

Provide a critical reflection of your role and responsibilities within a wider archaeological project considering the requirement for professional and ethical judgement, and your relationships with other team members and other stakeholders.

Few career pathways could boast of being more diverse, or having such numerous forks and intersections, than that of an 'archaeologist' (CIfA, 2024). As Gawande asserts in *The Checklist Manifesto*, there are three expectations universal to all learned occupations' criteria for 'professionalism': selflessness, skilfulness, and trustworthiness (2010, p. 182). Archaeology is no exception (CIfA, 2017, p.3; CIfAa, 2021, Column 5).

Archaeology [has] a responsibility to ensure that through our professional practice we help people of the present build understanding, knowledge of how our environment shapes our actions and how we navigate our world. [...] There is great potential to gain support [...] within our client body if we are clear about the value our work provides and how it can contribute to their own social value obligations (CIfA, 2021b, p. 31).

'Ethics' is the study, or more specifically the application, of moral philosophy (CIfA, 2017, p. 2). The term 'project' or 'archaeological project' will be used as defined by Barclay *et al.* (2016, p. 20). Where applicable, acronyms will be introduced and used thereafter. In this essay I critically reflect on my duties as an Assistant Finds Officer [AFO] employed by Cotswold Archaeology [CA] and the archaeological profession at large, and contemplate my team dynamic, scrutinising what is productive and identifying where change is necessary.

My role and responsibilities

In September 2022 I was promoted to AFO at the Milton Keynes [MK] office. My position entails "recording, post-excavation assessment, analysis and reporting of pottery and other finds recovered from archaeological sites" (Preece, 2022). Furthermore, I am required to commit to my own professional development and enhance my skills through training opportunities and continuous learning. Accordingly, I maintain an up-to-date Development Log and am pro-active in seeking regular review of my progress to sign-off skills once I have achieved the

appropriate standard. I am encouraged to take initiative to pursue new work experiences/responsibilities and maximise learning opportunities, as is my professional obligation to remain informed about developments in my specialist field(s) (CA, 2017, p. 6; ClfA, 2022, p. 6).

On a day-to-day basis I engage in quantification, recording and, occasionally, spot-dating and reference collection curation, to facilitate my assessment and analysis of the assemblages. As part of its outreach initiative, I research highly significant or intriguing artefacts for the *Cotswold Archaeology Virtual Museum*, adhering to ethical social media use (CA, 2023a; CA, 2023b; ClfA, 2017, p. 20-22). As my experience grows, I am able to offer specialist advice within the limits of my understanding and abilities, including the safe treatment of artefacts. Where possible, I provide data entry support and training to CA staff, volunteers and work experience students. In all aspects of my duties, I aim to contribute pro-actively to the publications department (CA, 2017, p. 7).

The wider publications network consists of distinctive teams, including post-excavation [PX] processing, finds, environmental, illustration, archives, and PX management. I receive the processed material from the PX archaeologists/assistants. My duties regularly involve collaboration with senior finds specialists when I need guidance about artefact identification or writing reports, and with illustrators, whose figures I'll review to ensure they conform to the specialists' interpretation, or sometimes their images reveal a different perspective. Subsequently, the officers/managers use my dataset to assist phasing the site and incorporate my finds report(s) into the project's main report, furthering the outcomes of the investigation; the artefactual material is prepared for deposition or discarded by our archives supervisor.

If I led a team, there would be several integral components to its structure and operation. Firstly, I would implement a clear hierarchy, with straightforward communication channels, which encourages in-person and remote questions. Secondly, my projects would have defined deadlines, subdivided for specific milestones, with inbuilt flexibility. Tasks would be allocated according to skills and experience, with mentoring/supervision for less experienced staff to assist professional development. 'Management by exception' would be my default

approach but I may consider a different method at an individual's request, provided it did not negatively impact wellbeing or productivity. I would lead by example, demonstrating ethical behaviour and upholding professional standards.

Informative resources are crucial to my AFO role, falling broadly into two categories: standards and guidance, and reference catalogues and databases. Notable standards/guidance include *A standard for pottery studies in archaeology* (Barclay *et al.*, 2016), *The Study of Prehistoric Pottery* (PCRG, 2010) and ClfA's *Toolkit for Specialist Reporting*, "designed for use by [...] trainee specialists" (2023). Frequently consulted directories consist of *The national Roman fabric reference collection* [NRFRC] (Tomber and Dore, 1998), *Potsherd* (Tyres, 1996) and Worcestershire's *Ceramics Online Database* (WCC, 2023).

