

Critically reflect on your experience of the role play scenarios to identify the key challenges in successful project delivery when working as a team.

Common wisdom is that “**T**ogether, **E**veryone **A**chieves **M**ore” (Brent and Dent, 2017, p. 5; Adair, 2015, p. 45; Thompson & Bender, 2018); however, teamwork in project delivery is not short of obstacles (Young, 2010, p. 26-29). Within HPAR7003, students engaged in role-play discussions typical of internal meetings integral to MoRPHE project management. By chairing and contributing to eight tasks modelled on relevant scenarios, participants enacted information gathering/discussion and decision making/communication. Throughout this essay the spelling ‘role-play’ will be used, akin to Britt Elmore (n.d.), although ‘role play’ as the noun form is acknowledged (RPG Battles, n.d.). Scenarios will be referenced by number [Sc.X], in order of occurrence; an overview and summaries are provided (Table 1; Appendix A). References are named for each meeting’s chair and attribute associated transcripts and timestamps. Theories on leadership, management and team dynamics will be discussed, where relevant. Psychology, such as Belbin (2024) and Myers-Briggs (16Personalities, 2024), will be consulted to investigate the personalities at play. Furthermore, the importance of role-play as pedagogy cannot be understated:

“To get students to apply their knowledge to a given problem, to reflect on issues and the views of others, to illustrate the relevance of theoretical ideas by placing them in a real-world context, and to illustrate the complexity of decision-making” (Pavey and Donoghue, 2003, p. 7).

This essay provides a critical reflection of the role-play scenarios, primarily drawing upon my involvement, observations, and disposition, and how they expose the fundamental challenges to successfully delivering a project as a team.

Familiarity with Meetings and Role-play

During my academic and professional career, I have participated in, and occasionally chaired or scribed, various meetings/committees. At Cotswold Archaeology [CA], I most regularly attend monthly Finds Team Meetings, where we appraise each other of our programmes, to aid reallocation, and discuss

applicable issues. I hosted the August 2023 meeting as part of my CPD. Notetaking was a persistent challenge, especially unfamiliar project names, however, the experience was worthwhile.

Moreover, social recreations such as ‘Live action role-play’ [LARP/larp] and Dungeons & Dragons [D&D] have equipped me with role-play experience.

Larping differs from immersive theatre in that there are no performers or audience, but instead [‘larpers’] inhabit the environment and context as their characters, proactively pursuing their characters’ objectives [and] are the principle creative force (Osmond, 2023, p. 23-24).

Occasionally these experiences intersect, culminating in LARP bureaucracy, such as attending Crafting Guild meetings as a Svartálfr (MGS, 2024). During the scenarios, the role-play was intermittently sustained.

Table 1. Overview of tasks and roleplay scenarios

No.	Date	Task Name	Chair	Attendees*	Location / Description	Reference
1	14 Feb	Project Start-up	Kristophe Michaels	RA, CG, JH, TL, AM, CM, AP, LP, ZV	Severn Estuary at Goldcliff, Wales	Michaels, 2024
2	21 Feb	Correspondence	Zsuzsanna Veres	RA, CG, JH, TL, KM, AM, CM, AP, LP	Roman Way, Newtown, Siluria	Veres, 2024
3	28 Feb	Historic Environment Record [HER]	Annie Moore	RA, CG, JH, TL, KM, CM, AP, LP, ZV	Sandy Lane, Netherseal, Derbys	Moore, 2024
4	06 Mar	Project Management Methods	Laura Pearson	RA, CG, JH, TL, KM, AM, CM, AP, ZV	Furniture Design & Marketing	Pearson, 2024
5	20 Mar	Written Scheme of Investigation [WSI]	Connor Motley	RA, CG, JH, TL, KM, AM, AP, LP, ZV	Large Housing Development	Motley, 2024
6	03 April	Health and Safety Ethics	Martin Locock	RA, JH, TL, AM, AP, LP	Analysis of BBC's 'Detectorists'	Locock, 2024a
7	10 April	Project Planning and Costing	Martin Locock	RA, KM, AM, CM, LP, ZV	6-hectare Housing Development	Locock, 2024b
8	10 April	Critical Path Analysis	Martin Locock	RA, TL, KM, AM, CM, LP, ZV	Short evaluation over 3 Areas	Locock, 2024c

