

PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
Y DRINDOD DEWI SANT

UNIVERSITY OF WALES
TRINITY SAINT DAVID

Session Meetings and Role Play Scenarios
A critical reflection
(Assessment 2)

Archaeological Project Design and Delivery (HPAR7003)
(Humanities)
Zsuzsanna Veres

2024

Introduction

The subject of the following paper is a critical reflection of the role play scenarios practised over the course of the module. During the sessions the group had to engage and work together to try to find solutions to several tasks given by the lecturers. On every occasion a member of the study group was appointed to chair these discussions and had to lead the team to reach an agreement on the chosen topic. The aim of these short meetings were to simulate an environment of which the individual may face during their career as a core team member or team leader. The work will give a short insight into the real life meeting experiences of the author followed by the presentation of the session meeting and the role playing scenarios.

Meeting experiences

I have not had many opportunities to attend internal, management or project planning meetings which involved any chairing or decision making, so participating in these exercises were very new to me. On site however, there was a situation where a meeting was called to assess the methodology of the site work as archaeological features were encountered under a layer of occupation which was not detected during the evaluation phase. The consultation involved the project manager, the project officer and the supervisors where we had to find a safe solution to investigate these new features. As the site had a tight deadline, a quick decision had to be made, and after several propositions we agreed that the layer will be investigated and sampled in accordance with the guidelines set out by the written scheme of investigation (WSI), then removed mechanically by a machine in a safe and risk free way when all the features above the deposit will be excavated and recorded. The project manager approved the changes and the work could continue in line with the newly established methodology. I also took part in progress meetings where the post-excavation work was discussed. As part of the session we had to present the results of the assessment of a large project. These scheduled meetings were a great opportunity to see the overall development of the project and people were able to share their opinion and thoughts or give tips which were always welcomed. These meetings were usually long and only the people involved in the post-ex phase of the project were present.

Session meetings and role play scenarios

There were several tasks presented to the study group for discussion, during the weekly sessions which intended to model the decision making at the workplace or in a professional setting. I found that some of the scenarios were a bit difficult for us to discuss due to the lack of previous involvement and background knowledge, while others were more easily relatable as the group was more comfortable with the situation and we could draw on our own experiences. The tasks and the

scenarios were imitating decision making meetings where the key to find the solution was a clear setting of the purpose and its appropriate outcome (Smart 2022).

I was appointed as a chair to find a suitable outcome for the following situation: *'You are all workers for the heritage team in the Planning Department of Siluria County Council. An applicant has asked for discharge of a planning condition. The heritage adviser who dealt with the initial planning response has now retired and you need to decide how to respond'* (Locock 2024). The group was responsible for finding the solution for this problem and I had to direct them towards an agreement and a plan for what to do next. With no previous experience in chairing I found the task challenging and was not really comfortable to deal with the situation. I have not much knowledge about the planning processes (and the technical terms) involved prior to the execution stage of any project and was not familiar with any of these steps; I felt I was struggling to lead the 'meeting', which was visible as the conversation was not really flowing. There were some helpful bullet points for us to start with and agree on although I felt that not only me but the group also find it difficult to engage with the situation. Some of us were more proactive than others, however everyone tried to contribute to the task, which was very kind and supportive. In my opinion it could have been more helpful if there was a bit more time to prepare or have a short introduction of the subject of the task beforehand to understand what and who is involved in a planning process. If I had a chance to be involved in a meeting as a chair again, I would be more prepared and try to explain the situation to the best of my abilities. I would allow enough time so the participants were able to contribute and bring their ideas to reach the most appropriate outcome. All the recommendations, arguments and counterarguments would be taken into account and the decision would be collective.

Other chairing and decision making exercises I think were more successful and the appointed leaders were able to guide the other participants and reach a consensus most of the time; for me the most comfortable situations were the Goldcliff, HER and WSI scenarios. As I mentioned before, these topics were more familiar to everyone and it was clear that the members had experience dealing with similar situations. Knowing more about the subject resulted in more contributions, the participants were more active and everyone added something to the discussion and I also found it easier to express my opinion or ideas. I noted that most of the time we were able to reach a common ground very quickly; in other cases the chair of the meeting recognised the division within the group and tried to make sure that people could share their point of view; however I did not observe any disagreement when one side tried really hard to convince the others about their ideas. The chairs were very considerate and patient; they let and encouraged all the members to have their say when they wanted to contribute and tried to keep the conversation within the subject of the scenario.