Professional and ethical requirements

Ethics are the cornerstone of archaeological practice and research, enabling a respectful approach towards "the cultural, historic and spiritual context of objects and structures" (UWTSD, 2023a). Professional judgement is often instinctive, the best course of action evident and not easily disputed. Where there is ambiguity, specific guidance, especially the RIGHT mnemonic ["Rules, Integrity, Good, Harm, Truthful"] outlined in *An introduction to professional ethics*, can help navigate the issue (ClfA, 2017, p. 4). This can be applied to personal ethics and how I amalgamate them with my professional responsibilities, e.g., my environmental concerns about HS2 versus the archaeological potential and employment. In all instances, I endeavour to adhere to the most balanced, respectful judgement, based on objectivity (laws/rules, facts) and inflicting the least damage.

Team dynamics at Cotswold Archaeology

My relationship with other team members can be understood in the context of the successes and shortcomings I have observed within the organisation.

The plethora of favourable dynamics within CA's policies and procedures can be summarised as 'communication, education and inclusivity'.

An advantageous component of my AFO training is the monthly progress meetings with my line manager; we discuss advancements in my skills, any concerns, and sign-off my Development Log. I am fortunate to be managed 'by exception'. Our routine of conducting quality assurance of my assemblages together is a great learning opportunity for me and saves time by catching problems early. Beyond pottery assemblages, I am able to seek assistance from experienced colleagues. Principle 5.8 of ClfA's *Code of conduct* necessitates "appropriate support" for training and development, to ensure professional competence (2022, p. 8; ClfA, 2017, p. 14-15). To broaden my knowledge, I am encouraged to attend training opportunities, mostly external study days/conferences, and internal coaching sessions, including ArcGIS in December 2023.

Post-pandemic, CA employees have benefited from flexible working; this extends to PX personnel. We are increasingly utilising digital tools for remote working and cohesion between the offices to "ensure effective relationships and communications" (UWTSD, 2023a). Regardless of geographical proximity, I have excellent contact with my colleagues; Alejandra in Andover and Alex in Suffolk usually reply swiftly in abundant detail. Crowley notes the advantages and disadvantages of email: "it is just too easy to use", and that we risk being overloaded, stressed and overwhelmed (2018, p. 68). However, his understanding of communication tools is already out-dated with the rise of video-conferencing software (Crowley, 2018 p. 71). CA has embraced MS Teams; I participate in monthly Finds team meetings, and the convening of Finds and Enviro staff every three months and Publications three times a year. CEO Neil Holbrook regularly updates the company via pre-recorded videos, which are transparent, informative, and unifying.

In rare instances where coworker cohesion deteriorates, CA aims to open up dialogue, and where necessary implement facilitated discussion/mediation. This aligns with recommended approaches for conflict resolution: be proactive, present in-person, prepared, fair and clear, empathetic and prudent (Bryant-

Smith and Beard, 2018, p. 92-96). Inappropriate behaviour is explicitly prohibited by ClfA, however it recognises “members may find themselves in ethical dilemmas”, including interpersonal-conflicts, and encourages adherence to the Principles of the *Code of conduct* and to “communicate and co-operate with colleagues”; in this way, grievances and potential misunderstandings stand a chance of being resolved impartially (2022, p. 5, 7-8).

An indispensable dynamic is diversity and inclusivity: “the principles of professionalism encourage inclusive practice” (ClfA, 2021b, p. 31). I am proud to commend CA as highly inclusive and wonderfully diverse, especially regarding age, sexuality, gender, (dis)ability and maternity accommodations (Bryant-Smith and Beard, 2018, p. 46). However, there is one observable uniform characteristic: skin colour. Nearly all colleagues are white, with some diversity in cultural backgrounds, as well as degree educated, although apprenticeship placements afford another pathway into archaeology (CA, 2023c). British values encourage “mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs” (UWTSD, 2023b). Colleagues’ personal faiths are not widely discussed. This may reflect the evidence-based approaches integral to archaeology: no-one’s religious beliefs are at odds with contemporary scientific principles about human evolution, geological formation, and dating. Subsequently there is little impact on their professional knowledge and capabilities, only positivity when it comes to interpersonal conduct.

