

VISUALISING CHANGE

Contrary to the traditional belief that people are either visual or auditory or kinesthetic learners, more recent research suggests that there are more similarities in how people learn, and that it is more accurate to say presenting information visually helps everyone learn. In fact, research suggests that visual cues help the majority of people pay attention to, process, recall and make sense of information. People respond to and engage with visual imagery, and visuals are increasingly recognised as critical to helping us deal with the overwhelming complexities

that face us if we want to make a difference in addressing complex social issues such as place-based disadvantage, childhood obesity or intergenerational poverty.

As a social designer, one of the ways I work with groups and organisations is to help them to visualise the social issues they are wanting to impact. This can be an important part of the design process, through which people actually 'see' how to define the issues, understand the factors and forces that drive and perpetuate the issue, and prototype potential 'solutions'. In this article

I share some of the tools, methods and processes I regularly use in the social design process.

Traditionally we have tended to emphasise the need to build our knowledge about how to respond to complex social problems through articles, reports, strategic plans, and other voluminous justifications of how we can change 'reality'. The limitation of such text-based, static justifications is that they are read by relatively few of the people who are working to change the issue; they often don't help us to 'see' the bigger picture, nor the multiple

perspectives from which these issues can be viewed; and they are generally not 'engaging' - they don't require nor inspire dialogue, discussion or responses from readers.

Presenting information visually has the potential to reach many more people. However actually engaging people in visually 'constructing' conceptualisations and responses to complex social issues has the potential to help groups and organisations to reframe and redesign understandings and action opportunities at both programmatic and systemic levels. This is not about creating slick 'marketing quality' visuals, it is about reaching out and engaging ordinary folk in dialogues about what could make a difference. The most effective visuals for this purpose are those that convey and capture people's realities, so they are often simple, engaging and have a handmade quality.

The options of creating visual representations, models, murals and maps that help us understand, explore and respond to complex social issues are expanding and proliferating in many exciting ways. Which visual tools or methods you use depends on what purpose you are wanting to use visuals for, who you want to involve and impress, and what outcomes you are seeking from using visuals.

There are many examples and inspirations for those working in and for social impact to explore further how visuals can be incorporated further into organisations, sectoral

bodies, and the design of policy and practice responses. Here I've grouped the tools, methods and processes have been grouped into three areas:

1. Tools & Methods for Processing Information Visually;
2. Tools & Methods for Presenting Information Visually;
3. Methods & Processes for Participatory Construction of Information Visually.

PROCESSING INFORMATION VISUALLY

Mind Maps (Also called Cluster Maps, Radiant Thinking)

Mind-maps are perhaps the most familiar visual tool when we are trying to understand or define a complex issue. They begin with a central concept or idea, and then associated concepts radiate out from this on branches and sub-branches.

In social design processes, mind-maps can help us to define an issue, or its context, and they can be useful in the ideation phase, as a way to organise ideas or potential responses. Adding colour and pictures to a mind-map can maximise its visual impact and make the mind-map more memorable.

Frameworks, Graphic Templates

Frameworks are models that can help us to recognise recurring concepts, behaviours or analyses that make it easier to understand or respond to complex issues. For example, the SWOT (Strengths,

“ VISUAL CUES HELP THE MAJORITY OF PEOPLE PAY ATTENTION TO, PROCESS, RECALL AND MAKE SENSE OF INFORMATION.



Ⓜ A Comic Strip as a Graphic Story

VISUAL NOTETAKING or Sketchnoting

TAKING NOTES WITH A MIX OF PICTURES, TEXT, DOODLES, SHAPES

Mike
ROHDE



LISTENING + DRAWING



SKETCHNOTING BEGINS WITH

ACTIVE LISTENING

THE SKETCHNOTE HANDBOOK 2013

rohdesign.com

Eva-Lotta
LAMM



WHY SKETCHNOTES?