* Robyn Andrews (RA), Ciar Gifford (CG), James Hodgson (JH), Tabitha Lawrence (TL), Kristophe Michaels (KM), Annie Moore (AM), Connor Motley (CM), Amiee Parker (AP), Laura Pearson (LP) and Zsuzsanna Veres (ZV)

Effective and Persuasive presentation of views

A key challenge in successful project delivery as a team is ensuring sufficient opportunity for participation; lack thereof can hinder efficacious contributions. This does not necessarily stem from too little time, but too many participants: “six is optimal” (Meuller, 2012, quoted in Brent and Dent, 2017, p. 5); indeed, Sc.6 and Sc.7 afforded leeway for elaboration. Prior to Sc.1, Nigel acknowledged a

'big room scenario' is often more challenging, thus advised adapting our chairing styles and gave Kristophe a 15-minute steer (Michaels, 2024, 02'32"). This is true for large D&D parties: they are more arduous to DM [organise/direct] and there is less role-play per player. Some discussions were shorter than ideal (Sc.8). However, it necessitated briefness and relevancy, which was beneficial.

Another barrier to persuasiveness was participants' lack of expertise. Occasionally scenarios preceded pertinent information; Sc.1's objective was "to put forward a project proposal [however] we haven't really talked about project proposals" (Michaels, 2024, 20'52"). Short preparation time was also a hindrance to expertise, although this is a genuine challenge for many project teams.

Most scenarios involved 'group roles'; only once were 'individual roles' assigned (Sc.7). The individual allocations were deliberately unfamiliar (Locock, 2024b, 01'13'07"), leading to Robyn's jocular opener: "with my very expansive knowledge of paleoenvironmental" (*ibid.*, 01'46'53"); consequently, the role-play was (briefly) broken. However, this is not an incorrect method; it is consistent with the following pedagogy approach:

[Role-play] is the practice of having students take on specific roles - **usually ones in which they are not familiar** - [...] for the purpose of learning course content (Sogunro, 2004, p. 367; *emphasis added*).

Whilst assigning roles with little-to-no prior knowledge is an accepted technique, I counter that it has flaws. The role-play discussions would have been better informed if teaching proceeded them, or adequate preparation time was allowed to form well-substantiated opinions. Ultimately the solution requires time. Time spent preparing is time deduced from other learning. However, I argue that students are more likely to engage with their roles as preparation than investigate them in hindsight (Locock, 2012, p. 30); post-scenario, we are inclined to move on. "Learning course content" only goes so far without a suitable foundation, even when role-play is followed by discussion/teaching. Perhaps it speaks to a perfectionist Completer Finisher trait (Belbin, 2024) that I consider the tasks wasted opportunities if people did/could not commit to the professional roles.

Ease of contributing

So, I would say the experience is part of the learning and it may be uncomfortable, but that's also learning as well (Michaels, 2024, 00'39").

Generally, I was comfortable offering my opinion. Even in poor health (Sc.7) I made twelve contributions, second only to Jame's fourteen and twice as many as Tabitha, which equated to Sc.3, Sc.5 and Sc.7 combined (Locock, 2024b; Appendix C). While chairing Sc.4, I assumed an 'overly polite host' demeanor (Pearson, 2024); an instinctual style over "hero" or "servant" (Brent and Dent, 2017, p. 16-23; Owen, 2018, p. 186-191). Consequently, I more readily dealt with dilemmas, such as the inconsistent itinerary.