I also noticed that there were no 'clusters' forming, most of the time everyone expressed their own opinion and did not stand behind someone's idea. This may be the result of several contributing factors such as the design of the whole course as it is delivered online, and the short time frame (10-15 minutes) for the tasks. While it is understandable that the course is online, and it has a lot of advantages, I think the biggest limitation lies in the lack of 'real' human interactions. The lecturers and the members of the cohort do not know each other well as we only meet once a week and we see each other only on the screen. There is no opportunity to really bond and become a real team, take action and cooperate, and not just act as a group of people (Smith 1999). Speaking from my experience, I do not know my fellow cohort members on a more personal and professional level so it is difficult to see all of their strengths or weaknesses therefore it is unknown for me what role they would have in a professional team structure (Belbin 2010, p. 185). I do not wish to judge them based on their performance week after week, however we all have one field of interest in common and that is archaeology. We all came from different backgrounds and have different qualities and experiences which could be a great starting point to form a great working team. I believe if there was a bit more time during the sessions for the group to bond or even take part in team building exercises would help us engage more and make critical judgement about the role play scenarios (Dowson, nd).

Understandably the chairing exercises were very short, although I found it challenging as there was not enough time to explain why we chose or suggested that particular option or solution for solving the issues. There was not really much time to reflect on the problems and convince others in the case of a disagreement why we thought that that particular solution is more suitable than other answers. We could not work as a team even if we agreed on the same point. Some of the scenarios involved voting, which made the job of the chair easier; however there was not really an opportunity for the group to split and represent different solutions. If there was a bit more time, individuals behind the same idea could form a smaller group and discuss why they think their argument is a more suitable solution; during the discussion the appointed person from one of the small groups could reason for the preferable outcome and engage with the other collective.

Teams, meetings and project delivery

My experience in decision making meetings are very limited, however what I observed when I worked for a unit is that the people involved in these situations know each other on a professional or sometimes even on a more personal, friendly level which can make the decision making easier. They are in a more established environment and as the time progresses, their member role is accommodated and consolidated within the team. The leader of the group or project manager usually knows the members and their abilities. The chair also has the responsibility to take into account the team member roles and personality of the individuals when organising a team to avoid situations such as the 'Apollo syndrome' as seen in Belbin (2010). As mentioned during the sessions these decision making meetings need to be short to be cost effective (Locock pers. comm), however

in an office setting where people know each other these meetings can take time as sometimes the meeting requires a level of preparation. The meetings need to allow each and every participant (depending on the number of the members involved) to discuss the strategy and approve the action which will follow the meeting (Smart 2022). The team leader has not only the responsibility to assemble a team, they also have to be organised and focused on the goal. The meetings organised by the team leader need to be titled (to know what type of meeting will take place), have a structure, a clear plan and connection points (Locock 2023) to be able to reach the desired outcome which is very important when delivering a project.

Summary

The role playing scenarios during the sessions were a good way to try to simulate the working environment in a real life setting. While the situations were different, I could not relate to all of them due to the lack of knowledge and experience as my approach was influenced by my background. In my point of view the group could not work together as a team even if there was consensus and an agreement was reached. These situations helped me to understand and observe the opinion of others and hopefully I will be able to use this skill to practise critical judgement if I will need to take part in project meetings.

References

Belbin, R. M. (2010) *The Management of Teams, Why they succeed or fail*. Elsevier.

Thomas Dowson (no date) *Teamwork and Archaeology: A guide to developing team building skills in archaeology students* (Liverpool: HEA Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology).

Available at:

<https://www.scribd.com/document/523888/Teamwork-and-Archaeology-Developing-teambuilding-skills-in-archaeology-students>

(Accessed: 29.04.2024)

Locock, M. (2023) *Chairing and Meeting skills*. (Internal Course Material)

Available at: <https://moodle.uwtsd.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=8251§ion=16>

(Accessed: 29.04.2024)

Locock, M. (2024) HPAR7003 *Assessment 2 brief*. (Internal Course Material)

Available at: <https://moodle.uwtsd.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=8251§ion=2>

(Accessed: 29.04.2024)

Smart, J. (2022) How to have a more productive team meeting. *SessionLab*, 16 June.

Available at: <https://www.sessionlab.com/blog/team-meeting/>

(Accessed: 29.04.2024)

Smith, K. A., 1999, *Strategies for Developing Engineer Students' Teamwork and Project Management Skills*. Session 1630. University of Minnesota & Michigan State University.

Available at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247277075_Project_Management_and_Teamwork

(Accessed: 29.04.2024)