

12

The business planning story: planning land based enterprises with rural Aboriginal people

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• Introduction

Aboriginal people are assuming increased responsibility for the management of vast rangeland areas of central Australia. They have many uses for the land ranging from traditional hunting, harvesting, burning and ceremony, to cash generating uses such as tourism, pastoralism and the sale of artefacts and 'bush tucker' (food from wild plants and animals). The cash economy is now a strong part of the local Aboriginal economy, but many rural Aboriginal people have not had the opportunity to understand the cash system, or business planning and management. To promote better understanding, the Land Management Section of the Central Land Council and Aboriginal traditional owners have developed and used a simple model of participatory business planning.

The major aims of this model are:

- to provide a clear, structured planning process;
- to increase peoples' understanding of business planning and management; and,
- to test the viability of a proposed business.

The process is similar to the accepted process for Property Management Planning which is widely used on non Aboriginal farms and pastoral stations in Australia. However, the methods are adapted to people with low literacy and numeracy standards and different cultural assumptions to non Aboriginal people. The steps (People map, Aims, Land map, Land use map, Business story, Money story, Budget

and Action plan) are shown on the following pages.

Where have we used this model?

The process has been used to plan a range of activities in different parts of Australia, including central Australia, the Kimberley and north Queensland. Activities include a commercial farming enterprise running 6,000 head of cattle, small-scale cattle activities running only 100 head, and an orchard development. It has also been used to decide whether to go ahead with a tourism venture and to resolve a conflict between two business partners.

How can we make business planning effective?

The process must be flexible so it can be adapted to suit local needs. For each step there are many possible methods that may be used, and we continue to try new ones. Although the steps are shown here in sequence, there is often a need to review past decisions as new understandings are gained.

This process is a tool. Facilitators must understand the principles of action research if they are to use it effectively. Everyone taking part should be prepared to share knowledge and share responsibility for action.

Participatory business planning requires that local perceptions, values and goals come face to face with the rigidity of the competitive market. If the model is to be useful, the participants must themselves determine, or at

least, accept the productivity and market information put into the model. This information must be technically sound and reflect the reality of the market economy. This can provide difficulties for facilitators, who often need to think about new ways of breaking down economic systems into their parts, with assumptions clearly explained. For example, interest is explained as paying rent for the use of someone's money. Facilitators can use an agreed external 'expert' to provide technical information if necessary. If people have low numeracy skills, most of the planning process can be done without counting money but by simply comparing and allocating piles of money. To help this, we have printed our own model money.

Where to from here?

We are testing various ways of recording the planning process using photos and drawings. We leave these records in the community for ongoing use as a planning and management tool. We are also trying to adapt land use plans so they meet funding agency information needs. We also need to convince funding agencies to change their application forms so they can be understood by community members. We hope that community plans and funding applications can become the one document that is understood by all. Another challenge is to encourage and support local Aboriginal people in the role of facilitators. They may adapt and develop steps and methods that are even better suited to rural Aboriginal people.

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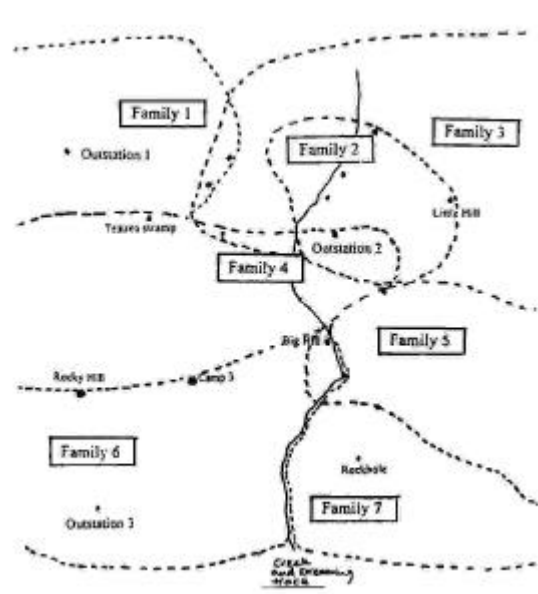
The business planning story: the steps

• People map

It is important to know who are the traditional owners for the country. Land ownership is often very complex. There are participatory

ways of finding out who are the right people to make decisions about the land. Land Councils or anthropologists can help to do this (see Figure 1). All the land owners must be invited to share in the planning process. They must all understand and agree to any new land use, before it can go ahead.