However, there is a difference between "experienced/prepared" and "comfortable": adaptability during collaborative tasks does not equate to being internally at-ease with disruption. Re-watching Sc.4, my neurodivergence became apparent. Nervous hesitation mixed with time-filling chatter as my brain worked overtime to keep pace with the task. Indeed, it was comparatively fast-paced, largely ideal because chairing involved reciting the management approaches and counting/recording votes, with no detailed notetaking to summarise. However, the furniture-production tasks changed, requiring me to carefully read each digitised slide, disrupting the flow, especially when it became apparent that the launch party brief only contained half the information on the slide (Pearson, 2024, 01'55'26"). Do I provide context from the original brief, or do I adhere to the updated version? Regardless, unanticipated challenges are a reality in genuine team meetings and the chair cannot succumb to crisis or assign blame (Owen, 2018, p. 90; Locock, 2012, p. 96).

Conclusions and outcomes

The scenarios yielded mostly expected outcomes, although they were not all sufficiently summarised. Connor did not conclude the WSI meeting (Sc.5), therefore Martin immediately moved to the debrief (Motley, 2024, 02'56'43"). There were several unanticipated contributions. Tabitha suggested looking into Goldcliff Tidal Ltd.'s reputation (Michaels, 2024, 06'43"), and the WWII pillbox

received a surprisingly varied response (Motley, 2024, 02'47'41"-02'51'21"). In most situations, limited information was available: a challenge which threatens the successful delivery of authentic team projects.

Impact of time

As discussed, shortness of time occurred, but it was partially advantageous. The greatest challenge involved meetings overrunning, especially during Sc.6 (Locock, 2024a). Consequently, attendees departed the Teams session; this realistically happens if employees need to be elsewhere. Moreover, a 30-40% absence rate transpired during the final three tasks. The Ethics meeting (Sc.6) had no defined limit. The greatest detriment was a lack of urgency. Again, this is not devoid from reality. However, if the chair allows timings to slip, who's duty is it to refocus the meeting? "Who watches the watchmen?" (Cherwell, 2018; Juvenal, Satire VI:347–348). I perceived attendees' reluctance to directly address it. This may be because the discussion was enjoyable, or due to embarrassment when correcting a lecturer. Within real projects, poor time management causes delays and has cost implications. A benefit of Sc.6 overrunning was that Robyn may not have otherwise contributed. Robyn's comment (03'07'55") clocked in over 39 minutes after Tabitha (02'28'52"); of six attendees, she was the 31st to speak, and only once (Appendix C; Appendix D).

Impact of managerial styles

Broadly speaking, the leadership styles exhibited did not appear to significantly affect the verdicts. Where clarification was required, e.g. Ciar asking the definition of an 'evaluation' (Motley, 2024, 02'44'05"), the chair's explanation or group's consensus ensured a common interpretation, hypothetically enabling a like-minded conclusion.

In contrast, lengthy external explanations delivered mid-meeting impacted Sc.5's chairing methods, and by extension the task's conclusions. A straightforward repercussion is it distorted the timing. A more complex effect is it undoubtedly

threw off participants' role-play. Within LARP this is termed 'breaking character': Are we employees of ASW or MA students? This is a prime example of "uncertain team authority" (Young, 2010, p. 26-27). Under appropriate circumstances this is a useful technique, re-enforcing learning in tandem with the role-play: a flexible *Agile* scrum rather than an irreducible PRINCE2® meeting (Newton, 2013, p. 159; PRINCE2®wiki, 2024). However, earlier scenarios had indicated a definitive 'Time in' and 'Time out' (Michaels, 2024, 2'32"), not a stop-start approach. Without prior discussion, it distracted the fluid resolution of the WSI meeting and cast doubt on the role-play's importance, thereby undermining its objectives. Ideally the chair would have interjected; once again, perceived taboo may have prevented assertion. Whether a deliberate construction or an organic reflection highlighting poor managerial style, this intrusive and unregulated transmission of information demonstrates the challenges teams face when delivering successful projects. Nevertheless, where continuity was maintained, interjections were beneficial. I welcomed Martin's reminder to retake the vote (Sc.4); this was delivered as if a prompt from the 'Unit Director' (*ibid.*, 01'11"), which has occurred during CA Publications Team meetings, and evidences the advantages of team delivery.