NON-LINEAR
VISUAL HIERARCHY
VISUAL MNEMONICS
FUN CONCENTRATION
REALTIME PROCESSING

SKETCHNOTES, 2011, 2012

sketchnotesbook.com

Dan
ROAM



6 WAYS OF SEEING + SHOWING

- 1. WHO/WHAT** QUALITATIVE REPRESENTATION PORTRAIT
- 2. HOW MUCH** QUANTITATIVE REPRESENTATION CHART
- 3. WHERE** POSITION IN SPACE MAP
- 4. WHEN** POSITION IN TIME TIMELINE
- 5. HOW** CAUSE + EFFECT FLOWCHART
- 6. WHY** REASONING + PREDICTION EQUATION

BLAH, BLAH, BLAH, 2011

danroam.com

Sunni
BROWN



6 FUNDAMENTALS OF VISUAL NOTETAKING

- LETTERS**
- CONNECTORS**
- BULLETS**
- FRAMES**
- SHADOWS**
- PEOPLE**

THE DOODLE REVOLUTION, 2014

SunniBrown.com

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Sketchnoting

“ VISUALS CAN HELP US TO SEE THE ISSUE FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES, SEE PATTERNS & NAME BOUNDARIES

Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) is a framework that is commonly used in strategic planning processes to better analyse contexts for action. Frameworks provide a mental scaffold within which we can process rich and complex information that can help us to understand issues, make decisions, plan actions or identify potential points of intervention. When frameworks are made ‘visual’ rather than merely text-based, they can open up engagement, help people ‘see’ a bigger picture, and they are more easily recalled. In a social design process, I create graphic templates from frameworks that others have found useful in unpacking issues or planning actions. Workshops can become more engaging when these visual frameworks are displayed on the walls, and where data from participants populates the templates. Frameworks can help ‘frame’ and ‘shape’ complex realities - but the

important thing for social designers to remember is that a framework is a conceptual model of reality, it is not the reality - so we need to remain flexible and responsive when we develop and use frameworks rather than being driven to make reality fit our mental frameworks.

Sketchnoting

Sketchnoting is literally, sketching notes - of presentations, workshops, meetings and so on. I use sketchnoting as a way to really tune in to lectures and meetings, because doodling helps me to concentrate and listen better. However my colleagues will often ask me to share my notes because they are accessible, capture the ‘essence’ of a meeting and enable others to quickly get a sense of what the key messages of presentations are. So, I now incorporate sketchnotes into my design processes, sharing important meetings, discussions, decisions via that medium. It has

the effect of engaging people in the process, and inspiring others to listen more carefully by 'drawing' their experiences of meetings and lectures.

