

# Critical Reflections on Matrix Gaming

Connections North 2024

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## MATRIX GAMES ARE NOT A THING

*(that got your attention).*

- There is considerable overlap in process terms with TTX, Seminar Games and BOGGSAT.
- I have seen huge variety in processes of games that have been called Matrix Games.
- So a 'Matrix Game' could be many things to many people
- But there are some common issues that I've encountered



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## 1. RAPID DEPLOYMENT

- The ability to deliver a Matrix Game quickly is seductive.
- Just because you can do it doesn't mean it is fit for purpose.

## 2. THE CONCEPT IS EASILY GRASPED BY NEWCOMERS

- But this risks over-use ("If all you have is a hammer")
- And therefore mis-application




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## 3. COMMON MATRIX GAME ADJUDICATION METHODS ARE VULNERABLE

- Argument-based adjudication requires appropriate subject-matter knowledge
- Argument based adjudication is vulnerable to quick-thinking, charismatic, forceful or just loud disputants. *Strength of the arguer is not strength of the argument*
- Voting methods are fragile (you can't repeal the law of gravity by voting)
- Voting methods can encourage false confirmation.
- Uncritical use of dice, probability or risk assessments can obscure critical determining factors.



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#### 4. FACILITATION ITSELF CAN HAVE UNINTENDED INFLUENCE

- Charismatic or dominant facilitation can lead the game down pre-determined routes favoured by the facilitator, potentially invalidating player involvement.
- Framing the wording of a vote by the facilitator can misdirect or obscure an issue.
- Handwaving Adjudication (HWA) by a skilled facilitator can create the illusion of rigour.



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#### 5. GETTING THE RIGHT PEOPLE IN THE ROOM

- Uninformed participants will struggle to generate meaningful outcomes and relevant or insightful actions.
- There is a risk of confusing the outcome of the game with a genuine insight, especially with a non-expert group of uninformed players.
- Well informed participants without diversity of thought in the room risk perpetuating cognitive errors such as confirmation bias etc.
- Seniors in the room can stifle creative or insightful game play, and HIPPOs and CORGIs can run amok!



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## ALL IS NOT LOST

Matrix games can be effective where they:

- Can be focussed on debate over issues rather than details
- Are run by skilled facilitators who do not dominate or influence.
- Can be structured around the subject under consideration. One size **does not** fit all.
- Are used for scoping more detailed studies/wargames
- Involve genuine, relevant and diverse expertise in the room
- Involve anything where open-endedness and low detail are useful, or where verification and validation is hard to achieve.



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## THE BIG BUT

But when you **do** use a Matrix Game **always**:

- **Understand** the limitations of the method and critically review its utility. Be prepared to select a different game method that meets the requirement better.
- **Be Mindful** of your limits as facilitator. Self awareness is your friend.
- **The Game is Not The Truth**. Whatever the outcome it cannot, of itself, be predictive (except, possibly by accident). Observations, Insights and Lessons are purely indicative.
- Remember that **Group Dynamics** in the room can have a massive effect on outcomes, credibility and utility.
- **Be Honest** with your sponsor and participants about what the Matrix Game process can realistically achieve.



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