Effective methods

The three approaches can be summarised as general discussion among professional counterparts (Sc.1-3, Sc.5, Sc.6, Sc.8), voting among professional counterparts (Sc.4, Sc.5), and targeted discussion from assorted specialists (Sc.7); most were preselected to suit the task, whereas Sc.5 organically morphed from self-elective contributions to collective voting. Different team types (Brent and Dent, 2017, p. 61-67), much like specific projects categories, require suitably adapted leadership (ET, 2023).

A leader's style can also reflect their personality. Students chaired the first five scenarios (Table 1); I encapsulate their approaches/performances as efficient and nonchalant, in-character and precise, informal and cheerful, peppy and flustered, and relaxed and knowledgeable, respectively. My self-characterisation aligns

with The Big Five Personality Test, revealing 85% openness and 67% agreeableness ('peppy') with 69% neuroticism ('flustered') (Truity, 2024).

Whilst all approaches had merit, two efficacious techniques ensured equity among attendees. Firstly, Kristophe was decisive yet courteous when Ciar prematurely interjected (Michaels, 2024, 18'03"). After Connor faced technical difficulties, Annie (alerted by Aimee) voiced his written contribution (Moore, 2024, 01'59'51"). Perceived or actual inequality/dismissiveness is a substantial challenge to team success.

Encouraging participation

I was keenly aware of inequality's demotivational impacts and attempted to boost engagement by fostering an egalitarian atmosphere. Sc.4 utilised the 'raise hand' function. I did my utmost to remain vigilant towards attendees' ballots; I wanted them to know their opinions mattered. When one attendee failed to vote, I acknowledged the discrepancy to hold space for them: as an INFP, I wanted to register their viewpoint (16Personalities, 2024). There was one abstention, however, it was preferable to register confident opinions than force unsubstantiated responses. I tried not to single-out attendees by asking for volunteers to advocate their choice, where possible.

Throughout HPAR7003, Robyn was called upon for her ariel photography insight, however, without these invitations, she may not have willingly contributed. For almost 40 minutes during Sc.6, Robyn was a 'follower' (Locock, 2024a; Adair, 2009, p. 50). Furthermore, she did not contribute to Sc.2 (Appendix C). This was also true of Ciar, although she experienced technical difficulties, as did Connor (Sc.3), who persevered through the chat (Moore, 2024, 01'50'03"-01'50'52"). Poor online connectivity is undoubtedly a key challenge for remote team working in the 21st century.

Prior to the WSI task, Ciar declined to chair (Motley, 2024, 02'23'09"). This, admittedly, irked my INFP sense of fairness (16Personalities, 2024) and required self-awareness, self-analysis, and self-reflection (Brent and Dent, 2017, p. 114-118). Upon consideration, Ciar's decision does not reflect poorly on her ability as

a team player. A key challenge of group working is that the team are human, with complex lives and needs. It takes emotional intelligence to admit to not possessing the correct headspace/physical comfort to successfully chair a meeting (*ibid.*, p. 113), and a healthy work environment accepts this stance without prying or condemnation.

Dealing with divergence

Whilst opinions exhibited significant variety, the tasks resulted in amicable consensuses, and team cohesion never deteriorated. Activities to re-evaluate and solidify viewpoints, such as defending and re-casting votes (Pearson, 2024) or defining a “divergent of understandings” (Veres, 2024, 01’48’12”), aimed to value and benefit from the varied perspectives afforded by team projects. Within genuine project teams, serious interpersonal rifts can cause substandard and delayed outputs, driving up costs, stress and absences. Where conflict resolution is necessary, Bryant-Smith and Beard (2018, p. 92-96) advise managers to be proactive, present in-person, prepared, fair and clear, empathetic and prudent.