PRESENTING INFORMATION GRAPHICALLY

Infographics and Diagrams

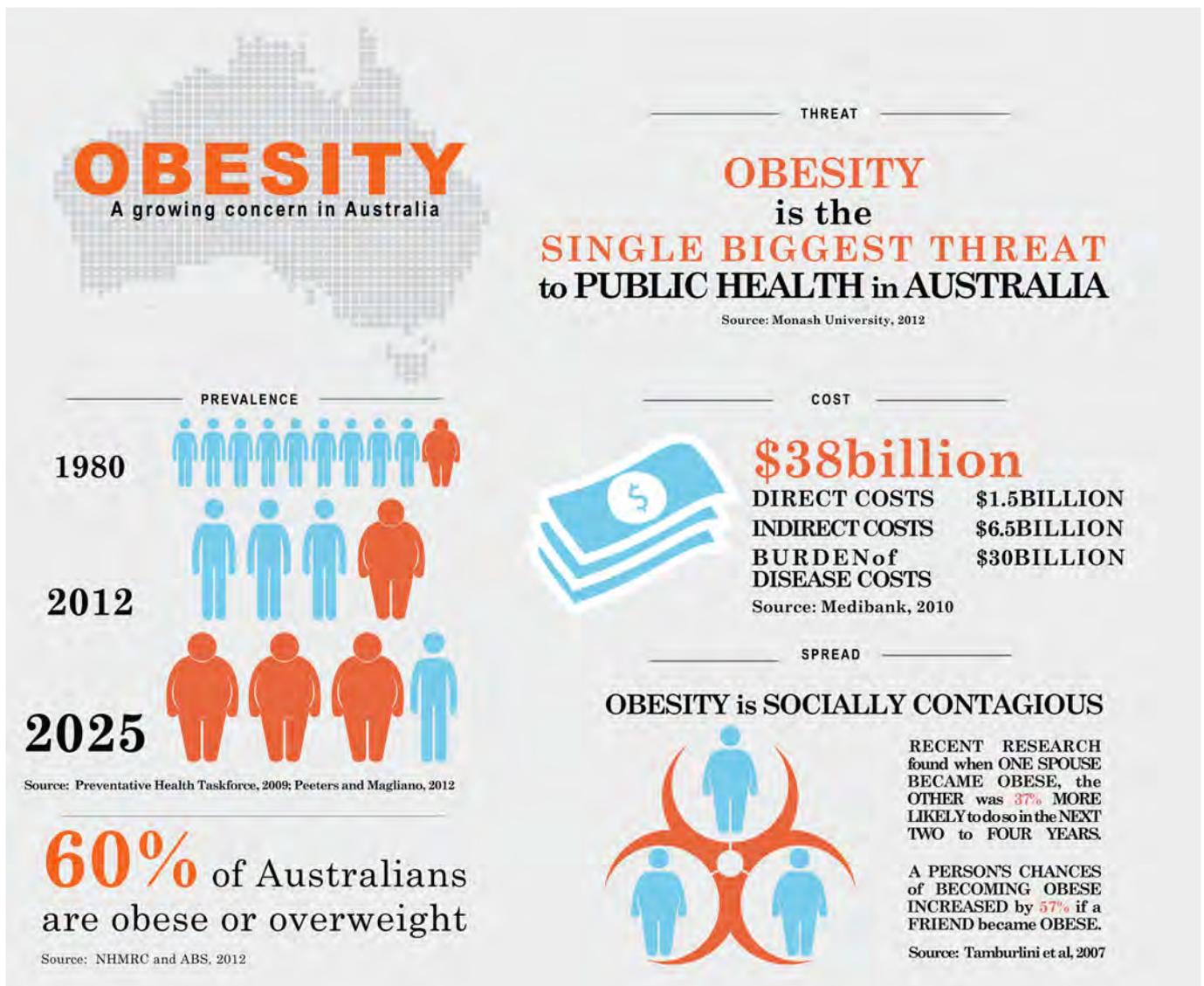
Presenting the large amounts of information and data needed to make sense of complex issues can lead to analysis paralysis quickly if people have to work too hard to understand graphs, tables or complicated statistical formulas. Presenting the same information in infographic form, makes data accessible and even engaging. Information design is an important skill that is often undervalued in

the social impact space. Yet it can help generate energy and galvanise responses more quickly than asking people to absorb complicated research data, no matter how fine this may be.

Maps (System Maps, Knowledge Maps, Concept Maps)

Maps are visual representations of the relationships between things - they may be spatial, conceptual, perceptual, thematic or transactional. Maps are a critical component of social design as they help us to visualise the relationships between parts of social systems and help us create tangible 'models' of what we know about issues. Getting our knowledge about an issue out of our heads and onto paper can help