Figure 1. People map



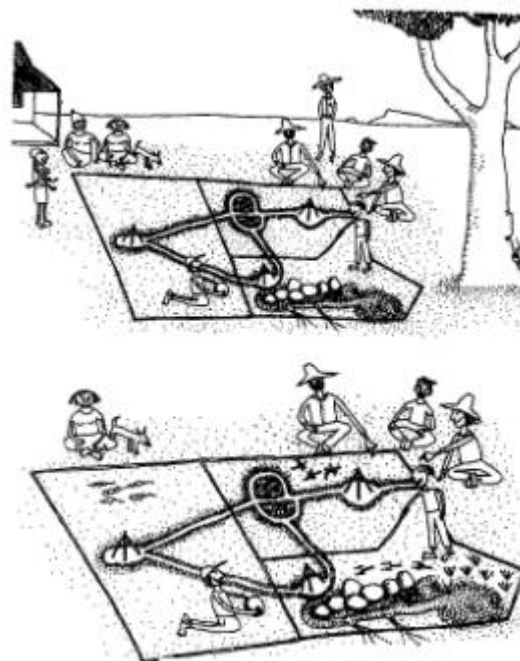
• Aims

It is important to find out why people want the business to go ahead. A good way to listen to people's ideas is to travel through their country with them and let them show what is important. Later, important ideas can be shared and agreed upon by 'pinboarding'. To do this, each person draws pictures on their cards to show what they want to get out of the business (see Figure 2). All the cards are put in the middle on a big piece of paper. The cards are sorted into groups. Some of the people will have similar aims. All cards showing a similar aim will be put in the same group. People can decide which aim is most important, and which aims are not so important.

Figure 2. Aims



Figure 3. Land map (above) and land use map (below)



• **Land map**

“If maps of our country, our communities and our plants and animals are made by outsiders, then it is their future that will be mapped”. Local people should decide what is important to put on their maps. Maps can be made in many ways. A land map can be drawn with charcoal on a verandah, or a map about 6 metres across can be made in the sand. Important features can be put on the map using sticks, cans, stones, or anything that can be easily found (see Figure 3).

The important features might be:

- water places- soakages, rockholes, or springs;
- land forms - hills, creeks, water floods, sand plains and other places; and,
- Man-made features- roads, buildings, fences, bores or cattle yards.

• **Land use map**

People have many ways of using the land. Each land use might be best suited to a different kind of country. Some of the different kinds of country and land uses might be where:

- sweet grasses are grazed by cattle;
- bush potato is found;
- hill kangaroo is hunted;
- firewood is collected; and,
- outstation areas have stable soils, wind protection and no flooding.

These can be marked directly onto the land map (Figure 3). Mapping different kinds of country for different uses can help to get the best use of the land. It will also help to look after the country over many years, so that children and grandchildren can enjoy it too. After land use maps are made, it is important for someone to copy them onto a big piece of paper so they can be used again.

• **Business story - business management and making money**

The business story helps people to talk about the management of their business and how much money the business can make for them. You should be able to make up a model of any kind of business. The business might be tourists, selling ‘bush tucker’, selling wild camels or horses, or any other business you think of.

The business story shown here is the *Cattle Story* (see Figure 4). In the *Cattle Story*:

- white poker chips are cows,
 - spotted poker chips are weaner steers,
 - dark poker chips are weaner heifers.
- (One poker chip might show 10 head of cattle or might show 100 head)

Figure 4. Cattle story



The cattle are put on the land map, and shifted around to show weaning, or sales, or deaths, or grazing management. The *Cattle Story* can help people think about all kinds of management issues:

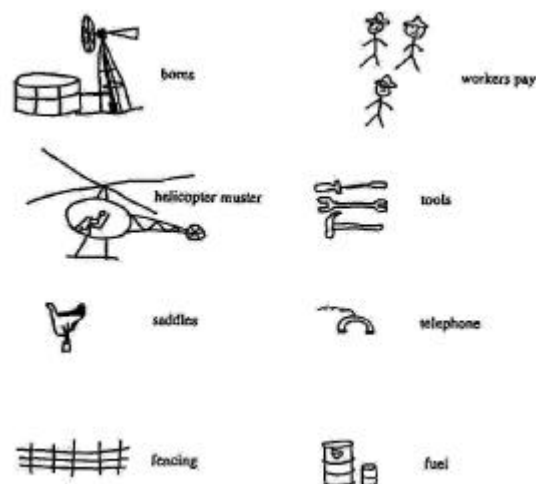
- where you will run the cattle;
- how many cattle you can run;
- how many bulls you need;
- where will you put fences or waters;
- where you want to spell and burn country;
- where you want protected areas;
- the effect of cattle on other land uses; and,
- how much money you can make.

When the cattle are ‘sold’, they are taken off the land map and model money is put under them to show how much they sold for. Later on, this money is used to do a budget.

• **Money story**

In the MONEY STORY, people decide what they need to spend money on to make the business work. A big piece of paper is put in the middle of all the people. Everybody takes a turn to draw something that is needed to make the business work. This is a MONEY STORY for the CATTLE STORY. Each spending area is called an ACCOUNT. The ACCOUNTS for this business are as follows (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Money story



• **Budget**

In the MONEY STORY, people decided on their spending areas, or ACCOUNTS. To make a BUDGET, the money that is made in the BUSINESS STORY is divided among the ACCOUNTS.

Sometimes there’s not enough money to pay for all the things people want to do. Maybe they’ll have to leave some of their aims and just do the really important things. This is a good time to think again about the aims of the business. Is this business really going to provide all the benefits people were hoping for? Should people go ahead with the

business? Should people think about another way to do things?

Figure 6. Budget



The finished budget can be drawn as a bar graph on a big card and stuck on the wall (Figure 7). When money is spent people can mark off how much money is spent. They can then see if the money will last long enough to get the job done.

• **Action plan**

When there is a lot of work to do, it is helpful to divide a big job into small steps. By returning to the BUSINESS STORY, a step by step action plan is put together. The action plan is drawn on a big card and stuck on the wall for everybody to see. This makes it easier for people to do the work, and make things happen (see Figure 8).

Many other skills can be made using participatory methods, such as:

- do people have the skills they need to carry out the action plan?
- if not, where can they get those skills?

Figure 7. Graph

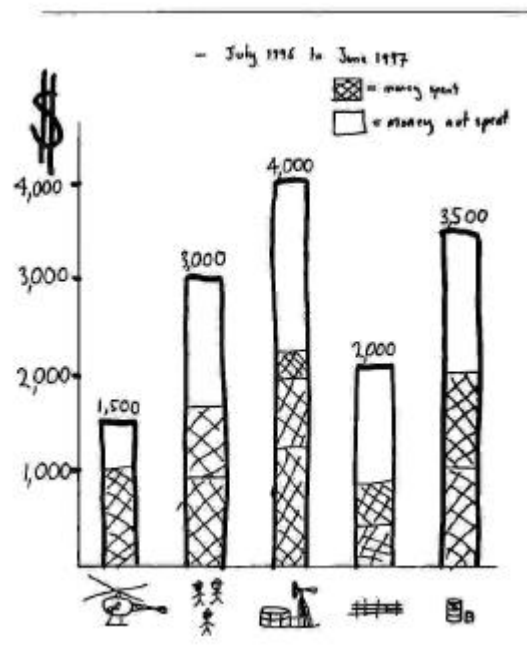


Figure 8. Action plan

| STEP | WHO | | FINISH BY |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| | LOCAL PEOPLE | OTHER PEOPLE | |
| Fix fence [fence icon] | Jakamara mob | | January |
| Work out stocking rates | Jakamara mob | Dept. of Primary Industries | March |
| Fix bore [bore icon] | Jungarai mob | Funding agency bore training mob | March |
| book keeper training [person icon] | Nakamara + Jakamara | training school | December |

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