Neurodiversity and personality considerably impacted my response to incongruity. As an ‘Information seeker’, articulating corrections and clarifications, e.g. the absent deleted photos scene (Locock, 2024a, 02’49’46”), and the correct critical path total (Locock, 2024c, 02’44’25”), to maintain factual accuracy was intrinsic to comprehension and helping others (Adair, 2009, p. 47). Brent and Dent (2017, p. 131-132) discuss the importance of clarity regarding accountability in teams, whilst Young (2010, p.27) cites “ambiguous objectives” as an obstacle to team success. An INFP’s desire for validation stems from idealism and “need[ing] to know that are on the right track” (16Personalities, 2024). If not harnessed, these traits can harbour discord. However, INFPs’ “creativity and insight enable them to shake up old, ineffective [methods if] given the chance to speak up” (*ibid.*).

Based on my analytical skills, I embody a ‘Teamworker’/‘Monitor Evaluator’ blend: co-operative yet indecisive, and logical but prone to being over-critical (Belbin, 2024). For instance, Sc.8’s table was illogically formatted (Appendix A), and whilst

I did not wish to appear uncooperative by criticising it, I would insist on swapping lines two and three to observe the Dependencies in the final design (Table 2). Disparate ideas require respect from all parties, as well as courage and forbearance, to facilitate successful project delivery.

Table 2. Reformatted dependencies for Scenario 8

Task no.	Detail	Estimated duration (days)	Dependencies
1	Set up site	1	
2	Trench 1	10	After 2
3	Trench 2	30	After 2
4	Trench 3	25	After 2
5	Backfill trenches	2	After 1, 3 and 4
6	Close down site	1	After 5

Conclusion

This essay sought to determine the key hindrances to successful project delivery as a team through critical reflection of the role-play scenarios. The most evident challenges involved mitigating human/technical errors and ambiguous objectives, adhering to time management, encouraging engagement, utilising people's expertise, and maintaining healthy dynamics. Through the lens of personal and corporate psychology, the role-play exercises provided students with crucial insight into the strengths and shortcomings of group-based projects, and the findings reaffirm existing advice for optimal teamwork (Brent and Dent, 2017). As prospective archaeological managers and specialists, we must be prepared "to meet the challenges of the future" as a resourceful, unified collective of professionals (Locock, 2012, p. 88).

Word Count: 2,495 words.

[excluding Tables; 2,761 words including Tables]

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APPENDIX A: SCENARIO SUMMARIES

Scenario 1:

As a potential Archaeological Contractor, discuss the gathering of information, the significance of heritage issues and the suggested stages of work for a Project Proposal to be prepared for a test tidal energy weir in a proposed development area of the Severn Estuary by Goldcliff Tidal Ltd. (Appendix B).

Scenario 2:

As a Planning Department heritage team, ensure AAA Archaeology have deposited the archive from an evaluation on Roman Way with Siluria Museum; reach a consensus on the addressee and contents of correspondence, and possible weaknesses of our case.

Scenario 3:

As an employee of ASW, assess the known heritage interests in proximity to Sandy Lane, Netherseal, using HER data (<https://her.derbyshire.gov.uk/map>) on behalf of Greenfield Consultants; rate their importance and determine which ones might prohibit planning permission and whether potential heritage features requiring evaluation may exist.

Scenario 4:

Consider and discuss the most appropriate Project Management [PM] methods (PRINCE2/AgilePM/Lean/Six Sigma/MSP) for five business needs:

- manufacturing a limited-edition chair,
- creating and operating a temporary website for a marketing campaign,
- reducing environmental impact and achieving ISO 14000 compliance,
- decreasing variation in pre-cut dyed leather manufacturing,
- inviting guests to a launch event as well as catering and staffing.