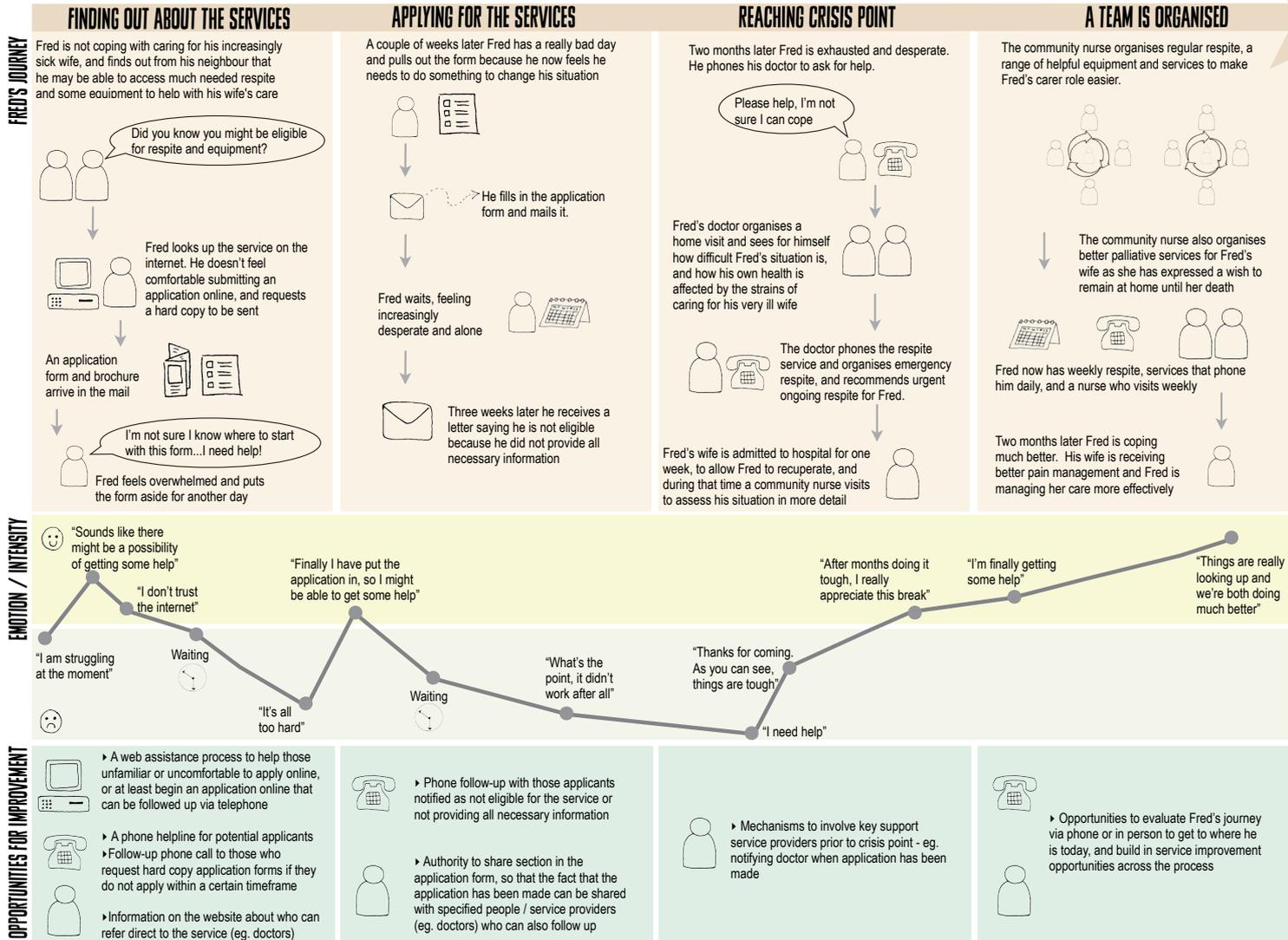
us to see that the issue can be viewed from many different perspectives, is inter-related to other issues, and it can help us see patterns and name boundaries. Maps can also help us identify limits, gaps, and opportunities. I could write a whole article about maps and mapping in social design (stay tuned for this!), but suffice it to say that a capacity to construct maps for presentation, but also the ability to do this with others is increasingly a central role of social design processes. Further, the use of Geographic Information Systems is playing a growing role in the visualisation of spatial maps and enables us to overlay systemic maps onto to geographical data, which has extraordinary visual potential.



FRED'S JOURNEY MAP FOR ACCESSING RESPITE AND EQUIPMENT

FRED: a 68 year old man who is caring for his terminally ill wife

FRED'S GOAL: to access respite services and equipment to help him care for his wife at home



Journey Mapping

Visual Scribing

Visual Scribing does for whole groups what sketchnoting does for individuals. Through large-scale, real-time recording of people's ideas, thoughts and decisions visually through images, colour and words, the graphic recorder reflects back to a group the content and process of a meeting or workshop. This allows people to 'see' the progression of their discussions, make connections between ideas, and deepen their meaning making process. It can help to surface patterns, support decision-making, and reflect process elements of interactions. I find visual scribing very useful in social design processes where the dialogue is in danger of becoming bogged down in complexity, or

where it is important for engage with the content and the process of a workshop.