Some archaeological organisations are taking active steps to redress imbalances. Through *An introduction to professional ethics*, ClfA seeks to educate members about workplace equality and diversity (2017, p. 12-13). In 2023 the Neolithic Studies Group [NSG] invited submissions which considered “diverse and alternative voices in Neolithic Studies”, including people who don’t conform to a traditional ‘academic archaeologist’, for their *Historiographies* conference (Brophy, 2023). Over the past year CA continued its exemplary record, providing accommodations to staff with neurodiversity and health limitations, e.g. a private office, dimmed lighting and hot water bottles. Whilst 2010’s *Equality Act* likely expedited these “reasonable adjustments”, this compassionate, relaxed environment makes the appeal of working at CA far

greater than merely archaeological opportunities, empowering employees to perform at their best (GEO, 2023, p. 26).

In some areas where problems are evident, CA is already taking positive action.

The company is gradually improving its recognition of colleagues in historically under-credited roles. In December, our CEO urged the publications team to “remember your colleagues in other departments” (Holbrook, 2023). This is commendable since documents like the ‘A40’ excavation report, given final approval in June 2023 and publicly accessible online, credited all contributors except the PX team (CA, 2023d, p. 43). When I raised it with PX manager Jo, this inclusivity directive had not been widely circulated, and she had imitated previous reports. Jo offered to credit PX staff in future publications and forward my request to the principal PX manager (Pearson, 2023). Through the Ethics of Care and Reason I presented a convincing argument; my responsibility was to my colleagues – to promote recognition and inclusivity, my employer – to address issues and maintain a strong reputation, and my profession – to help it evolve its ‘best practice’ criteria (ClfA, 2017, p. 3-5).

Due to differing working hours, spatial partitioning within offices, and remote/on-site activities, there is a perceptible division between departments, especially office-based/Working-from-Home and field-based staff. CA’s HR and IT teams have devised useful resources which partially overcome this issue. The Intranet is a convenient information source about new colleagues, whilst Share Point serves as a means of “central communication” (Wallace, 2023).

Staff welfare has seen considerable improvements. Welfare calls are implemented to liaise with absent colleagues about their ongoing needs, including for mental health and long-term conditions. As an employee, I am reassured to know that “people’s health and safety is at the heart of what we do” at Cotswold Archaeology (Cobain, 2023).

Looking to the future, there is scope for improvement concerning interconnectivity and health & safety [H&S] training.

Ideally, I would increase my engagement with CA’s publications managers and external specialists. Currently, considerable information is compartmentalised

and dissemination between groups can be limited because it is not deemed relevant for others to know. An exceptional instance was being invited to an industrial waste specialist's presentation about his findings to the project's managers; it was highly informative, deepening my knowledge of metal-working and on-site discovery/recovery of evidence. Similar briefings and more guidance about where relevant information is stored and how to access it, like the ArcGIS training, would be exponentially beneficial to my analysis and reporting.

As a company first aider and fire marshal, I feel a profound sense of responsibility towards my colleagues. Though the initial H&S training (over two years ago) was comprehensive and fit-for-purpose, subsequent provision of fire drills, walk-throughs for marshals, and practical refresher courses has been non-existent in MK. The *Code of conduct* advocates for "due regard" to H&S "potentially effected by [employees'] archaeological activities (ClfA, 2022, p. 8). My role is office-based, in an enclosed space containing oxidising substances such as hydrogen peroxide; these are subject to COSHH regulations, but first aid and fire safety resources/training are vital if an accident occurred (British Safety Council, 2024).

Conclusions

This essay has given an account of my duties and obligations as an AFO, as an accredited professional, and as a member of CA's publication team. I have recounted examples of exemplary practice within the organisation, as well as the potential for positive developments. This critical reflection has demonstrated the importance of professionalism and how its three key criteria are enacted in archaeological vocation. An enriched awareness of individual responsibility and team dynamics can be used to cultivate targeted interventions aimed at honing professional and ethical judgement and strengthening corporate relationships. Where important changes need to be made, a collaborative, steadfast approach will achieve results with the greatest impact, longevity, and satisfaction.

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