Scenario 5:

As an employee of ASW, assess seven known/potential non-designated archaeological interests within a proposed housing development; discuss and decide upon suitable approaches to be submitted in the WSI to the planning authority for approval.

New Poplar Farm - mid-19th century farmhouse with modern outbuildings.

Geophysical anomaly - large rectangular feature, possible Roman building.

Old Poplar Farm - possible medieval farmhouse, now levelled.

Peat deposits - 0.5m deep peat deposits beside a stream.

Finds scatter - two Roman coins and other metalwork within 100m².

Second World War pillbox - Overgrown and vandalised concrete defence structure.

Old barn - 20th century barn, concrete footing remains.

Scenario 6:

As a project manager visiting a watching brief site, identify where health and safety [H&S] procedures are not being adhered to, assess the severity, and suggest how these H&S violations could/should be addressed; discuss the ethical dilemmas and implications.

Material used: BBC Four's '*Detectorists*', Series 3 'Episode 2' (2017; 9'00"–10'07") and 'Episode 3' (2017; 7'43"–9'55").

Scenario 7:

As a designated employee of ASW, provide recommendations at the planning meeting for a costed project proposal for an archaeological evaluation of a 6ha housing development with a short window based on our specialist expertise; advise how best to reduce project costs by 15%. The assigned roles and decisions are tabled below:

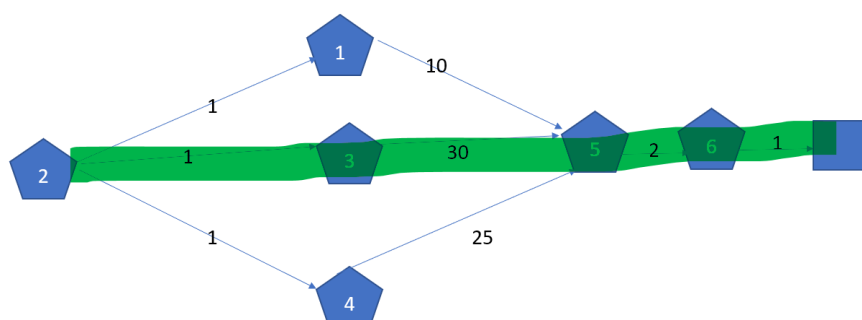
Role	Assigned*	Decision
1 Project Officer	~~Ciar~~ & Amiee	6 weeks of onsite activity
2 Finds Officer	~~Tabitha~~	Finds officer (or trained person) on site
3 CBM Specialist	Connor	Employ a freelance specialist
4 Palaeoenvironmental manager	Robyn	Brief the team on the sampling strategy
5 Staffing manager	Annie	9 staff programmed for fieldwork
6 Facilities manager	Zsuzsanna	Hire huts for the project
7 Outreach officer	Kristophe	Arrange a single open day event
8 Commercial manager	Laura	Include all desired elements, aptly costed.

*Attendees with unforeseen absences stricken out; James provided advanced notice of absence.