Visual Storytelling & Graphic Stories

Storytelling is core to social design processes. Stories form the basis of the ways we share experiences, they generate empathy, and they help us to design responses that are human-centred and impactful. Though storytelling is traditionally oral, increasingly there are ways to record and share people's stories visually through pictures, comics, videos and digital imagery. These do not have to be expensive, professionally made nor even highly refined. The important thing is that the stories are genuine, and that the visuals reflect the

intent and the ethos of the stories as told by the storyteller. This method can be even more powerful if the people experiencing the story create the visuals themselves.

Information Murals

This represents an alternative to, or an adjunct to written reports and research about complex social issues. Information murals present contextual and strategic data visually, through large-scale murals or posters so that people can see multiple perspectives, access complex data, see relationships and patterns and get a sense of the 'big picture' of issues. They are meant as dialogical tools, and in my experience they are most useful if people can engage with them

rather than the murals being static constructions by an expert. In community organisations they can also be an excellent way of making analyses of complex social issue accessible to constituents and to the general public, particularly if they are displayed in public spaces.

PARTICIPATORY INFORMATION CONSTRUCTION

Graphic Facilitation

Whereas graphic recording visually captures the content of a workshop but is removed from the actual process, graphic facilitation uses visual methods within the facilitation process. So, the graphic facilitator may engage participants in visual exercises, and uses visuals to move the process along and support the decision-making process. In social design processes, graphic facilitation invites participation so that stakeholders become part of creating a 'picture' or visual representation of the social issue, and/or the possibilities for responding. I now only very rarely facilitate social design processes without using visual exercises and encouraging all workshop participants to participate in processes visually. Many people are, at first, fearful that they need to be 'artistic' to participate in visual processes, but once this myth is debunked, it becomes clear to all that visual practice adds depth to discussions and supports active decision-making.

Experience / Interactive Mapping

Engaging people in mapping systems, processes or experiences visually is one of the most powerful means of supporting social design processes. Using processes such as Soft Systems Methodology, and linking this to visual mapping, can help to unpack and unlock systemic change possibilities. Using service design methods such as journey mapping can provide deep insights into the experiences of people affected by social issues, and/or can help us develop and prototype potential service responses to these issues. Seeing 'mapping' as an active participatory process (in other words, not just see 'the map'

as a static visual representation) can provide powerful galvanising visuals that help people experience the relationships between parts of a social system.

There is a growing recognition of the importance and the power of visualising information for learning, sharing, and supporting action for positive social change. I've outlined some of the methods and tools I regularly use in social design processes - however there are many, many more tools out there! I would encourage all those interested in visualising change to delve into the resources and links I've included here to explore more. Visualising change is not about

creating 'pretty pictures' - it doesn't require artistic talent, and nor is it about 'adding images and stirring' just for the sake of having visuals. Yes, it is about building visuals into our change practice - but visuals that actually help us to engage different worldviews, reflect possibilities, immerse ourselves in the evidence of what works. Visualising change is about taking the power of images and pictures, and creating seriously helpful visuals that support and catalyse real change in those social issues which challenges us most.

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LONELINESS CAN KILL YOU...

SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS IN OLDER PEOPLE HAS BIG HEALTH IMPACTS.

IT IS EQUIVALENT TO:



SMOKING 15 CIGARETTES A DAY



CONSUMING 6 ALCOHOLIC DRINKS A DAY

IT IS TWICE AS HARMFUL AS OBESITY



IT IS MORE HARMFUL THAN NOT EXERCISING

SOCIAL ISOLATION RESULTS IN A 26% HIGHER DEATH RISK OVER 7 YEARS, AND HEALTH IMPACTS EXIST WHETHER OR NOT PEOPLE 'FEEL' LONELY.

Source: Beer and Faulkner, 2013 University of Adelaide and AGEUK