to facilitate the process. We want people to experience MAPS and PATH as more like the joint creation of a mural than like filling out a bureaucratic form. We also believe that people need training and practice to learn how to facilitate, and long experience shows us that the number of people who can't learn all the graphic skills that they need to do a competent job of drawing the shapes and recording key images and idea with a few hours of training and practice is very small indeed. This small number of people can make their contribution by taking up the other role in the facilitation team that we see as necessary, that of process facilitator. We know that age and disability need not keep most people who want to learn from being capable graphic facilitators, and that the time and planning needed to hand draw the templates is very small.

Some people say that a digital format would make it easier to archive people's plans. We notice that many people keep the hand-drawn records of their MAPS and PATHs, many people use them to brief those who were not present or to remind their circle of where they were together when the MAP are PATH was done, and some people post them on their walls. We also notice that digital cameras are common and that a little space planning allows the easy production of printable digital pictures of the display. However, because the purpose of the meeting is to mobilize and direct creative action in the real world, perhaps the most critical record exists in dispersed form, in the additions that participants make to the "to do" lists on their refrigerator doors or in their planners or on their desktop calendars that reflect the agreements that have emerged from the meeting. Without commitment to follow through on these agreements, any archive is a dead letter. With commitment, people will need only occasional refreshers to remember the big picture that fames what they have decided to do.

Some people say that a digital format would make it easier to meet service system requirements for written individual plans. We have a very different understanding of the relationship between MAPS and PATH and the disability service system. The system

has a legitimate claim on standardized, auditable information that establishes a person's continuing eligibility for system funds and satisfies system requirements for monitoring the quality and effectiveness of its investments according to its own standards. This kind of uniform information, while legitimate, is fundamentally different from the sort of knowledge that MAPS and PATH generate. We have seen many examples of people who are fluent in the system's language making effective and responsible translations between the deliberations of those who meet to do MAPS or PATH and the system's forms. We have even seen system plans and records that include images cut and pasted from digital images of the graphic record or a MAP or a PATH. These translations seem good to us when they result in a better focus of system resources on supporting the conditions that allow the person's gifts to thrive or assisting the person to move toward a personally significant future. But it seems to us like an inversion of purpose when MAPS and PATH are done at the system's behest to serve the system's purposes. MAPS and PATH developed as ways to offer people a base for planning outside the system's grammar. We have been privileged to see many people use MAPS and PATH to create life chances that were unthinkable in the terms current in the systems available to them. If the results of MAPS and PATH don't need translation into system language, and if there are not important parts of the conversation that cannot be translated into system language, the process has failed to support social creativity to the extent that we know it can. In case current system offerings can straightforwardly deliver what people want for themselves, there is no need for MAPS or PATH.

Some people say that a digital format would allow people to complete a MAP or a PATH on their own, without the trouble or the loss of privacy involved in convening a group. We occasionally eat alone and sometimes find it enjoyable, but we would not call such a meal a dinner party. More than a sequence of questions, MAPS and PATH are essentially forms of social inquiry. The group may be very small, but the process underlying both formats is relational. Neither process flows unless the person experiences being seen from the hearts of others and heard in the hearts of others. Each process makes a person's interdependence explicit: MAPS says, "This is what I need from you and others if my gifts are to flourish"; PATH says, "This is a future I can move toward experiencing if

I can enroll you to support me." Each process draws on other's knowledge of the person and the world: at the appropriate moment, MAPS asks, "How do you, who know me and care for me, see my capacities and gifts?"; PATH asks, "What can you, who know me and care for me, add to my sense of a desirable future and how I can move toward it?"

British Television recently featured a show called "Grumpy Old Men" in which an en-semble of late 50 something to late 60 something men grumble about the myriad ways in which the world is crumbling. It is not our intention to join the cast. It seems to us that the reasons people ask us for a digital template each point toward possibilities for new inventions. We know that people can profitably think on their own about the sorts of questions that MAPS and PATH suggest, and we think it might be interesting to invent other ways to support that thinking without compromising the essentially social nature of the MAPS and PATH process. We are glad when service systems look for ways to steer their investments that reflect what is really important to and for the people they serve, we just resist the co-optation of necessarily diluted versions of MAPS and PATH to meet system rules, timetables and resource scarcities. We think that there are many exciting creative possibilities in using digital media and web-pages to assist people to construct vivid, exciting, personalized answers to the question, "Who am I and what matters most to me?"

We are simply asking that those who want something fundamentally different from MAPS and PATH get on with inventing what they see the need for in its own terms rather than trying to bend MAPS and PATH in ways that will break them. Dinner parties are great, but life has room for far more and varied ways to get together.