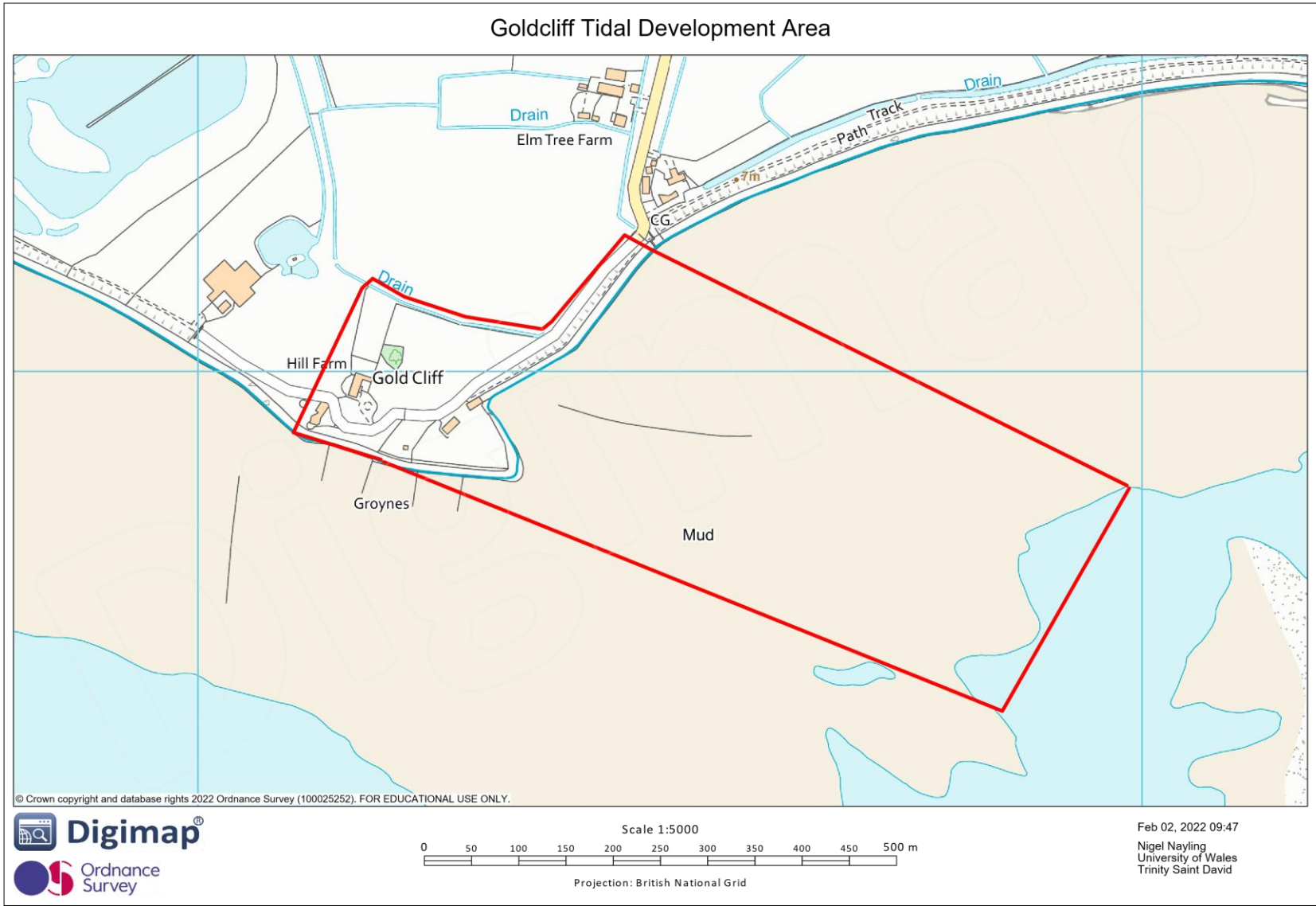
Scenario 8:

As a project designer of a short evaluation across three areas simultaneously, calculate the shortest window possible to complete all tasks for the construction contractor; recalculate the window due to changes in staff availability.

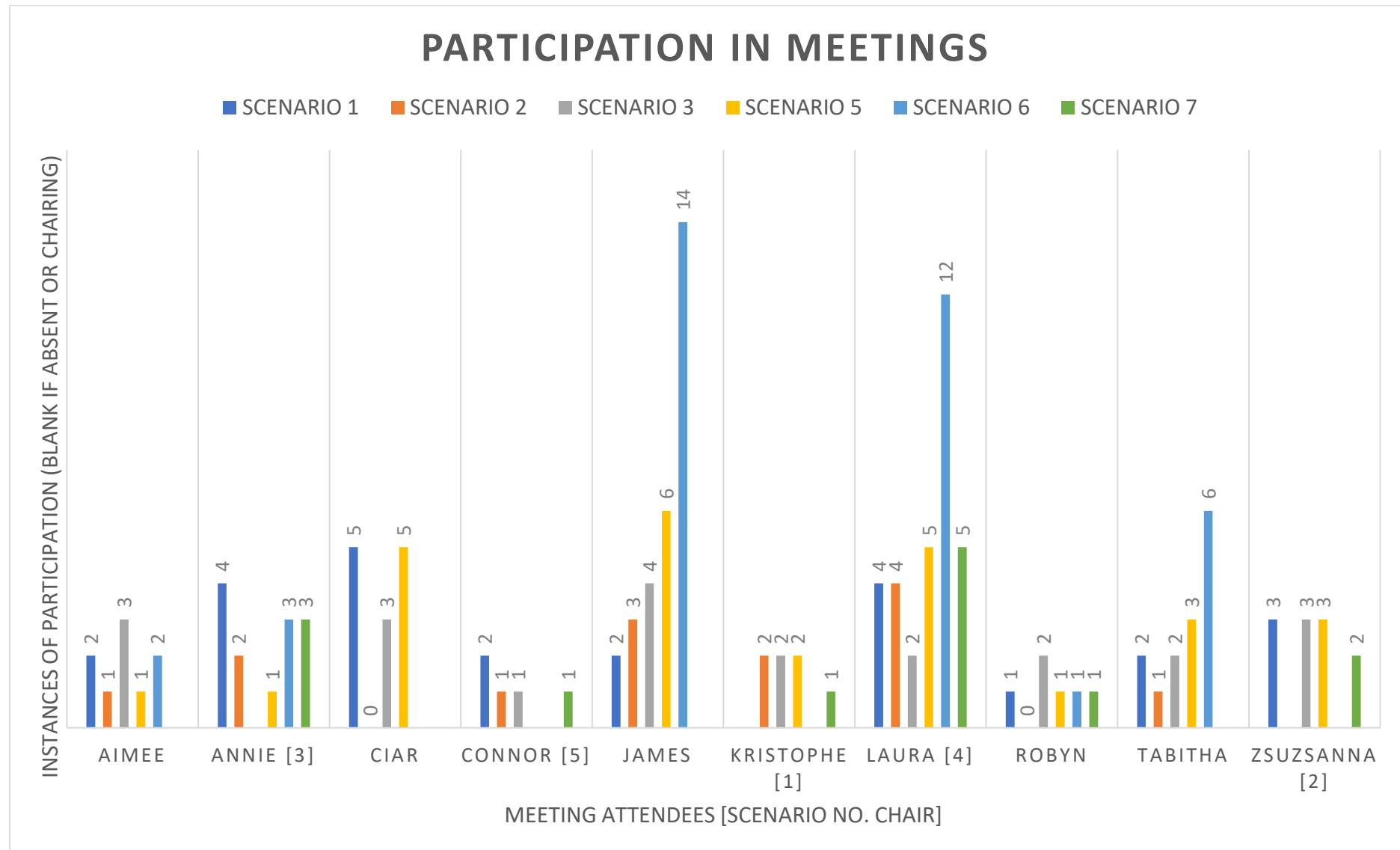
Task no.	Detail	Estimated duration (days)	Dependencies
1	Trench 1	10	After 2
2	Set up site	1	
3	Trench 2	30	After 2
4	Trench 3	25	After 2
5	Backfill trenches	2	After 1, 3 and 4
6	Close down site	1	After 5



APPENDIX B: MAP OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT FOR SCENARIO 1



APPENDIX C: GRAPH SHOWING NUMERICAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO APPLICABLE SCENARIOS



APPENDIX D: CHART SHOWING PLACEMENT OF INITIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO APPLICABLE SCENARIOS

